

WHAT SHALL WE STUDY?

In determining the scope of the studies to be pursued in the schools which are intermediate between the elementary school and the university, we must be guided by the same general principle on which we based our statement of the subjects which ought to engage the attention of pupils in schools of the elementary grade. The education must, in a large degree, depend upon the prospective avocations of the scholars. In our former paper we expressed our conviction that true education consists in a just and thorough recognition of the fact that training is of more importance than the bare acquisition of knowledge, and of the consequent necessity of so directing the work of the school that the pupils shall leave it with a fair degree of intelligence, and have implanted in their breasts the elementary principles of morality. The farmers and mechanics who in this way are prepared for the duties of life, will not only approve themselves good and skilful workmen, but acquit themselves as citizens with integrity and enlightenment.

In the intermediate schools are found some who, while purposing to return to the farm or learn a trade, are anxious to obtain as good an education as is within their reach, but by far the larger number of the scholars intend to become teachers, doctors, clergymen, lawyers or merchants. To the majority the high school or the academy marks the close of their scholastic life. There their assisted studies end, and thence they proceed forth into the world with such equipment as has been provided for them, in the knowledge which they have acquired, the habits of thought in which they have been disciplined, their desire to augment their scientific or literary stores stimulated, and, in some degree at any rate, their ambition directed to worthy aims. The remainder complete their literary studies at the university, preparatory to entering upon their professional preparation for the career of their choice.

To provide an education which shall be suitable to persons intending to follow these different pursuits is not so difficult as it at first sight appears. All ought to be affected in much the same way by the education they receive. It should make them capable and cultured human beings. Whatever talents a youth possesses, it is the province and duty of education to evoke them, and once made conscious of his natural endowments and proclivities, it becomes the anxious care of the teacher to lead him to such sources of knowledge, and employ such instruments of culture, as shall develop to the fullest extent those faculties and tastes.

The studies in the intermediate schools ought to be threefold—literary, scientific, and commercial. Under the first are classed the study of languages, literature, and history; the second comprises pure and applied mathematics, chemistry, physics, astronomy, and natural history; while under the third are embraced such subjects as are specially requisite for commercial pursuits—short-hand, book-keeping, etc., and, we may add, music and drawing, which will, undoubtedly, not only prove highly advantageous for those who have a special talent for them, but greatly beneficial in many ways to all, by cultivating the ear, the eye, and the hand.

There can be no question that the most important of all the literary studies to which students at this period can be directed is that of their own language. The more irksome, and therefore the least interesting stage of the study has passed. Here selected classics are with great advantage read and studied. The mind of the student can now grasp the meaning of a passage, analyze the thought therein expressed, and even thus early the promising pupil can be led to observe characteristics of style which may influence the formation of his own. By paraphrase and original composition he should acquire a facility in expressing his thoughts in language with whose meaning he is familiar, and in a form, clear, concise and coherent. And he may be made conversant with the English language at various periods in its history, by listening and reading carefully chosen passages from the writings of the authors which afford the best illustration of the condition of the language at the time the works were produced. The stimulating power of such a course of study as this cannot be overestimated, provided the teacher is gifted with a clear understanding and an enthusiastic appreciation of the literature which he opens up to the student. Unless the teacher himself is in sympathy with the author, he will in vain seek to produce an enduring impression upon his class, and few, if any, will feel irresistibly impelled to read for themselves. And this last is one of the most valuable results of literary teaching.

There is not the same unanimity respecting the study of Latin and Greek. The time was, and that not very long ago, when, in England, and nearly to the same extent in Scotland, these were almost the only subjects studied in grammar schools and academies. A change, however, has been effected, and the work has been modified so that it, to some extent, responds to modern demands. The usual result followed the agitation against exclusive classical teaching in the high schools of the country. To carry their object, the opponents of the traditional system had exaggerated its evils to such a degree that