

PRACTICAL TEACHING.

FROM CONTEMPORARY SOURCES.

LANGUAGE LESSONS.*

THERE is no subject in the much distended school curriculum, commonly called the course of study, which is receiving so much careful consideration from the leading educators as language lessons and composition. Judging from the results, after a continuous school course of a dozen years, certainly no subject still demands more thoughtful investigation.

In the whole range of human knowledge nothing is more desirable than a thorough acquaintance with the mother tongue, so that the thoughts can be expressed in a clear, concise, consecutive, and forcible manner. It is no ordinary acquirement to be able to wield a fluent pen, or in unpremeditated speech to give utterance to definite ideas, arranged in order so that whatever is communicated will be lucid and convincing. In a district, grammar, or high-school course, which of the various subjects (on the great arena of life) will most positively demonstrate the supremacy of intellectual strength and vigour? After the course in arithmetic has been finished, how much mathematics beyond that is required for the statesman, judge, lawyer, physician, merchant, mechanic? And yet to which of these persons is a command of language not of the utmost importance? With a continuous course in language from the first year in school, through the various grades, until graduation from the High Schools, what an immense

advantage there would be in culture—not to mention power and vigour of intellect—over present attempts at “harmonious and equable evolution of the human powers.”

On the part of regular drill masters and book-bound teachers there is little sympathy for this work. It is somewhat different for teacher and pupil from that in the exact sciences, or spelling, in which various steps and stages can be measured and estimated accurately by a per centum mark. In language there must be variety and versatility.

The numerous exceptions and peculiarities in our language are insurmountable to the younger children, but there is a period in mental development when such minute investigations and analyses afford excellent mental discipline and become indispensable—in other words, the so-called grammar has its proper place in a thorough study of English.

With the children below the Fifth Reader a text-book dealing with the technicalities of the language is an impediment rather than an advantage in preparing the mind for freedom in the proper use of speech, oral or written. The great outcry against grammar arises from the injudicious and stultifying procedure of attempting work in the lower grades that is suitable and appropriate for more mature intellects. It is not the fault of the grammar that there are so many exceptions to each rule established, but as these actually exist in the language, there is a proper time for their study.

With a graded course advancing

* Abstract of a paper read before the Pedagogical Association, by J. Mickleborough, Principal of Cincinnati Normal School.