

THE CANADIAN MECHANICAL MAGAZINE

MAGAZINE


AND
PATENT OFFICE RECORD

Vol 4.

SEPTEMBER, 1876.

No. 9.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



S the education of youth, in our public schools, is a question of very great importance to the mechanical interests of Canada, it is quite within the province of this journal to point out some of the errors into which our teachers are falling, with respect to the course of study laid down for them to follow and the rules of discipline adopted. Whilst we appreciate most highly the great advance made, of late years, in the education of the masses, and the superior class of

teachers employed, we still feel that we are giving to them a mere superficial education on many subjects of no importance to them in this country in after-life—in fact, forgotten altogether ere youth has reached the age of manhood, whilst other subjects of the utmost importance, not only to the people as a body, but to the future prosperity of the Dominion, are entirely ignored.

Some of the principal subjects of education, of the greatest importance for the future development of the resources of this vast country and for the benefit of its people, and which, hitherto, have received little or no notice by our Educational Boards, are Mechanics, Agriculture, and Geology, for boys; and Home Industries and Domestic Education, for girls. If a taste is not created for these important studies in early life, they are not likely to be attained after children leave school, when, to a certain extent, their education may be said to cease, and the little store of superficial knowledge acquired at school, on subjects not required in their sphere of life, except in isolated instances, becomes soon rubbed out, and all that remains on the mind, after five or six years instruction, is the knowledge of how to read and write, and to make such arithmetical calculations as are actually necessary in commercial life. How few boys and girls remember, say two years after leaving school, a problem of Euclid, or how to work out a question in Algebra; because in their daily routine of life their application is never called for; and even when taught, scarcely

one boy, out of twenty, leaves school with the slightest idea of the application of these branches to practical purposes in life. He is taught to learn them simply by rote—and the boy with the most retentive memory, will often receive the first prize, after an examination on those studies, although, with respect to the usefulness and application of these sciences, he actually knows nothing, because he has never been taught their value. How can it be expected that any boy can feel a pleasure in studying, or make any progress in a study which he learns to repeat as a parrot? One simple application of theory to practice would do more to create a taste for knowledge, and make a greater impression on the memory, than weeks of hard study, in endeavouring to retain on the mind words which have, apparently to him, no use and no meaning.

Our school teaching is undoubtedly too theoretical; we want more of practical instruction; we want teachers to be trained up to know the practical application of what they teach, and to teach it also; and we want our children to be taught those branches of education suitable to the sphere in life for which they are intended.

We have too many boys now in Canada whose educational training fits them only for clerks, of which we have already too many. We want more agriculturalists and more mechanics—not mechanics who simply know how to plane a board, or make a joint, but mechanics educated to their trades as to a profession, and who will be able to turn to advantage, in after-life, the education received in youth, not only to the benefit of themselves, but for their country as well.

To what do England, France and America owe their great prosperity during the past century? almost entirely to the inventions and skill of their mechanics. What would be the state of England in the present day, were it not for its high state of agricultural knowledge, by which every acre of land fit for cultivation is made to produce, to its utmost, food for the people; where one acre there, produces a larger crop than five in this country? Let us then, by all means, have a practical course of education for our children, and let those studies, of which a mere smattering knowledge is of no practical use, be laid aside and give place to other branches of education of greater benefit to the masses. This is really a question of vital importance to the country, and deserving of the serious consideration of all Boards of Education.