

COMMENTS.

It is customary to hear on all sides, amongst the very severe criticisms of our educational system, a contrast drawn between the methods of the teacher of fifty years ago and those of the more modern pedagogue, and generally very much in favor of the latter. We are told that the modern methods tend to true education, while the methods of a past day, although some clever men have been subjected to them and have come safely through the ordeal, were not based on scientific principles. In no point is the difference more evident than in the assistance which is given by a teacher of the present day as compared with that afforded to a schoolboy in the forties. The teacher of to-day carefully prepares his lesson, puts his facts or his mathematical reasoning step by step before his class, smoothes away every little difficulty which is at all likely to stand in the way of the duller pupil, and is quite prepared to repeat any part of his reasoning as often as the density of his pupil may appear to make such a repetition necessary. Finally, should any member of the class forget the lesson, or lack the ability to profit by the knowledge imparted in it, he will accept the responsibility of their ignorance, and proceed to analyze his methods in order to ascertain in what particular he has been in fault.

All the shortcomings of pupils, the modern school method teaches, arise from the neglect, incapacity, or misapprehensions of the teachers; the scholar cannot be held responsible for them, inasmuch as he is only a plastic mass in the hands of a modeller, and his intellect is to his teacher as the clay in the hands of the potter.

If we compare this condition of things with the system in vogue when the grandfathers of the present school children received their early education,

nothing strikes us so forcibly as the fact that in their day much more was left to the individual effort of the pupil, who shared the responsibility of acquiring knowledge with his teacher. We are not at all sure that the modern method is so vast an improvement as inspectors of schools and lecturers on pedagogy would have us believe, and venture to suggest that two mental characteristics, which require as much exercise as any others, and affect the success of the future man, are perseverance in the face of difficulties and concentration of thought. It is very doubtful whether more than a small percentage of the school children of the present day are capable of the mental effort required to investigate any problem which has not been previously explained, and the consequence will be that at the end of their school life, when their teacher, upon whom they have been accustomed to rely in every emergency, is not at hand, they will be daunted at the first difficulty, and will be incapable of making any further advance in self culture.

We are not, of course, advancing the proposition that a child should be left to educate himself. The old schoolmaster was accustomed to set his pupils a task and leave them to wrestle with it until they had mastered it. In arithmetic, for example, a rule was exhibited, too often without explanation of any kind, and the pupil was left to apply it to a series of examples. But, while this was distinctly a clumsy and unscientific method of teaching, if, indeed, it can be denominated teaching at all, we have probably gone to the opposite extreme, and as the Bishop of London said in a recent speech, "Now we explain everything; we comminute the solid food of knowledge to suit the feeblest digestion; we anticipate every difficulty; we analyze and arrange until there is