

KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION NOT A GIVER OF POWER.

A PERSON would justly be considered demented who should advise a shoemaker to study the history of shoes in order that thereby he might make better shoes. The want of connection between the proposed means and result is apparent at once. But is it any more sensible to urge teachers to study the history of education in order that thereby they may teach better?

This is not a new topic in these columns. In the past we have questioned the advisability of putting so much stress on the history of education or on the philosophy of education in the Teachers' Reading Circle courses of the country. But the idea still prevails largely that a course of reading for teachers would not be quite orthodox if it should omit altogether a compend of the history of education or a text-book on the application of mental philosophy to the science of teaching.

The subject is revived by a discussion briefly reported in another column, which prompts the question: For the ordinary teacher whose supreme needs are wholly of a practical nature wherein lies the value of the history of education? So far as we can see it lies just where the value of the history of shoes lies for the man whose need is to make good, salable shoes, that is, its value lies nowhere, it does not exist.

Now this is not saying that there is no value whatever in the history of education; but simply that it is worthless as a means of supplying to teachers dynamic information or practical skill. A knowledge of the history of education is valuable as a small ingredient of general culture and as a somewhat larger ingredient

of professional culture. But such knowledge acquired as patchwork, from a mere compend, does not produce culture, is no real index of culture. You may read all the mere text-books you can find on a subject, but you will not thereby acquire culture. Culture requires wider articulation, a deeper insight, than comes from merely stringing facts together in the memory. But if the facts of educational history such as the great mass of teachers get, do not contribute to their culture then these facts give them nothing. In the history of education as a science and aside from the biographies of a few of the personalities that figure in it, there is nothing heroic, nor even inspiring until one's horizon takes in a larger view of human progress than comes from reading a few books.

A knowledge of the history of education has value mainly as a sign of wide reading and study, as affording an honest presumption of large mental acquisitions and of professional or literary tastes. But where these acquisitions and tastes do not precede or underline the index then the latter is a lie. A knowledge of such history has value as a sign in the same way that a knowledge of spelling has value as a sign. In the nature of things the power to spell correctly should mean that one has read so much literature that as a result he has mastered the forms that he has seen so often in his reading. In this sense the ability to spell is a true sign of a lettered person. But when the process is violated and we go to work and learn to spell from the spelling-book, without any reading, then the power to spell signifies nothing, is in fact a lying index, for it seems to indicate