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## CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER.

PAGE

I. Style and Language in Teaching.....	145
II. PAPERS ON PRACTICAL EDUCATION.—(1) Discussions on School Government. (2) Tests of a Good Gallery Lesson. (3) How Socrates Practised the Art of Questioning. (4) Taking a Thing for Granted. (5) Teachers' Characteristics. (6) The Early Education of Children. (7) Home Discipline—Familiar Thoughts by a Mother. (8) Home Influence.....	146
III. EDITORIAL.—(1) Official Regulations in regard to Religious Instruction in the Schools. (2) Next Session of the Normal School. (3) Trustees' School Manuals. (4) Prizes in Schools. (5) Public School Libraries. (6) School Maps and Apparatus. (7) School Registers. (8) Pensions—Special Notice to Teachers.....	152
IV. MISCELLANEOUS.—(1) Children. (2) A Tribute to Queen Victoria. (3) The Princess Royal in Prussia. (4) Royal and Imperial Visits to Oberbourg. (5) England's Strength. (6) Teach Children to Pray. (7) Shall we Teach our Children to Repeat Prayers! (8) Praying Mothers. (9) A Child's Sympathy. (10) Periods of Child Life. (11) The Influence of Kind Words. (12) The Door Scraper. (13) Good Manners, their Want and their Influence. (14) The Human Countenance. (15) Public Playgrounds.....	153
VI. EDUCATIONAL INTELLIGENCE.—Canada: (1) Distinguished Visitors at the Educational Department. (2) Pic-Nic Celebration for the Pupils of the Public Schools of Pembroke. (3) Church of England Synod of Schools. British and Foreign: (4) Ireland Represented at the Recent Competition Examination in England.....	159

### STYLE AND LANGUAGE IN TEACHING.

A complaint not unfrequently made against teachers is, that they lack variety and flexibility in their language. It is said that even when the subject of the instruction is understood, the phraseology in which it is conveyed is too often bookish and technical, and that in this way the teaching of elementary schools is not only less interesting, but far less effective than it should be. There is too much truth in these accusations. The most pains-taking and conscientious teachers of course get up the knowledge of their subjects from books; but they often aim only at conveying that knowledge in the language of those books. The best lessons are marred by the too frequent use of technical terms. The master learns teaching as a profession, and therefore throws much of his instruction into a professional form. Hence there is a want of life, of vividness, of force, of adaptation, to the real needs and comprehension of children, and therefore a want of interest and practical value in a large majority of school lessons.

It is not difficult to assign, at least in part, the causes for this state of things. One may be found in the character of the ordinary school-books; which are for the most part, as indeed they ought to be, filled with information put in a concise and condensed form. The language employed in them may possibly be the best language; but it is necessarily technical, often

abstruse and unfamiliar. Such phraseology should undoubtedly be learnt by children, but they are too often confined to it. Teachers suppose that if the facts are learnt in book language their work is done, and nothing more is necessary; forgetting that the facts require to be set before a young mind in a great variety of forms, and that it is especially necessary to *translate* the language of a school-book into that of ordinary life, in order to make it interesting or even completely intelligible. Moreover, the desire for exactness and precision in statement, which is in itself a commendable thing, often makes teachers afraid to deviate from the phraseology which is used in books, or which they themselves have been accustomed to use when they studied the subject. The private reading, also, especially of the best and most faithful teachers, is apt to be confined almost exclusively to professional books, or to books whose main purpose is to furnish facts. Thus they are apt to acquire a hard, professional and unattractive style of expression, which they habitually use, without being conscious that there is anything remarkable or pedantic about it.

The great cause, however, of the prevalence of this evil, is the tendency which exists, in all but persons of the highest cultivation, to do their work mechanically, and to be content with only one way of doing it. Routine is, after all, much easier than an independent or original method. Mechanical teaching, in the words prescribed for us by others, is not absolutely impossible, even when but half our minds are occupied; but the teaching which invests the subject with a new dress, and which presents knowledge in exactly the form best suited to the learners, requires the whole mind. The true reason for the dullness, for the meagreness of language, and for the coldness of style so often complained of in schools, is that teachers do not always give their whole minds to the subject. They do not sufficiently identify themselves with it, nor make it thoroughly their own before they teach; above all, they are content to be the channels by which the words of others are to be conveyed to a learner's memory, instead of living fountains of instruction, imparting to others what springs naturally and spontaneously from their own minds.

The consequences of the deficiency to which we refer are often shown in many ways. Children feel an interest in their lessons in exactly the same proportion in which these lessons appeal to their own sympathies and to their own consciousness of need; but their attention is languid and their progress slow, when no such appeal is made. Unless the subjects talked about in school connect themselves with the duties of ordinary life; unless the