

EDUCATION.

NORMAL SCHOOLS.

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The most difficult and delicate part of the instructor's task in the education of the human mind, and where he is most likely to fail to fulfil the high object of his mission, and to inflict serious and irremediable injury upon the immortal soul, is in taking the incipient steps—in laying the foundation—in taking the intellectual and moral element of the human soul, as they come fresh from the hands of their Maker, unperverted, and nurturing them with appropriate elementary truth, stimulating, strengthening, directing, and developing them, so as always to obey the teachings of nature and of truth. Here is a work unsurpassed for difficulty, delicacy, importance, and peril. In these respects it has no equal within the compass of the allotted duty to man. It is that upon whose correct or incorrect performance depends whatever is excellent or base, blissful or miserable, in human character and destiny. It involves consequences as endless as immortality, and as vast as eternity. Is it then more difficult to supply our primary schools with instructors, in all respects well qualified for the duties of their sphere, than to furnish our academies and colleges with the right kind of presiding officers? I hold that it is. Not that you may not obtain an instructor of a primary school with less trouble and expense than you can procure a competent and successful college officer—nor that the teacher of the common school has the same need of a knowledge of the ancient languages, and of the higher branches of mathematics that the college officer has—but that the office of the primary school teacher requires rare and special qualifications—the first order of real educational talent; that it embraces within the compass of its legitimate duties the most difficult and important part of the work to be done by the instructor, a part in which there is more omission of what the capacity and necessities of the pupil exact—more blind and inappropriate action in the dark, and at random, more utter and disastrous failures of the teacher, wisely and successfully to discharge the duties of his responsible function, and more real and permanent injury inflicted upon the mind and heart, than in any or in all subsequent stages of education. The evidence of this is seen in the general apathy and drowsiness of juvenile intellect—in the common listlessness and want of interested engagedness of pupils in their studies—a disinclination and strong aversion to books and to study—in uniform inaccuracy in almost every attempted performance—in the want of correct and manly deportment, so commonly witnessed in scholars attending school—in the frequent disorder and disruption of schools—in the generally depressed standard of popular education—in the well-known fact, that our common schools generally give such a limited and imperfect education—that they so rarely give the public thoroughly educated scholars, and in a thousand other ways, known and read of all men. How rare is it, in some communities, that the intellectual and moral character, and the habitual conduct of schools, do not afford affecting proof of the extreme incompetency of instructors—of their utter failure to perform their appropriate work or to approximate toward it.

Permanent injury is done to ignorant, confiding infancy, and to inexperienced youth. It may be unconsciously and ignorantly done, but it is no less pernicious and disastrous. Amid the general disappointment, contention, and alienation, all may be in doubt as to the real cause of the mischief, which was simply the fact of the want of due qualifications in the instructor. He might have a decent recitation, mechanical knowledge—a parrot-like memoriter knowledge of

the rudiments of the English language, and yet while he is grossly deficient in mental discipline and rudimental attainment, he has no knowledge of the human mind, with which he is constantly dealing, nor of a single faculty of it, or of the science of teaching. He is handling subjects of which he knows but little—he is treating with elements of most subtle, delicate, and pliable nature, of which he knows comparatively nothing. Thus, tens of thousands among our 92,600 teachers of primary schools are doing immense mischief to the precious interests of our three and a half million of scholars. But the result is legitimate, natural, unavoidable, considering the qualities of the principal actors in it. Few, very few, apprehend the extreme difficulties involved in the office and duties of the primary school teacher. They are inherent, complicated, serious, requiring the possession of rare, peculiar, appropriate talent and qualities to contend with them. They are not the difficulties incident to the office of the 12,263 preceptors of our academies, in the discharge of their duties to their 263,096 pupils. Theirs is, in general, a plain, easy service, directing and aiding mind, already taught to think, investigate, demonstrate, and acquire knowledge. Nor are they the difficulties attending the discharge of the important duties of the 1,678 professors called to instruct the 27,821 students of our 239 colleges, which are little more than the requisition of conformity to rules stereotyped in college statutes, and enforced by the sanction of venerated usage, and the strength of wholesome, public sentiment. Mind repairs to these institutions so far disciplined and enlightened, that it requires comparatively little aid, in addition to close and faithful application to the use of existing auxiliaries to mental culture, to achieve the scholar's victory, in the acquisition of a liberal education. The duties of the instructor and pupil are all plain and easy. Printed rules prescribe the duties, and well-known penal laws define the conduct. Especially, mind is developed and enlightened, so that it only needs a little guidance to direct it in its onward and upward career.

All these difficulties combined, are trifling in comparison with those which are inseparable from the office of the primary school teacher, originating in the unformed, unenlightened, undeveloped intellectual and moral elements of children and youth—in the delicacy of wisely adapting instruction and discipline to all varieties of disposition, capacity, and attainment—in the relations of the teacher to every description of sentiment and style of domestic discipline, and in the great variety and multiplicity of onerous and responsible duties to be discharged. Here is an array of difficulties rarely to be found in any other sphere. And they must generally be met, with very little sympathy or aid from parents, or any other auxiliary agency. And they are usually imposed upon inexperienced, unpracticed youth, who have but a limited, and often very defective, knowledge of the simplest rudiments of their mother-tongue—no scientific acquaintance with the human mind, or with the science of its education—no practical disciplinarian talent, not knowing how to govern themselves, and a very limited sense of religious or moral obligation, a small amount of general intelligence and acquaintance with the world. Most cruel and awful injustice of the fathers to the children of the present generation, and to the unnumbered myriads of unborn generations! Is it, therefore, marvellous that it is often said: No liberal profession comes so far short of its object as that of the instructor of the primary school! There is very little, and often no fitness between the instrument and the contemplated service and end; consequently the object sought is so rarely realized. Under existing circumstances, it is more than vain presumption—it is preposterous—to expect any other issue.

What kind of instruction do the exigencies of primary schools require?