

OVER-ELABORATION IN PRIMARY TEACHING.

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IN presenting the topic assigned me, I wish it understood that the over-elaboration criticised has been observed in the lower grades of city schools. In the average district or mixed school the tendency is more likely to be toward under-elaboration. The faults to which attention is called are worthy of criticism, and are dangerous, not because they are wide spread, but because the primary teacher who most indulges in them is too often the model for a host of weaker imitators.

The new education brought us out of an idolatry of words only to deliver us too often to an idolatry of things; as though the teacher who failed to vivify the word could not fail to vivify the thing; as though an object may not be as unmeaning a symbol as a word. "The mind," says Carlyle, "sees in an object what the mind brings the power of seeing." But, "Ideas first, then words," "Use objects to get thought," are interpreted to mean a multiplying of objective illustrations, a piling up of apparatus for so-called sense culture. Theory and practice are so different that these excellent principles, the wisdom of the sages, are constantly being wrecked on the sea of practice. It is consoling to believe that "a grand and noble end will wisely control all means to it." Yet every great principle of education has suffered from extreme and mistaken application. There is still the old groping in the darkness for patent methods and rules of thumb, the follow-my-leader hunt for devices with a pretended reference to some faintly understood glittering generality of pedagogical polity.

If we once clearly understand that every truth has limitations, that the wisest method may be used to excess, we shall have done much to guard against the vacillating tendencies of educational practice.

Our sterling principles of education we have always with us, but our methods,—“no man knoweth whence they come or whither they go.” No sooner am I familiar with the teaching of technical grammar than the craze for language lessons sets in. Spelling was taught by the old fashioned spelling book, spelling down methods, when the wave of progress carried out the book. Now when one has made himself a crack teacher of spelling, without a book, behold the revised spelling book comes sneaking back. So it was with mental arithmetic. We had it; we had it not; and now we have it once again. It is remarkable how easily these kinks come and go. Our leaders ride their hobbies in and out.

G. Stanley Hall examines 600 little children in the Boston public schools, and, as a result, finds that 90 per cent. of these do not know where their ribs are. Then the cry is raised: "What is the use of teaching these children to read, when they do not know where their ribs are? What will become of this great American republic, if children are to grow up without being taught where their ribs are?" So the blushing school-ma'am is set to work to develop the ribs. It is long since we dethroned the object lesson. It once had lordly sway. The porosity and non-transparency of bread became household facts. Children were everywhere being led to see that a