

The Educational Weekly.

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WE have a word of encouragement and advice to say to young teachers. Do they fully recognize their responsibilities? In the prime of life, their mental faculties sharpened by recent education and present intellectual activity; keenly alive to all that is going on around them; brought into constant contact with other minds as active as their own; with opinions formed on a variety of topics; and with all their faculties concentrated on the explanation of topics at present unsolved, but which are on the high road to solution—is it any wonder that to young men, and to young teachers above all, there is attached a great and unavoidable responsibility? The older men amongst us have also their own particular responsibilities, but they do not *share* those of the younger generation. Let us not lose sight of this. They are different, as in degree, so in kind. It is the business of the younger members of the community to see that they are not content to follow in the old grooves. Where were progress if none undertook to discover new paths? And to whom should devolve better the duty of discovering these new paths than to those with full, untrammelled, unprejudiced, unfettered, unbiased, intellectual powers?

We are not depreciating the value of matured judgment, of old and experienced methods of thought. Far, very far, from it. Those who have passed the spring-time of life have a value in the state which can be transferred to no other persons. They are the ballast, the equilibrating power in the sphere of thought. They may be compared to the House of Lords in the British constitution. And, to follow out the simile, it is in the lower House that we look for progressive measures, for those acts that will add to our intellectual wealth.

And we may most legitimately and rationally do this. "Owen Meredith" has described the younger elements of progress as a dwarf upon a giant's shoulders.

"There were giants in those irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours, In dividing the work, we distribute the powers. Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more Than the live giant's eye-sight availed to explore, And in life's lengthened alphabet what used to be To our sires X Y Z, is to us A B C."

The dwarf sees all that the giant sees, but he also sees much more. The giant will give him the direction in which to work, and will explain to him what he sees, as far, that is, as the giant himself sees; it is the duty of

the dwarf to look beyond, and to use that explanation in this farther-reaching view.

Again, although the greatest achievements of men have been produced at very various periods of life, yet, speaking generally, we think it will be conceded that the time of the greatest activity of the brain is in youth—from twenty-five to thirty we believe some have placed it.

But this activity for which we have argued must be used with caution. Let it be brought into play on all occasions and in all subjects; but let it be ever tempered and softened by the wisely-directed experience of those who have passed over this stage and have arrived at the stage of sober thoughtfulness.

PERHAPS the most prominent feature of the greater part of the literature that has been pouring from the press during the last few years is the large number of books of biography. Biographies, autobiographies, reminiscences, lives, letters, literary remains, have been absorbed by the public in hundreds of thousands. There seems no limit to the appetite for them. And, strange to say, there seems to be no very great fastidiousness as to the quality of material which is produced. All the petty details of a great man—his littlenesses equally with his greatnesses—are devoured with avidity. There is something melancholy in this. It looks as though the object were, not to learn what is true greatness, what were the hidden springs of great thought, great action, but to analyse and dissect the lower parts of human nature—not to eliminate the alloy, but rather to make this the object of examination, not to learn from superior intellect and moral worth how we ourselves may attain to a nobler view of life, but to revel in the contemplation of the idiosyncracies, and even not seldom the actual faults of the great men of this world.

But yet, let us hope, that there is to this another side: that this depraved taste is not really wide-spread; that there are many who read of great men in a reverential spirit, kind to their faults, docile as to their virtues; willing to learn from them, to correct their own faults by witnessing the effects of these in others, and eager to apply to their own cases all that was found to be efficacious in helping those of whose lives we read.

We wrote a short time since on "how to read"; this reverential and liberal spirit

should ever surely be the attitude in which to contemplate the lives of those who have not yet been wholly explained to us. True, no criticism or abhorrence of vice can be too severe, but we do not here speak of the vices which are held up to us in the biographies of men and women, we speak only of their weaknesses.

It is only the great man that can really comprehend the great man. We should not lose sight of this. Superior intellects themselves recognize the value, and at the same time the difficulty, of understanding minds of large calibre. How many of those whom the world has called geniuses have striven hard to obtain clear views of their compeers? Look, for example, at the names of Carlyle's works—how many of them deal solely with this subject: "Frederick the Great"; "Heroes and Hero-Worship"; "Cromwell"; "Essays on Goethe, Diderot, Johnson, Burns, Schiller"? So too with De Quincey—Kant, Pope, Herder, Keats, and many others he wrote on. So too Matthew Arnold. So Macaulay. Our readers can, without difficulty, extend the list.

Biographies then, if we grant these propositions, are valuable, provided always that they are the products of competent minds, and are read in a proper spirit. And being so, they should form part of our course of reading. But there is this caution always to be borne in mind: no expounder must be considered infallible. There are some sentences of Coleridge's in reference to Shakespearean critics the vigor and beauty of which will serve to impress this caution upon our minds. "If all that has been written upon Shakespeare, by Englishmen, were burned, in the want of candles, merely to enable us to read one-half of what our dramatist produced, we should be great gainers." And again: "I grieve that every late voluminous edition of his works (Shakespeare's) would enable me to substantiate the present charge with a variety of facts one-tenth of which would of themselves exhaust the time allotted to me. Every critic, who has or has not made a collection of black letter books—in itself a useful and respectable amusement,—puts on the seven-league boots of self-opinion, and strides at once from an illustrator into a supreme judge, and blind and deaf, fills his three-ounce phial at the waters of Niagara; and determines positively the greatness of the cataract to be neither more nor less than his three-ounce phial has been able to receive."