

METHODS OF ILLUSTRATION.

WE all remember that tide of object teaching that swept through the schools and courses of study, and how we envied the favoured ones who first learned its cheap trick with a piece of glass, a button or a basket. There was a time when it was something of an affair to develop the uses of a chair, or to find out in the orthodox fashion that a cat had legs, a back and a tail. And somehow it took years to discover that fragmentary and trivial work diluted solid instruction none the less whether crammed from book or object.

Certain kinds of object teaching have long since been convicted of obtaining credit under false pretences; but it seems to me that the prevailing tendency is to pass through a similar stage in methods of illustrating. We are assimilating a large amount of new knowledge, and finding by trial and error the paths of least resistance in teaching it. Such a time is peculiarly the hey-day of the small theorist and enthusiast.

Teachers are not wanting, nor silent, who seem "pleased with a rattle and tickled with a straw," and we, in our eagerness for novelty, are ever ready to admire a new method of using a wire, a tube or a toy, and sometimes forget that we may cheapen illustrations until they become very dear. And so the insignificant gets prominent, and the good gets in the way of the best.

This tendency to dabble, to multiply details, to magnify the *how* at the expense of the *what*, seems to me a mistake—"an advance backward." To lose the simplicity and impressiveness of great facts and laws is too high a price to pay for trivial illustration or ambitious completeness.

We need neither greater adroitness nor more little things so much as a more comprehensive grasp of what is significant, and greater skill to communicate economically the fundamental things that legitimately enter into the school education of children.

Let me show some general methods of illustration in a single typical study—geography. In teaching the primary elements of earth-study, mountain, plain, desert, cold country, etc., no patent method or device can take the place of vivid artistic description—description that shows a quick human sympathy, and lingers lovingly upon attributes. But this gift will avail itself of any accessories to make the word-picture more definite—the model and moulding-board, the off-hand sketch and painstaking drawing, the photograph and engraving.

But, for myself, I have found the moulding-board of great value. The ideal mountain whose height I wish to emphasize is belittled by being represented in inches. Such a mountain range as this comes nearer: Cloth mountain five feet high, made of a settee, inverted chairs and window sticks, and covered with gossamer waterproofs and a sheet. The difficulty lies in giving the scale; but the little card-board village at the base contributes somewhat. Moss for trees, sawdust roads, foot ruler fences, and tippet rivers, may or may not add to its value. With this we can show mountain, mountain range, mountain peak, water-shed, valley, river basin, diminishing vegetation, snow-cap and snow-line, avalanche-path and glacier.

When, later, the surface of a continent is to be shown, I have found a peck of sawdust and a sheet of brown