

Special Papers.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR TEACHERS' INSTITUTE OF MOST BENEFIT?*

BY MISS MAGGIE MACDONALD.

In ordinary school work it is supposed that the trustees provide the most competent teacher and the best equipment their means will allow. So in our institute work, we must have for standing officers and committee the very best material within our reach.

Very much depends upon *the president*, just as very much depends upon the Principal of the school. He is the moving spirit of the whole. He will have ideas of his own gleaned here and there, tried and proved until they have become recognized principles, and valuable aids to his own success. And if valuable to the individual, why might they not become so to us all? The wise president will be quick to perceive and to apply whatever of worth he may find in suggestions from his counsellors, the executive committee.

This *committee* should be composed of live, progressive teachers. There are honest, faithful teachers, who take "Institute Days," and who attend promptly and throughout every session. They are the ones to appoint for a committee. Perhaps they will say, "Why, we could do nothing on a committee—we come regularly because *we feel the need of help.*" Then be sure they are the ones who can best *ask* for the "help." Members of a committee who have no special need in any subject, and who are so very wise that we are afraid to say to them, "discuss this," or "have the methods of treating that illustrated," are *not* the ones to sympathize with our needs, and, consequently, are not the ones to draft *helpful* programmes. They may choose good subjects, and these may be handled most excellently, but, if they do not meet the demand, where will the relative amount of profit come in?

Let us look at this matter of the preparing of the programmes. As a rule we like those subjects least which we have the smallest degree of success in teaching. What then? Let them quietly slip by? Never! Take them up bravely, study them intelligently, seek to find out the principles which naturally underlie a pleasant and profitable presentation of them to our pupils. But how is our committee to find out our needs? Chiefly in two ways, (1) by looking at results; (2) by having teachers ask for help. Some of our committees would say, "Oh, yes! Now, how often do you suppose teachers have asked for help since *we* were placed on the committee? NOT ONCE!" What! Wasn't it worth the while of *even one* to ask? Were your systems looked down upon, or were they too good to be made common property? Or if the fault was not in your systems, was it in yourselves? Did you see that, in *even one little* case, you knew of a plan better than that which a younger teacher was working upon, and yet you refused to call out his or her confidential questionings?

And did *we teachers* ever think of this? Perhaps we do not even know ourselves which subjects we handle least successfully. Let us then look up the results of our last written examinations, and see wherein our pupils took lowest percentage. Let us give ourselves in greater measure to study the principles of teaching that subject, and if still we fail (comparatively speaking), it becomes our duty no less than it is our privilege to call for the help of our fellow-teachers.

So much for the relative parts. But what of us as a whole? How can *we* take most benefit out of our meetings? One way is to have more interchange of thought—more discussion. A good plan to bring this about (and I say "good" advisedly, having seen it tried and proved) is the following:—The committee appoint, for each subject of their choosing, a leader and two critics. The duty of a critic is to prepare the subject just as thoroughly as though he were the leader, so that he can give to us his own peculiar methods of handling it. This plan has advantages for all parties concerned. The teachers convened listen to *the best* that those dealing with the subject know. If their best is better than what we practice now, let us take it up, put it to the test for ourselves. If, on

the other hand, we feel convinced that *we* have ways that are better, then it becomes our duty to present the methods we use for *their* consideration; those appointed to the subject by the committee having the first hearing—the open discussion in all cases following.

A way in which I think we might improve our programmes (and this I offer simply as a suggestion), is to state upon them the *limits* of the work assigned; e.g. "Arithmetic—outline of sketch of first lessons in subtraction;" "Analysis of problems based on the simple rules;" or "Geography—how to teach the motions of the earth, with their corresponding effects;" or "Reading—with class in Third Book," etc.

Again: We might discuss educational books; by looking at the list in our registers we can readily see what ones are to be studied during the year. Let us, say at this meeting, fix upon at least one of these, and agree to discuss its matter, or any definite portion thereof, at our next regular meeting.

One other thought: Let us touch upon matters that interest our ratepayers. I was glad to see upon our programme for the present meeting an invitation to delegates and all friends of education. Now what should be our object in having these attend? Not surely to see a president and a lot of teachers; nor even simply to encourage and strengthen us by so much sympathy as their presence amongst us expresses. The invitation means that there is something upon the programme of live interest to *them*. There is School Discipline. In what measure do our trustees appreciate the help they can give us here, or the benefit they can render the community they represent? "Would they allow talking in school, or eating, or the running in and out of the children at playtime, or their leaving school before dismissal?" "Well, they hardly know—they hadn't thought of it. What does the teacher think about it?" There is also on the programme before us the question of Uniform Promotion Examinations. This is something our ratepayers are interested in at the present time—more especially so on account of the November Examination just pending. They would like to hear the matter discussed—they want to be intelligent in their decisions, and they are glad of an opportunity of listening to reasons on both sides of the argument.

