

WHAT SUBJECTS SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

BY J. TAIT, GEORGETOWN.

This question has been to a considerable degree anticipated by an article in your July No., "Attempting too much," as well as by another in your August No., "High vs. Public Schools," by Mr. Woods of Kingston. But it is one of such vast importance that I cannot refrain from referring to one or two of its prominent features. Many may indeed consider that the Council of Public Instruction, or in other words, Dr. Ryerson, has effectually settled this matter for us by laying down a very extensive programme. I do not profess to be gifted with the spirit of prophecy, when I say emphatically, that were we to carry out this programme in its integrity for a few years, this school system, of which we declare we are so proud, will be nearly, if not altogether ruined. The people of Ontario take an active interest in educational matters, but let us destroy that interest by a system of complex machinery, and by a slighting of thorough elementary training, and all the bolstering and patching by Dr. Ryerson, or any other person, will avail little.

Granting, in the meantime, that an acquaintance with a great variety of subjects constitutes knowledge, does it follow that there exists in Ontario a necessity for such an extensive programme? We think not. The great majority of our pupils are the sons and daughters of farmers, who intend to walk in the footsteps of their parents, and who are able, as a general thing, to attend school for only a few months in each year. What they want, and what they should have, is a thorough grounding in those subjects which are brought into use in every-day life. What great advantage is

there to a young man to know when Troy fell, how many bones there are in the human body, or all the possible combinations of chemical elements, if he is unable to calculate sharply and correctly, if he cannot express himself with something like freedom from grammatical blunders, or if he dare not enter into a business correspondence, from fear of exposing his deficiencies? It may be said here that I am supposing an impossible case; that one acquainted with History, Chemistry, &c., is required, as a matter of course, by the programme to have an accurate and ready knowledge of the more elementary branches. That the case is quite within the range of possibility may be shown by a reference to the reports of the High School Inspectors, to the able article of Mr. Woods, and to the experience of the five thousand teachers of Ontario. Painful as this fact is, it must be admitted. Still further: do not others as well as farmers require a sound elementary training? Most assuredly. The mechanic, the doctor, the lawyer, and all others must work from the same common basis; and all, no matter how various their occupations, find, hourly and daily, practical calls upon their knowledge of the same subjects. What these subjects are is apparent to everyone—namely, Reading, Writing, Spelling, Practical Arithmetic, and Practical Grammar. Apparently a very meagre bill of fare. Still, one that is all sufficient. (I see in your article, "Attempting too much," that Geography is inserted, but after a little thought, I have felt induced to give it a secondary position). I know that every experienced teacher in the country will en-