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To an intelligent observer of the growth and character of the educational methods and systems of the present day one distinguishing feature will, we think, very soon be apparent—the preponderance of theory. The thirst for theory seems unquenchable. There are evidences of it on all sides. Teachers cry out for new theories with the hope that these will aid them in their daily duties; senates, boards, associations, discuss them *ad nauseam*; and educational journals are filled to overflowing with them.

And these theories take on all sorts of shapes; now in the form of moral disquisition, at another time of minute and intricate psychological analyses—as valueless often as they are minute and intricate. As examples of the description of theories of the first kind the following may be taken, culled at hap-hazard from the

pages of different educational periodicals:—

“Teacher, do you love the human race? Do you aim to do the work of the local philanthropist? If so, look beyond the school-room. See in your pupils future men and women. Do not, for God’s sake, do not aim only to prepare them to answer set questions,” etc., etc.

“A desire for knowledge always precedes knowledge.”

“All culture is self-culture. Any young person with good health and ambition can make a success of life.”

“An ounce of grit is worth more to a student than a pound of royal blood.”

“Worth, not wealth, determines the standing of a student in school.”

“The object of the teacher should be to develop character. There is nothing nobler on earth than a true man or a true woman.”

And so forth, and so on, through countless pages. These are admirable maxims certainly, and contain much strong meat—so strong that a very little goes a very long way. Any one of them properly “chewed and digested,” to use the words of Francis Bacon, would suffice for a lifetime, and would transform the most inefficient of schoolmasters into an ideal guide and instructor of youth.

The question is, Are they of real practical value? Are we doing right in writing, in reading, and in letting our minds wander on such, undoubtedly good, but as undoubtedly visionary, theories? Would there not accrue to each of us very much more benefit if we quietly set ourselves to doing the small routine of duties that have each day to be done? True, if we “love the human race” we shall in all probability make better masters and mistresses. But it would be an interesting calculation to discover how many columns of exhortations to philanthropy it would require to bring about this so much-to-be-desired a consummation.

The evil which this preponderating attention given to mere theory brings

about, it appears to us, is a proportionate disregard of practice, of earnest, zealous, every day work. “But,” perhaps we shall be told, “it is by means of these beautiful moral axioms that we are nerved to our every day work.” This is not altogether deniable, certainly. By occasionally diverting our minds from mere routine and engaging in quiet meditation moral strength may be—let us say, recuperated. But to properly increase that strength the surest way is to use it.

So much for theories of the moral disquisition type. Theories of the psychological type are, we hold, for young teachers equally valueless. No doubt a correct system of tuition is based on a correct system of psychology. If we know accurately the difference between a concept and a percept, can define emotion, and feeling, and sensation, and will, and know which precedes the other, and all such like metaphysical technicalities, we should perhaps be able to dole out our ideas to our pupils in their proper logical or psychological sequence. But after all, is not this better learned in the school-room than in the pages of a philosophical essay? How does a man improve any argumentative ability he may possess? By conning Aristotle, or Mill, or Jevons, or Walker, or Murray, or Whately, or Thomson, or by arguing? Or, to use another simile, does one sing better by knowing all the names of the voluntary and of the involuntary respiratory muscles, the anatomy of the larynx and the working of the vocal chords, or by using these muscles?

So, too, which is the better—to learn the constituents and the functions of the mind by the perusal of beautifully worded sentences and nicely rounded paragraphs, or by noticing the character of these constituents and the working of these functions in the minds of the pupils under our care? There is only one answer. No one will or can deny the value of the knowledge of logic and the knowledge of anatomy, and the knowledge of psychology; but the fault lies in attributing to such knowledge a value far above its true worth.