

Educational Weekly

VOL. V.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7TH, 1887.

Number 116.

The Educational Weekly.

Edited by T. ARNOLD HAULTAIN, M.A.

PUBLISHED BY

THE GRIP PRINTING AND PUBLISHING CO.,
TORONTO, CANADA.

JAMES V. WRIGHT, *General Manager.*

TORONTO, APRIL 7, 1887.

ALTHOUGH we cannot by any means agree with all that the *Pennsylvania School Journal* says in the following paragraphs, yet since they touch on a subject much discussed in these days, we think they are worthy of re-publication :

No writer since Hegel has exerted so profound and far-reaching an influence on human thought as Herbert Spencer. This fact alone, says the editor of the *Pennsylvania School Journal*, should be enough to induce every thoughtful person to make himself acquainted at least with the fundamental principles of this great thinker's philosophy. Unfortunately, however, or perhaps fortunately, his principles have aroused bitter opposition, are fiercely attacked and as fiercely defended, and as often as not are misrepresented both by friend and foe. Current literature is therefore so full of books and reviews and essays and articles about the philosophy of evolution that the temptation simply to read some of these and from them form a judgment of Mr. Spencer and his system, is too strong for many. So that while no educated person is willing to confess ignorance of the principles of evolution—but on the contrary will criticise them freely, and oppose or espouse them unhesitatingly—there are yet too many of these very persons who have never looked inside of one of Mr. Spencer's own works. This is the main reason why there is so much misconception and misrepresentation, coupled with warmth of feeling and prejudice both for and against them, to be met with everywhere. What is needed, for the sake of truth and honesty, is more personal acquaintance with, and calm,

thoughtful, and judicial study of, the much-discussed but little understood system in the works themselves of Herbert Spencer. In no other way will the merits and defects, the degree of truth and of falsity, in this philosophy ever be determined.

It is mainly for this reason that we here call attention to the subject. Evolution is the dominant philosophy of to-day. Our teachers hear it discussed everywhere; periodical literature is full of it; theology generally denounces and derides it, scientific works as generally accept it, many even of our text-books take its truth for granted; it is not only desirable, it has become almost necessary, for our teachers to know what it is, and intelligently to judge its claims. It is no longer possible for any enlightened person to simply ignore it; least of all is it possible for our public educators to do so. The time is here when Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy" demands a place in every well-equipped library. It is not enough to have this one's "Examination" of it, or that one's "Refutation," or another's "Vindication." A correct and satisfactory judgment of the system cannot be formed save from a close and thorough study of Spencer's own works. To attempt it is unjust, dishonest to him and to ourselves; and it is folly besides.

And why should we not so study them? It is neither a dry and uninteresting task, nor one so difficult as to be burdensome. For unlike former systems of philosophy, there is no transcendental speculation, and little metaphysical abstruseness, to confuse and weary one. All of it, indeed, requires close attention and logical thinking; but the only really difficult part is that on "The Principles of Psychology" though George Eliot, it is said, used to read it for recreation, when wearied with hard study! The remarkable clearness of arrangement, wonderfully close logical method, and singular purity and directness of style, which characterize all the volumes, help materially to lighten the reader's task,—another contrast with former philosophers,

as Kant, Hegel, and even Lotze. Indeed, the volume of "First Principles" is a model of English style, and well worth reading as an exercise in literature alone. Moreover, even if the philosophy should not interest, every volume is so full of new data and curious facts, culled from every realm of human knowledge, as to make them interesting for the entertaining information they give. Certainly the time and labour spent in studying these volumes will be amply repaid, even if their philosophy be rejected, by the fund of new and diverse facts learned from every sphere of knowledge and science, and especially by the training undergone in accurate thinking, the exercise in analytical and synthetic thought, in strict logical methods; and last but not least by the literary benefit derived from the study of so consummate a master of clear and forcible style as is Mr. Spencer.

IN our country, says a New York exchange, where the average of natural capacity among boys is higher than in any other, every boy who learns a trade, and learns it well, cannot practice it without making work for some one else. Suppose he is a bricklayer; the bricks he lays must be made for him, and on the building in which he is engaged there must be work for stonemasons, carpenters, plumbers, roofers, ironworkers, glassmakers, and who knows how many more. Suppose he is a brickmaker, the case is the same; he must have his tools, the employer must have his plant, and when the bricks are made they cannot be stirred without starting a long line of workers that go on increasing in number until the building in which they are wrought is finished. These are the facts that lead us to say that the policy of the trades unions is mistaken, that it is not in the good sense of the word, selfish in effect, but contrary to their real interests. As to how boys may best be taught trades, that is an open question, but that the mechanics of to-day would gain by an effective system of such teaching we have no doubt.