

METHOD—WHAT IS IT?

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THE literature of Method, if not luminous, is at least voluminous. About the only fixed principle evolved so far is a uniform want of fixity. Hardly any two authorities are agreed as to what method is. We have "method" and "methods"; "methods of teaching" and "methods of learning," when, clearly, the same thing is meant. The personal twist that some one gives his teaching is dignified into Brown's, Smith's, or Jones' "methods." The applications of general psychology to the unfolding of the growing mind are, by some, called method. Mere devices, as for instance the use of shoe-pegs, dissected maps, or coloured beans, are designated by the same name. A few years ago the schools had a transient rash consisting of a certain attitude of mind, on the part of pupils, teachers, and superintendent, plus various devices very good, very bad, or very indifferent, designated "Quincy Methods." And, farther in the past, the country had object-methods, illustrative methods, Oswego methods, etc. If we examine the so-called word-method, alphabet-method, and other methods, as they are called, of teaching primary reading, they will prove not to be methods at all, but merely names to mark the initial points at which the work of teaching begins. They do not even contain a hint of the real idea of method.

In general, Method is one of the branches or divisions of educational science. The coördinate parts are knowledge of the subjects of instruction from the teaching point of view, educational psychology, the philosophy of education, and the history of

education. These subjects and methods comprise educational science as a whole. They are distinct in their treatment of the subject-matter they deal with; viz., how to develop mind by means of affecting it by ideas. Method depends on the several subjects mentioned. It grows out of them. The teacher must be able to reorganize his academic knowledge from the teaching point of view, before he can devise method intelligently. Indeed, our so-called "subjects" are portions of a given field of knowledge organized into a whole for a specific aim in school training. Thus, a mere fraction or part of the whole subject of arithmetic is taken for use in our school-work. When we have decided upon any given subject-matter as suitable for our purposes in school, it needs still another reorganization. The relatively mature mind requires one arrangement of subject-matter, and the immature another. It is only when the teacher is capable of making these various reorganizations that he is able to be something more than a mere imitator or a follower of caprice. Educational psychology furnishes an equally necessary condition for intelligent method. Every result attained in training presupposes a series of antecedent mental conditions. These are more or less fixed, and success is achieved in proportion as the teacher observes the necessary sequence of activity. To learn any subject in its completed form, the mind must go through the processes of exact observation, fixing definite names, defining precisely, classifying systematically, and explaining rationally. These and all similar procedures are gene-