

What is the principal work of a school teacher? Certainly not to give his pupils some slight knowledge of everything; but first, to teach him such things as will enable him to pursue his studies by himself, and further, to get him into the habit of doing all his work intelligently, carefully, and accurately as far as he goes. A boy or a girl so taught and disciplined would have a thousand times better a start for carrying on the serious work of education than one who had got a little smattering of everything. And we fear that the smattering is now the rule. We are afraid to enumerate the various subjects which quite young children are required to attack. And with what result? Among other things a prodigious amount of flippant inaccuracy and boundless conceit. To take one instance, what is to be said of the spelling of the rising generation? We know what ought to be. Reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic are certainly the foundations of all education. Accuracy in these elementary subjects is a *sine qua non*. When it is not found, we may be pretty sure there will be accuracy in nothing else. A boy who cannot read and spell and write and cipher a little with a considerable degree of accuracy will blunder in every other subject which he undertakes. What, then, do examiners find in the papers of young men who are examined on science of all kinds, on medical subjects, on philosophy, on theology? Many of them testify that they find the vilest spelling, and that the thing has gone so far that they pay no attention at all to the spelling, but mark good spellers and bad spellers alike. Ought this to be done? Are the fundamental subjects, the bases of education, to go for nothing? Are men to go abroad with B.A., M.A., B.D., M.D. attached to their names, who are ignorant of that which a boy of ten or twelve ought to know perfectly?

We believe that this matter of the number and variety of the subjects taught in elementary schools needs immediate consideration, and that the sooner the number is reduced the better it will be for the masters and scholars and for the cause of education. But we must pass on to another aspect of the subject which is of no less importance—the manner of communicating instruction in our schools and colleges. On this point we must make our meaning quite clear. The errors which we shall venture to point out exist. We know that they exist. To what extent they prevail we have no means of knowing. Whoever is free from them is liable to no portion of the criticism which we here venture to offer. That others are so liable we know, and we shall therefore proceed to offer our criticism.

In the imparting of instruction in our upper schools, colleges, and universities, a prodigious amount of mere cramming is going on. Young men are stuffed for examinations; they are not educated for study and for life. They are made stupid rather than bright; they are made superficial and vain rather than thoughtful and humble: and Bacon warned us long ago that the kingdom of knowledge can be entered only as the kingdom of heaven is entered—by our becoming as little children.

And how is this done? In various ways. But one principal method is the plan adopted by some teachers and lecturers of dictating nearly from beginning to end of their lecture. No matter what the subject may be—chemistry, philosophy, history, theology, or anything else—the unfortunate student has to bend over his note book for a mortal hour, and then another, and then another, writing laboriously the sentences dictated by his teacher. There is hardly any opportunity of exercising thought on the subject of the lecture. He must just put down what he is told, and some time before the examination he must get it up; when the examination is over he may dismiss it from his mind, for he has nothing left. There was no reflection, it was simply a matter of cramming, and the work is done!

Very often it would be quite easy to save the student a great part of this mere mechanical routine by recommending to him a good text-book, which could in most cases easily be found, and which would contain a great deal more than the lecturer could possibly dictate, and would be quite as easy to "get up." But here again the miserable system is carried on. The lecturer will not give his victim liberty; he must guide him through the book; and so he sets to work and writes out or cribs an analysis of the work prescribed, and the unfortunate student has to write out, day after day, the meagre sketch of a book which might be interesting to him if he were allowed to read it.

Let us not be misunderstood. Analysis is often useful; but for most of the books that in any way need to be studied by such helps good analyses are already provided. And, at any rate, this is not the work of the teacher. His work is to excite an interest in the subject of study, to throw light upon the argument of the book, to criticize statements of fact, arguments, and illustrations, to teach his pupils to take a living interest in their work, and not merely to regard it as a thing to be got through in order that they may pass an examination and gain a degree or a prize. If the time now spent in this mechanical labour were given to explanatory or illuminative lecturing on a good text-book, and to examining at the beginning of every lecture on the subject of the previous one, we might have a good deal more teaching and a good deal less of cramming.

Yet there are cases in which dictation is necessary and useful. The method, for example, adopted by many German professors, of dictating a clear outline of their lecture, which the student can take away with him and fill up afterwards, as he pleases, is an excellent one. In this case, the portions dictated are merely the starting points for exposition and illustration; and any ordinary student who is attentive will easily be able by the aid of his notes and the exercise of his memory to recite nearly the whole of what he has heard. Nothing can be better than this system where it can be applied. The memory is exercised and strengthened, but not the memory alone. The reasoning powers are brought into play, and the whole intelligence is stimulated, illuminated, moulded. At least we are certain that this will be the judgment of all who have had experience of the two methods. Who will help our teachers to adopt the more excellent way?

MONTREAL LETTER.

