

Special.

CONSERVATISM AND REFORM IN EDUCATIONAL METHODS.

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"Everywhere there is a class of men who cling with fondness to whatever is ancient, and even when convinced by over-powering reasons that innovation would be beneficial consent to it with many misgivings and forebodings. We find also everywhere another class of men, sanguine in hope, bold in speculation, always pressing forward, quick to discern the imperfections of whatever exists, disposed to think lightly of the risks and inconveniences that attend improvements, and disposed to give every change credit for being an improvement. In the sentiments of both classes there is something to approve. But of both the best specimens will be found not far from the common frontier. The extreme section of one class consists of bigoted dotards; the extreme section of the other consists of shallow and reckless empirics." Thus does England's great historian characterize the two great political parties which for 250 years have alternately held sway in British politics. And thus may we aptly characterize the two great parties in the educational world which are to-day struggling for supremacy. Everywhere we find schoolmasters in the bonds of prescription, uttering with confidence the famous dictum of the preacher, "The thing that hath been it is which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." And everywhere we find schoolmasters who, like the Athenians of old, "spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." And in the domain of education, as in that of politics, we shall find the best specimens not far from the common frontier; and perhaps after diligent search we may find in some remote corner of the land the bigoted dotard and the reckless empiric. But a strange thing is to be noticed here in passing—conservatives in politics are often reformers in education, and radical politicians often cling with tenacity to the educational tenets of their fathers. Why conservatives do not conserve in all things and why reformers are not always anxious for reform is a question interesting but quite foreign to the present topic of discussion. The theme of this paper leads us to a brief examination of the most striking differences between what have been styled, "The Old Education" and "The New Education"—differences not in the subjects of education but in the processes of education, not in educational curricula, but in educational methods. Methods and curricula, however, are so interdependent that in dealing with the former one must frequently make reference to the latter.

At the outset we must be careful not to be misled by phrases. "The New Education" is a phrase now on the lips of all educationists. Its meaning is not indefinite, but the appellation itself is a misleading assumption. The "New Education" is new in its widening sway, but it is as old as Plato and Socrates in some of its leading principles, and it owes to the Baconian philosophy its spirit of investigation. The "New Education" is largely now in its practical application in the school-room, but a century ago Pestalozzi was engaged in his philanthropic labors. There are those who with reverence actually regard Col. Parker as the great apostle of the new ideas; but when Col. Parker was in his cradle the forces were silently at work which are now causing such a stir on this continent. The Pestalozzian principles took root in America many years ago, principally through the labors of Mr. Page and Prof. Agassiz. Col. Parker is the leading, because the most

enthusiastic advocate of the "New Education" in America, but to call him the founder of a new scheme of things is to discredit the unselfish labors of many earlier and silent workers in both hemispheres, and to check the advance of the new methods by exciting the antagonism of those who are repelled by the dogmatism and extravagance of the leading disseminator of the reputedly new doctrines. To glorify any one man for having discovered such pedagogic laws as, "Proceed from the known to the unknown," "Put ideas before words," "Never do for a child what he can do for himself," is to display dense ignorance and to throw ridicule on the cause of advancement.

Although the new ideas had their first practical application in the schools of Germany, still, even in Britain, the land of educational conservatism, there have been for many years spasmodic yearnings for educational reform. Milton and Locke, Goldsmith and Addison, uttered feeble protests against prevailing follies. In more recent times Scott and Thackeray and Dickens spoke with ridicule and contempt of the typical pedagogues of their times. Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, was the first English schoolmaster to declare that leading principle of the "New Education,"—"It is not knowledge but the means of gaining knowledge that we have to teach." Macaulay thus describes the pedagogism of twenty centuries: "Words and mere words and nothing but words had been the fruit of all the toil of all the most renowned sages of sixty generations, during which time the human race instead of marching merely marked time." And now we are done with marking time and have begun to march again. It took a century to make preparations for the advance, but "Forward" is now the word "all along the line."

With the old methods of education we are all perfectly familiar, for it has fallen to our lot to live in the transition period of educational thought, and most of us were reared in the reign of Rod and Rote. Some of us were so fortunate in the days of our youth as to be able to say, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places," but ill was the heritage of the many twenty years ago. Even now many of the old methods are in full swing in hundreds of schools all over the land, and they exercise their baleful influence to a greater or less degree in every school from the humblest to the highest throughout this broad Dominion. The curriculum of every Public School, of every High School, of every academy, of every college, of every university in the land imposes upon its students such studies, and shackles them with such tests, that it is simply impossible to carry out the new principles in all their fulness. The old studies, and the old order of attacking those studies, and the old methods of testing progress in those studies, produce limitations so confining that the new ideas necessarily have a sluggish growth. But they are growing, nevertheless.

Let us now briefly compare the "Old Education" and the "New Education," with special reference to guiding principles, and to the methods employed in working out these principles; and you will allow me to describe these systems in a series of contrasts. Although almost all rhetorical antitheses are unfair, as they contain an element of hyperbole, still they are invaluable for purposes of this kind. The "Old Education" was not entirely vicious, nor can we suppose that the "New" is entirely excellent; but the former embraced so many defects, and the latter offers so many advantages, that for the sake of a clear presentation (even at the risk of being misunderstood), I may seem for the moment to rob the "Old" of all its saving graces, and to clothe the "New" in a too attractive garb.

The motto of the "Old Education" is "Knowledge is power." And so it is. But the experience of centuries has proven that knowledge is not the greatest power. The omniscient man is not always the omnipotent man. In the realm of mind the scholar is