

the child his lesson in distinct subjects of thought. The child no more needs to know the system and method by which his mind is built up and developed than he needs to know the chemical and cohesive forces acting in the food by which his body is nourished. But it is important that in the primary school, of all places, the habits of thinking, feeling, and acting that are forming, and that are to be the basis of the future character, should be right habits.

Although the tendency of all teaching at the present day is in the direction of this method in substance, if not in name, yet the fact remains that there are some, and not a few, who practically condemn topical teaching. They usually belong to one of three classes: *First*, those who have tried to teach topically and have failed. *Second*, those who haven't time to teach from topics. *Third*, those who think it is too much work, and doesn't pay for the trouble.

What grounds have those who have tried and failed for their objections? "Good ground," they say; "we know whereof we affirm. The system has been 'tried in the balances and found wanting.'" That is their testimony, honestly given; and why? Imagine such a teacher, fresh from the precincts of Normal School, fully persuaded that topics are to be the basis of her teaching. She has topic-books,—yes, indeed,—topic-books by the dozen; and the affection of the average normal pupil for his topic-books none but a normal pupil can comprehend, not even those who have heard some despairing mortal mournfully exclaim, "Everything I knew was in that topic-book, and now I've lost it!" The teacher begins her work. The priceless topics that beguiled many an hour of solitude for her must surely be just what the children need; so they are introduced into her school, *verbatim et literatim*, without regard to

the age and intellectual capacity of her pupils. Of course her way of teaching is a failure, not through any fault in the theory, which she attempts to follow out, but through her own inability to adapt the topics to the needs of those particular scholars.

Then, too, there is another error into which the teacher may fall. It is possible for scholars to learn topics just as they would any statement given them in the text-book. That they can recite topics and whole outlines, and give definitions and statements glibly, proves nothing beyond the fact that they can learn words as easily in one place as in another,—from the board, or the slate, or the book, written or printed,—it makes no difference. These things the teacher must do if she would be successful. First, make sure that the topics are *thoroughly understood*; afterward, by questioning, by applications, by requiring it in every possible form, *fix the thought*, as well as its expression, firmly in the mind.

But what of those whose plea is lack of time; who have so many scholars, so many classes, that they cannot use topics, although they would like to? Their very excuse is the strongest argument that could be adduced in favour of topical teaching. If there are so many classes that the teacher *cannot find time* to teach in the right way, obviously the first thing to be done is to reduce the number of classes. The school can be most easily regraded by arranging the work in outline, and giving lessons in distinct subjects, rather than in pages of the book. This topical teaching prepares the way for itself; and since it is often impossible, on account of the number or varying ages of the pupils, for the teacher to reduce the classes, so that he can have all the time that he feels he needs for each recitation, there is the more need of having every lesson arranged beforehand, that none of the little time he has be wasted.