Yet, after all, our Institute will (comparatively) fail in attaining its object, unless each teacher or trustee *turns to account* what he has heard.

Let teachers come with note-books and pencils, not trusting wholly to memory. I have heard it said, "I don't count much on this note-taking—I want any ideas I give to go into brains, not into books." Well, there is no objection to having them in both, is there? I speak for myself, that I have gone home from Conventions and immediately begun practising ideas that I judged were valuable, and as these began to lose their freshness to the children, I have taken my note-book and found something else that could be brought in with new and inviting force.

But PRACTICE is what we need—our judgment is clear on this, but we must "put conscience into it" if we wish ever to become intensely practical. So, step by step shall we proceed, ever onward, ever upward, ever choosing the good and refusing all else with the utmost deliberation. Thus shall we make our schools, our institute, our profession itself the gainers, in just the proportion we ourselves become better.

THE TEACHER AS A READER.

THE teacher must be more and more a reader. He must not only read much, but he must read well. He cannot expect to read everything any more than any other busy worker, but the public is coming to expect the teacher who takes first rank to be intelligent upon all subjects of general interest, and unreasonable as this is when carried to the extreme, it is not unreasonable in the general application. The teacher is quite apt to speak of himself as too much occupied to read, and while we would be the last to discount the draft which school work makes upon a faithful teacher, we know of no profession, except the ministerial, that makes perceptibly less draft. There is no busy

professional man who finds any way to read without special vigorous effort.

The doctor can never call an hour his own, and it is not conducive to intensity of attention and ease in reading to have one ear on the door-bell.

The lawyer does not find it natural for him to seclude himself for literary indulgence after a hard day's work.

Every profession, every man's social and home life, tempts him away from his books, and yet doctors, lawyers, preachers, artists, merchants, teachers, who wish to read, do read.

One must train himself persistently to make every sacrifice required in order to do a reasonable amount of good reading.

It will never be easy until the habit is formed, until neighbors, friends, family, understand that it is as impracticable for him to leave his books on the evenings or hours assigned to them as it would be to leave his regular business. The world is full of idle people, who loaf away the time not spent in professional or mercantile employment, and men who would be indignant to be robbed of ten minutes from a busy day will rob you of two hours without a thought of its value, if only you are away from business.

We readily grant that a man owes much to home, something to church and society, and yet, no man who values his future, no man who realizes what life means, can afford to dissipate the hours away from business-office or school in the name of home, church, or social duties.

He will be more to home, church, society, if he is sparing of the time he gives them and does it as though it were a luxury, if he makes the most of his ability and opportunity to read.

It is not easily demonstrable that the teacher, as committee and society are now constituted, will not be as likely to be popular, will not cultivate his reputation as successfully, who never reads, but devotes himself to miscellaneous, social or religious luxuries.

It is clear, however, that no man is the wisest, most efficient leader of children, who is not himself constantly acquiring knowledge, who has not the ability to read a book that requires brains to read it, who cannot relish the reading of it, who cannot discipline himself to set aside other things regularly for the reading of such a work.

The teacher who loves to read the best things, and knows how to find the time for such reading, will leave an impression upon his pupils that will be sufficient reward for any earnest man or woman.—*Journal of Education.*

CANON FARRAR says:—"A life spent in brushing clothes, and washing crockery, and sweeping floors—a life which the proud of the earth would have treated as the dust under their feet; a life spent at the clerk's desk; a life spent in the narrow shop; a life spent in the laborer's hut, may yet be a life so ennobled that for the sake of it a king might gladly yield his crown." A writer referring to this speaks of the well-known picture of Murillo, in the Louvre, representing the interior of a convent kitchen, in which not mortals, but white-winged angels appear at the lowly work. One is putting the kettle on the fire, one is bearing a pail of water, another is taking down plates from the kitchen dresser. A teacher, full of enthusiasm in her work, recently undertook to teach in an out-of-the-way district in New York State. Her school-house had no ornament on it, no trees near it, no conveniences in it; right by the side of a dusty road, in reality, no better than an old red barn. Could she teach a good school in such a place? And the pupils! Just like the old school house; uncombed hair, unwashed faces, soiled clothes. What *could* she do with them? But she did something with them, and in doing this something she secured *success*. Teachers, do not think that success needs expensive surroundings, or a good salary; but it does mean knowledge of the means by which it is got, and a determination to use these means.—*N. Y. School Journal.*

THE tender words and loving deeds which we scatter for the hearts which are nearest to us are immortal seed that will spring up in everlasting beauty, not only in our own lives, but in the lives of those born after us.—*Spurgeon.*

* Read at the Peterboro' Teachers' Institute.