

S E L E C T I O N S .

CAUSES OF FAILURE IN TEACHING.

Before embarking in a new enterprise, the wise man studies carefully the probabilities of success in it, and his solicitude as to his success is measured by the importance of the enterprise. So one anticipating the work of teaching should consider well what it is, what is essential in order to succeed in it, and should seek to determine whether he possesses the requisite qualifications, and is, in all respects, adapted to the work. It is far better for all concerned that he let it alone than that he take hold of it and fail.

Perhaps there is no other occupation in which there is so large a percentage of failure as in teaching; certainly there is none in which the failures are so disastrous to the general welfare. Failures in teaching may be conspicuous, but they are by no means always so; and hence their number is far greater than may be supposed. Often, too, success is pronounced according to a false standard. In order to determine whether a teacher is truly successful in his work, it is necessary to have an adequate conception of what true teaching really is. Many teachers are accounted successful merely because they have the happy faculty of keeping up fair appearances, and not because they accomplish the grand aim of true teaching. It is sadly true that the real nature of the teacher's work is not appreciated by the community generally, too often not appreciated by the teacher himself. There is nothing which one may attempt which is at once so delicate and so momentous as to teach the young. I know this statement is trite—you have heard it over and over again—but after all, how many realize it? And it is because it is so faintly realized, especially by the people at large, that the teacher's profession is where it is, and we have so many worthless schools.

It is the teacher's special function to develop mind and form character. He who devotes himself to teaching devotes himself especially to this work—the development

of mind, the formation of character—and in all the domain of labor there is no work higher than this; none which demands a higher order of ability, rarer gifts of head and heart. This being so, what other occupation in the land is left to those who have so little fitness for it? Men are exceedingly careful whom they employ in their manufactories, their stores, and their agencies, and their first question is not of price, but of fitness; but in the schools there is far less anxiety as to fitness, and the first consideration, too often, is the price. Now, as a rule, in this world of mammon, talent goes where it is paid for, and as a consequence the schools are left to be supplied with those who haven't wit enough to labor in the fields where labor is better rewarded.

Perhaps this phase of the matter, by its implication, is not flattering to our pride as a company of teachers; but I can not help it; to ignore a disagreeable fact does not remove it. Suppose I should inquire how many of you here to-day have entered upon the work of teaching as a life-work—as a man enters the profession of law, or of medicine, or begins his career as a merchant. A very small proportion of the teachers of the land have entered upon their work with a purpose of devoting themselves to it for life, and the simple reason is it does not pay in dollars and cents. And here we have the secret of the miserable work in many of our schools. The nature of the work is not appreciated; the requisite qualifications are not demanded; and hence schools are largely filled with those who have no proper business in them. Of course, the only remedy for this evil is in the development of a right public sentiment, and for this it is our duty to labor. Every community ought to feel that its first duty, and its chief business, is the education of its youth. Were this recognized, the highest honors and the richest rewards would be found in this work.

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