A SUPERFICIAL observer at any of our public balls might hail with delight, if he be of socialistic principles, the seemingly democratic spirit that governs such entertainments. Closer examination, however, will discover a multiplicity of cliques, a bewildering number of social "circles" as far remote from each other "as from the centre thrice to the utmost pole." The *raison d'être* of such distinctions in this country of ours it would be difficult, nay, almost impossible, to explain, were it not for the fact that, despite our Churches, we bow with the rest of humanity no longer to the golden rule, but rather to the rule of gold.

All the world and his wife figured at the brilliant ball given in the Windsor Hotel on Friday evening to fête the Prince of Wales' silver wedding. It was organized by the regiment that bears his name: a regiment that prides itself upon its armoury, its rank, its enterprise, and the prowess of its officers in social manoeuvres. The ball-room was very prettily decorated with star-shaped trophies of bayonets, and at one end blazed an arch of steel and light. There were far fewer red coats than one could have wished to see; for the dress of the regiment, though very handsome and becoming, forms no contrast in colour to the sable hideous of civilians' garb, that makes so meaningless and ugly a daub amidst all the delicious tints of feminine attire. Some stalwart hearts appeared in kilts, and were rewarded for their intrepidity by presenting a most enviable figure. The ladies were, generally speaking, as fair and flimsy as the fattest old chevalier could desire. Soft, cloud-like skirts of tulle over satin seemed to be most popular. It was quite worthy a moralist's study to mark the hues of these fair creatures' dresses. The prettily awkward and childishly lady-like debutante comes forth in immaculate white; she returns the following winter in pink; we next find her a pale golden flame; but ere long she will blaze forth like stage fire, only to smoulder eventually in black and gray on the chaperon's bench.

If the roads were disagreeable beyond description, the distance from most Christian habitations seemingly interminable, when once arrived at, the St. George's Snow-shoe Club-house on Saturday afternoon more than rewarded our trouble. We had been summoned to an "At Home," but an "At Home" of a very convivial nature. The club-house is small, but most compact, and suited to its end in every way. It stands on high ground about a mile from the City's western limit, and commands a most gorgeous view. The interior comprises, on the first floor, a large entrance hall, supper-room and ball-room, and on the second, committee rooms. The walls, ceilings and floors are of pretty, light wood; while each of the only ornaments, the candelabra, is decorated with heavy gilded snow-shoes. Saturday's entertainment might almost be considered a house-warming, inasmuch as the Club has been built but a short time. However, not seldom during this past arctic season have dancing and sprightly companions exercised greater fascination than the less civilized, melancholy "tramp." Quite after the fashion of knightly days did the snow-shoers receive their friends, who danced and made merry from four to seven.

I had the pleasure of visiting Mr. J. Harris' studio last week; he is an artist, I believe, in whom Torontonians feel much interest. But, of course, one has no need to specify thus. Mr. Harris has at present on view his portrait of Doctor Norman, which, in a few days, is to be taken across the road and placed in the Art Gallery. We have in this portrait some excellent work of a most excellent workman. The face is indeed a tempting one to paint, with its strong, clearly marked features, yet calm and dignified refinement. The artist's treatment evinces at once strength and sensibility. You must often have remarked that subtle differences which, nevertheless, very truly exists between the physiognomies of teachers of different creeds. Doctor Norman's face is essentially that of an Anglican clergyman, and the indescribable something which makes it such is in the portrait.

Mr. Harris studied for a time at the Slade School of Art, in London, but he soon left it, like all enterprising English artists, to work in Paris. Here he entered the studio of Bonnat, the great French portraitist. Now he comes back to us with all the fresh strength and enthusiasm, and unconventionality, that animate the greatest of modern schools. A delightful absence of pose, an earnestness at once honest and simple characterizes Mr. Harris' work. We hear of the gilded Carolus Durand's receptions, we look at his latest work on exhibition—"Andromède," a comely model, but nothing else—and we smile. In contrast must rise before us the "Angelus" and its starving author, and then does it appear once again how for artists' lungs one whiff of air from Fontainebleau is worth many an hour passed in aristocratic faubourgs; one rough day under the open sky, many a night in pink-and-white salons. All this that I say I felt in Mr. Harris' studio, his rough little picture lined workshop, and I felt, too, we must do all we can to keep such an artist with us. But don't for an instant imagine his path is prickly like poor Millet's; he will doubtless have to be more on his guard against rose leaves than stones.

Mr. Harris has of course a number of portraits besides that of Dr. Norman. A bald-headed, silent-looking, wrinkled, old man he calls the "Cardinal." "A French Peasant Woman" several exhibitions have possessed. But more interesting than these, quite a little gem, is the figure of a young woman playing the organ. She turns her back to us, the pose is delightfully easy, while the dusky green of her dress is simply charming in tone. Another poetical little thing represents an old workman seated on the chesnut-covered ground in mid-forest. Here the reds and browns are deep and rich, and the bare trunks, the tired creature, and the stilly air murmur "autumn."

I have hardly the right to speak of a certain picture not yet finished, but yet what I saw was so good that I am tempted to give you some idea