

PRACTICAL EDUCATION.

WE are often taught that as soon as our school-days are over we are to lay aside our studies and engage in the more practical duties of every-day life, it being thus assumed that our studies are incompatible with what we are to experience in later years. Indeed, it is the common opinion that the student who has closely followed his books for years is, in a measure, unfitted for a business life. Accepting this conclusion as correct, it becomes an interesting question why it should be that the proper use of our school-days, and of the opportunities which they afford, should thus unman one. If book-learning retards a person and finally unfits him for practical life, and gives what must be forgotten or unlearned, why not better be without it?

We claim that the education commenced in childhood ought to be of such a kind that it can be continued through our entire lives; that we should in our tender years lay the foundation upon which to build the lofty superstructure of a noble manhood. If the process called education is good for the boy, it is good for the man, who is only a boy of larger growth. Whatever will stimulate the mind of the minor will, in the same degree, benefit him when he has passed the magic line of his majority.

The word education hints at the true method by its meaning, "leading out," and does not refer to the mistaken idea that it is a pouring-in process, as if a little boy's brain is to be filled up by the teacher precisely as one would pour water into an empty jug; and, alas, how many a poor unfortunate has been nearly intellectually strangled by this process, directed by the hands of some one of the famous Ichabod Crane family! But, fortunately there are many at the present time who believe that the human mind is created filled instead of empty,—filled with powers and capacities, which, indeed, are not ready for immediate use, but which it is the province of education to bring out. The Creator has given us a set of tools with which we are to do our life-work; but we are obliged to put them in order and learn their use. What the child needs is to gain facility in handling some of these simpler intellectual implements, while the man must learn to wield the more complicated and delicate, so as to be ready to perform creditably whatever work fortune may place in his way.

This theory gives us, as the great object to be gained by education, *mental discipline*. By this statement we do not intend to deny that the acquisition of facts is important and essential; but if regarded as an *end*, and not as a *means*, it is of comparatively little value. A mind well stored with facts, but without proper discipline, is like a garret filled with rubbish, or a store with a large stock of goods scattered miscellaneously over the floor. All is confusion,—nothing can be found when wanted.

Now, to this knowledge of facts add mental discipline, and you have the owner who selects and arranges everything and brings order from confusion. It is only after mental discipline has labeled and stowed all the facts that the man can place his hand on them at any moment, and thus make them available whenever wanted.

It is just here that those who raise the cry against what they call over-education base their strongest argument,—want of practicability. But does not the objection hold with more force against the way in which the subjects are presented than against the subjects themselves? Cannot any branch be so presented that it not only becomes distasteful to the learner, but practically useless? For instance, take geography as it used to be taught even to within the past ten years. Year after year the poor, unfortunate child was compelled to go over and over the book committing to memory a perfect labyrinth of words,—names of rivers, mountains, and towns scattered all over the world,—and at the end of a few weeks was unable to tell whether a certain word was the name of a river in Africa or a town in Indiana. And suppose that by dint of hard studying and the aid of a good memory one could remember these isolated facts for some considerable time, of what value would they be compared with the deductions and generalizations which we now draw from the subject? The reasoning powers were not called into action at all. No conclusions were drawn. And all the patient student could carry away as the result of years of study was a long list of names, which, fortunately, a disgusted memory soon refused to retain. For years a geographical river meant nothing to me but a crooked

line on the map, while towns were only black spots about the size of pin-heads. I have always admired the genius of that boy—and I have no doubt but that he became a great man—who described latitude as a black line running one way across the map, and longitude as a black line running the other way.

But now begin in the opposite manner. Show some of the great natural features first as facts, and then by reasoning draw many of the others as necessary results. The contour of the country will decide the position and size of rivers; the junctions and navigable waters of these rivers will determine the location and size of cities. The physical character of the country will determine the leading occupations of the people. The distribution of population, position of cities, and character of peoples, are not the result of caprice or chance: each has its reason, and is governed by some established law.

The certainty with which the climates, both general and local, vegetation, amount of rain, kind of animals, etc., can be determined from known natural laws, presents the once dry and justly hated subject of geography in a new and interesting manner, and clothes it with nearly all the charm of original investigation. In this way the mind of the child is taught to reason from cause to effect, and is delighted with its power of reasoning out conclusions which are sustained by facts. Besides this, the grand truths of the subject become firmly fixed in the mind, and can be reproduced at any time for immediate use. Thus the powers of the young mind are augmented; and even if the greater part of the facts should escape the memory, the mental discipline which would be gained by this course could not be lost. More than this, the mind has become interested, and has grasped the entire subject in three or four years, instead of being reluctantly dragged over it for eight or ten years, until the pupil has lost all interest in the study.

We often hear a remark like this: "Now, of what use is it for me, as I intend to be a merchant some time, to study geometry? I shall probably never be obliged to solve a geometrical problem in my whole life. Why not study something which will be of more use to me?" Did you ever consider how little of what you learn enters directly into the computations of business? How much of your all-important arithmetic will you ever use in actual life? Only a few of the simplest rules; and these a backwoodsman, who has never been to school a year in his life, will master in a short time when placed in business relations. Men can talk quite as well, as far as transacting business is concerned, who never saw or heard of a grammar; while any boy of average ability can learn in a week to write a better hand than do half the business men in the country. So, if your idea of the practical is only what is to be used directly in business transactions, you would confine education within narrow limits.

While we call these elementary subjects the directly practical, we may call these others the indirectly practical. Indirectly, as they enlarge the man, and make him capable of greater enjoyment, incite his ambition, place him within range of possibilities of which he before had no conception, keep him out of the narrow ruts of prejudice and illiberality, develop the softer sympathies and finer qualities of his nature, and make the difference between an animated business machine and the noble, whole-souled, generous man.—*Iowa School Journal* for March.

THOROUGHNESS.

ONE of the great defects of the present day, especially in our own land, is a want of thorough knowledge, and of a disposition to attain it. There is no lack of pretenders, but when culture or finished men are sought for, it is almost impossible to obtain them. We do nearly everything in too much of a rush. We generally live too fast. We imagine that we are old, while we are still youthful, that we shall be behind the times and remain unknown if seven or ten years, or more, are spent in solid preparation for life's duties. A complete course of study is already abridged, from the mistaken view that time is too valuable to be employed in developing and strengthening the powers of the mind. We are in too great a hurry to enter upon the duties of an active life,—“to make our pile,”—or to engage in any other pursuit than that of learning, if it promises even a possi-