

every case become weary of hearing that the true principles of our profession are still but little understood ; that the canons of Education, as generally admitted, are to a great extent based upon error and misconception ; and that, in the most necessary understanding of the work to be done and the way to do it, we are but on the threshold of investigation. It has been as often brought before us that the great body of middle-class teachers has been formed, and is being recruited, by the introduction into it of persons whose preparation for their responsible duties has not begun till those duties have already come upon them, and who have either floundered into some kind of experimental knowledge of their profession by the accident of talent or circumstances, or, by careful following of ancient rules and mediæval methods, have kept the even tenor of their way, in perfect unconsciousness of the mistakes they are perpetuating. To remove these defects, to set before the teacher, especially the young teacher, the true principles of his art, to raise him to a right appreciation of his noble place among the world's workers, and to stimulate him deeply and earnestly to investigate the nature and properties of the materials and implements at his disposal,—have been the leading objects of this institution, and of the many talented and experienced men whose knowledge and opinions on educational matters have been brought under contribution at our evening meetings. The precepts of philosophy, the thoughtful hints of tentative speculation, the bolder assertions of successful experience, have been set before him for his guidance in the general consideration of his work ; while the most recent facts regarding special subjects of instruction have been placed at his command. He has listened with delight as he has recognized the words of truth, and his heart has burned within him as he has thought, "It is thus that I will teach ; I too shall be an educator." He has returned to his work with high thoughts and earnest hope : but (*experto crede*) he has found himself surrounded, as before, by the same cares, the same difficulties, the same petty worries. True, he has learned to believe that for all these there are remedies to be found in the *arcana* of his profession ; he has realized, at least for a time, the prospect of such attainments in scientific mind-formation as shall comfort him for all his present discouragements ; but he asks, "What shall I do now ? How shall I apply, in the work of this very day, the theories which last night commanded the assent of my understanding by their simplicity and truth, but which seem to lie so strangely out of reach at my greatest need ?" Such questions have often been asked of one another by those who have met here from time to time ; and it seems, on the whole, to be rather in the practical solution of these everyday problems, than in the demonstration of theoretical principles, that we stand in greatest want of mutual help and instruction. In coming before you to-night, it is my purpose, not presumptuously, to assert that I have found what so many have sought in vain, but to tender some results of my own attempts in this direction for criticism and discussion.

Much has been said of late in reference to the examinations of this College in the Theory and Practice of Education ; and I feel sure that much satisfaction has followed the announcement of the Council's intention to modify these examinations in such a manner as to give them a more practical character and effect. Yet it has always appeared to me that great good must be done by the careful consideration of the departments to which in those examinations the greatest amount of attention has been paid, viz, the principles of mental discipline and the history of education. There are, I think, good reasons for the belief that, in the case of persons intending to become teachers, who possess practical opportunities for training

in matters of detail, these two should constitute the leading subjects of professional study. But the strongest argument which presents itself to my mind in connection with the subject of training institutions for teachers, is the vital necessity that the beginner's lessons should impress upon him, in the most clear and direct manner, the sacredness of the duties in the which he proposes to engage. Upon this point I need not enlarge, except to remind you of the acknowledged truth, that special training is required, not so much of necessity in knowledge of facts, as indispensably in thoughtful appreciation of the work to be done. I cannot, however, resist the conviction that one of the most important parts of the training of the future teacher consists in showing him, by his own personal experience, the mental process by which a given fact or train of facts may be learned ; and beyond this, leading him to a habit of measuring the steps downward from his own capacity to that of the pupil to whom these facts are to be transmitted. One of the greatest difficulties, so great that its conquest is often looked upon as evidence of special talent, is presented by the disparity between the teacher's ordinary conversation and the mental calibre of the boys in his class. A little while back I heard a teacher give an excellent lesson on Mathematical Geography to a junior class. He had evidently prepared the subject with considerable care, and he led the boys along with him very satisfactorily till he reached the culminating point of his lesson, indicated by these words, "Longitude is distance east or west of a given meridian." The idea of "meridian" had been etymologically and practically settled, the bearings pointed out by the boys themselves, and several examples similarly stated in illustration. So far so good ; but it happened that the form of words, "a given meridian," was unfamiliar to the children, whose geometrical studies had not yet extended to the peculiar phraseology of Euclid's Elements. The result was mystification, not only of the class but of the teacher, to whom the sudden collapse of comprehension and attention was apparently inexplicable. It is easy to suppose such failures as this being the rule rather than the exception, if we admit one of several possibilities ; e. g., the pupil's interest in the subject being as yet unawakened, his want of confidence preventing him from seeking explanation, or his eager interest leading him to assign to the teacher's words a meaning different from that intended. But as this is only one phase of a defect more or less accidental to several methods of instruction, it may be best, in our consideration of preventive measures, to examine the leading principles of different methods, with a view to ascertain the direction in which each incurs the danger of failure.

The means employed for communicating or fixing knowledge, or testing its extent and accuracy, seem to be susceptible of classification thus ; Oral Teaching, Catechetical Exercises, Examination Questions.

First, Oral Teaching, or the Lecture System. In the use of this method, we have to consider, whether or not it is desirable that the pupils should take notes of the lesson ; and, if desirable, whether such notes should be written simultaneously with, or subsequently to, the lesson. These are matters on which there seems to be much diversity of opinion. In the oral lesson, the teacher is left to himself ; and (assuming conscientious preparation) he has it in his power to marshal the facts, and bring them out in his own way, and as he judges best for the comprehension of the class. His object is, that these facts shall be recognised and remembered ; but in this special object he does not, or should not, overlook the general object, the habitual cultivation of the faculties of attention, observation, reflection. If, in the course of the lesson, a pupil intermits his attention for a while to write down