

# The Educational Weekly.

TORONTO, JANUARY 29, 1885.

We doubt if there is any class of men more energetic in the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of their minds, than teachers who are really interested in their work. So marked is this peculiarity, that we all know how it has been made the subject of humorous, but harmless laughter by innumerable writers—from Lamb's description of his pedagogic stage coach companion to the late Mr. Calverley's "The School Master Abroad with his Son."

TAKING for granted, then, this studious habit amongst teachers as a rule, it becomes a very important question to determine to what subjects (other than those to which their natural bent inclines them) it were best for them to devote themselves. There are, of course, numerous cases in which no choice is open to the teacher: he has this or that examination to pass, with its prescribed subjects; or he has involuntarily given himself up wholly to the study and teaching of one particular branch; or he has had neither the previous "grounding," nor possesses the present facilities for entering upon the acquisition of such subjects as he may desire. Nevertheless there undoubtedly are very many teachers who, having a large amount of spare time upon their hands, and possessing unbounded ambition and energies, find it often difficult to decide definitely and conclusively, the best and most advantageous subjects to learn.

AND such a choice we consider necessary. The age is one of specialism—a specialism, certainly, that is based upon a broad foundation, but nevertheless a specialism. There are but few we conceive, who would in those days be more sanguine of attaining success in the higher departments of teaching by a loose and incoherent knowledge of a variety of branches of learning (the only kind of knowledge possible in their rapidly growing stage) than by an exact and intimate acquaintance with but one or two. Whether or not such specialistic tendencies are to be deplored need not concern us: to the teacher they are inevitable.

TO return, then: is it possible to discover in what direction the general school education of the young is tending?—for will not this be our surest guide to the choice of a subject upon which to concentrate our powers? Is it possible to discover any signs which shall be evidence to us of the direction education is taking? We think it is: that it would be quite possible not only to find changes in the methods of teaching

classics, mathematics, the natural sciences, English, literature, history, and so on, but, also, to make more than a guess in prophesying which of these shall, at no very future date, be in the ascendant.

THE study of the English language, literature, and cognate branches, has, within the past few years, attained astonishing proportions. True, this development is seen in well nigh all branches, but in none, we assert, has it been so rapid or so wide spread as in English; more especially if under this title are included philology, ethnology, history, *belles lettres*, etc. The natural sciences may perhaps be a formidable rival in this progress; but as these are only remotely connected (in their higher branches) with the teaching in our schools, this need not be here discussed.

MANY things point to this development:—the reprints of old authors; the various new publications on the works and lives of English classical writers; the care taken to obtain accuracy of text; the eminent authors engaged upon such new productions; the diligence displayed in collecting the most exact information on every debatable point; the new interest taken in early English; and, above all, the scholarly manner in which all these are treated—all point to the preponderating influence of English and its cognate branches.

IF, as we hold, such change is gradually taking place, Canada first of all will feel its influence. The country we live in would seem to aid by its character and surroundings this gradual preference of an exacter knowledge of the mother tongue. Canada is democratic: high polish, culture, and refinement are not its goal; the obtaining of the necessaries of life concerns us more than does the enjoyment of its luxuries. Hence the ancient classics, the *pabulum* of all that is aristocratic, do not retain in the colonies the exalted position which they hold in the Mother Country. A misconstruction is not here a heinous crime, and a false quantity could never, in Canada, excite the derision with which it is greeted in England.

IF, then, we lose the classics as a basis of education we must fall back upon English. There is always a sort of undefined basis to education, and the transition from classics to English means only a change of foundation, not a removal.

NOR do we see much to be deplored in his change of basis—rather, we may say, much may be gained. For, first, all that is

sublime in the ancient Greek and Latin authors is these days preserved for us in our own mother tongue by translations of exceeding merit; second, their elegance of diction is rivalled, if not surpassed by writers speaking the language with which we are most intimate; and third, that systematic study of the construction of a language a factor of such inestimable importance in training the mind, is as feasible in English as it is in Latin or Greek.

AND as this tendency towards an exacter knowledge of English progresses, this factor will necessarily *pari passu* increase: we shall pay more attention to old English authors (who knows but that in time we shall resort to these for exercises in translation?); we shall perhaps make at all events a partial study of Anglo-Saxon a part of our school curriculum; our grammars will contain a large historical element explaining the changes of construction brought about by extraneous influences—so that the mental gymnastics which, it has so often been declared, the classics so excellently afford, will not be in any way absent in this change.

ANOTHER by no means unimportantly beneficial result that will undoubtedly accrue, is that we shall be able to study a work or an author in our own language, *as a whole*. The benefit of such a mode of learning all will admit. Mr. Matthew Arnold has laid much stress upon it. This mode of learning is, today, we unhesitatingly assert, lamentably absent from our school education. In Greek and Latin it is simply impossible until the pupil is well on in his undergraduate career. In English, even when it is attempted, the result is a failure. We may parse, analyse, explain, scan, repeat, and find parallel passages to, the whole of a poem, a play, or a romance, but is this in reality understanding it in the true sense of the word?

BUT under the change which we have predicted, with all the elements of the language learnt in our childhood, this true understanding of an author and his creations will be entirely possible. And with this will come a mental grasp wide and strong in its scope and power.

IF, then, we are right in this view, the subjects that should most engage the attention of young teachers—teachers who hope to be, say, twenty years from to-day, in the first ranks of educational leaders—are those of the English language and literature, with all the interesting connecting links without which English itself cannot be properly understood or taught.