

# The Educational Weekly.

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THERE is great scope for interesting instruction in the preliminary remarks that can always be made on entering on a topic as yet unknown to the class, and these preliminary remarks may frequently be made explanatory of the whole subject. Thus: in commencing, for example, a new work, say the *Georgics*, or a new book of Euclid, or even fresh part of Algebra—quadratic equations, or the binomial theorem, a master who is himself thoroughly conversant with the subject, and who has a grasp of its general purport and method of treatment, cannot fail to give his pupils a clear insight of what the author has in view, and of how he has attempted to gain his end. The new lesson can be inestimably simplified, and thus a very large proportion of unnecessary labor be saved.

WE do not sufficiently think of this; economy of labor is a matter which does not often enter into our minds. How best to use to the utmost the mental powers which our pupils possess—should not this be a subject of careful consideration? We have so much, and only so much, power with which to accomplish a certain amount. It differs in quantity and quality in each individual, and the master has to strike an average as it were, and must suit the task to be accomplished within a certain time to this average.

NOWHERE can this process of economizing be better brought into play than in the introduction of a new subject. Every child, no matter how confident of his abilities, and no matter how joyfully he may look forward to entering upon a new field, has always some fears in regard to it. We remember a child who found it extremely difficult to restrain his tears—tears of very terror, as we believe—on leaving one rule in arithmetic and beginning another—on going from subtraction, for example, to multiplication. Now this fear, as Bain has expressly shown, and as we can all very easily understand, is one of the chief wasters of energy that can possibly be introduced into the school-room. And it is at the commencement of a new subject with which the pupil is utterly unfamiliar that there is most likely to arise this much-to-be-dreaded consumer of mental power.

AND these preliminary remarks need not be always confined to an explanation of the general character of the matter in hand; they may sometimes form almost a lesson of themselves. Thus: let us suppose the pupil is beginning English history: he hears much of such names as Angles, Saxons, Jutes,

Danes, Picts, Scots, Kelts, Romans; he hears of frequent invasions and incursions, first by these nations, then by those; he is told how England was inhabited by peoples of all manner of nationalities; and, without some sort of explanation, he is apt to become altogether confused, and his knowledge of the earlier portions of English history is likely to be a patchwork not a coherent whole.

NOW, this, we think, can be remedied; and by the plan of spending ample time and labor upon the preliminaries. The system we have sometimes adopted, and which, we may say, was by no means an unsuccessful one, was to trace simply and as interestingly as possible (it can easily be so done) the course of the Aryan excursions and emigrations. By this means the pupils are able to form a general idea of the source of all the various nations who take a part in the history of England; they are prepared for accounts of invasions and of the ousting of one people by another: they can unconsciously attach different characteristics to different nations; and thus the meagre information we possess of the early days of England can be drawn out of the dry and uninteresting atmosphere of mere dates and surrounded by much that will help to indelibly fix it in the memory. It may be remarked in passing that an excellent diagram of the Aryan excursions will be found in Max Mueller's "Origin of Religion as illustrated by Ancient Sanskrit Literature."

SO, too, in passing to a new author. How many interesting details may be mentioned and commented on which will inspire fruitful curiosity and enthusiasm—details, not only concerning the author's life, his contemporaries, the age in which he lived, etc., but also as regards the work to be taken up: its purport, its characteristics, its beauties, its defects, and numberless other facts which need not here be touched on at length.

THESE by way of example. What we have endeavored to inculcate is the necessity of economizing mental labor, and more particularly in this way of preparing and making smooth each new path to be travelled.

IT is a pleasing thought that the most profound thinkers that the world has ever seen were theoretical or practical educationists—in many cases both: that the men who gave themselves up to the study of the most abstruse objects of thought either themselves were teachers or wrote on the subject of teaching. It will not be out of place to mention a few of the great men who have distinguished themselves both as thinkers and teachers.

IF we look at the list of philosophers alone—and true philosophers, are, perhaps, the deepest thinkers—we shall find it a list containing numerous teachers. Socrates was eminently a teacher—one of the accusations brought against him was touching the effects of his teachings on the youth of Athens. Plato—even if we leave out of view his labors in the Academy—has treated of the subject of education in various parts of his works—notably in the *De Republica*. So we may say of Aristotle. Coming down later in the history of philosophy we find Locke writing on education; we find Kant teaching, and Leibnitz, and Jacobi, and Fichte, and Schelling, and Hegel; and in our own day some of those who are best known for their achievements in metaphysics have also been writers on education—Bain, Calderwood, Spencer; not to mention a host of lesser lights.

THERE is nothing surprising in this. Education is in reality a most profound subject, and those who devoted their lives to such topics as metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and kindred sciences, recognized it as being so, and gave to it their best thought.

THERE is a science of education as there is of any other mental or physical process. That is to say, education has laws by which it proceeds; and it is the duty of the educator to discover these laws and to act upon them. Few of us truly recognize this truth. We teach empirically; we teach as we were taught, or as the particular author we are elucidating taught; or even, it may be, we teach haphazardly, according to no method and according to no rule.

BUT, it may be said, do not the means provided for training teachers and for those intending to adopt the profession of teaching—the Kindergarten, the professional examinations, and, indeed, the works of the very educators mentioned above, do not these point out methods and rules? Undoubtedly, and it is highly important that we make ourselves perfectly familiar with the best-known methods with which we are acquainted.

BUT there is much yet to be learned on the question of how to educate. We would exhort teachers not to remain satisfied with any theory yet promulgated, but to exert themselves to examine minutely, both theoretically and practically, all points of the subject. If the world is yet in want of an adequate and coherent theory of education, it can only obtain it through the experience of those who have had the most practical acquaintance with the subject—viz.: our teachers.