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TEACHERS AND TEACHERS

A Continuation of the Discussion of School Problems Begun in
the Issue of December 1.

[Introductory Note.—I had written several pages of the article below as it appears when I discovered that I could not satisfactorily complete the series with one article, and reached the conclusion that it is worthwhile to discuss more lengthily the fundamental problems of the schools in language understandable to both teachers and laymen. Accordingly, contrary to the statement that this article would end the series, others will appear if the discussion is not to be left incomplete. It is fair to state, also, that the article took a form different from what it would have taken if the intention had not been in the beginning to make it conclusive of the discussion.]

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?—Matthew VII, 16.

The former articles have created considerable interest. I must assume that you have read them. A resume here would make this article too bungle-some. Briefly, however, the development of the understanding has been established as the process of education, and wisdom its end.

As I sit down to write so many matters worthy of discussion, so many illustrations of failure on the part of the schools to utilize effectively the means at their door to develop character and mentality, so many illustrations of means mistaken for ends, teem in my mind that I am tempted to extend this series of articles into a treatise on education. Recognizing the apparent futility of such a procedure and hoping to close the discussion with this article, I shall herein seek to limit my remarks to the key of the whole educational problem—the teacher.

The True Basis of Compensation.

As suggested in the first article, the schools of North Carolina cannot successfully demand a largely increased appropriation unless the public is convinced that their products are of types justifying a further outlay. Unfortunately, the standardization of teacher salaries upon bases utterly unwarranted by my text leaves the individual teacher of real merit without recourse when the product of the system as a whole is found to justify no greater expenditure. That I conceive to be the case.—North Carolina is not getting an adequate quid-pro-quo for its investment in education. Teachers who are worse than worthless are being paid upon a par with teachers whose services are of inestimable value. The fruitless and menacing thorn bushes are being as carefully mulched and fertilized as are the fruitful vines. The product of the combined vine and thorn patch is distressingly disappointing, though every vine in it has yielded as abundantly as its thorny environment would allow. Fruitfulness is the true basis for increased pay of teachers. The barren should go the way of the barren fig tree.

Whence Came the Thorn Bushes?

If the educational field of North Carolina is partially overgrown with thorn bushes, it is pertinent to ask whence, why, or how.

I conceive the causes to be two definite ones:

The first is the scarcity of real vine plantlets.

The second is a blind-folded selection from the mixed nursery.

Supply Decreased as Demand Rose.

Unfortunately, in North Carolina the supply of raw material from which real teachers could be made was drafted upon by every profession, business office, and industry just when the demand arose for an increased supply of teachers. The result is a low intellectual level in the teaching profession in the State.

I surprised, even shocked or angered, a group of teachers in the only summer school I ever attended by remarking that the intellectual level of teachers today is not as high as that of fifty and sixty years ago. Asked to justify the statement, I recalled that there were scarcely a score of teachers in my native county fifty years ago. As many of those were men as women. The requirement now is two or three hundred, with less than ten-percent of them men. But that doesn't

show the whole picture.

Fifty and sixty years ago, the opportunities to prepare for teaching were so scant that only the very brightest intellects made the grade. Teaching was the only available employment for a man or woman of the calibre and attainments suggested. Even the young men who were preparing for other professions usually devoted a few years to teaching. Today, except for principalships and coaching jobs, men have little place in the school rooms of the state. Thus at one stroke practically half the native material is excluded. On the other hand, the women of the highest intellectual type are subject to the draft of the professions, business, hospitals, business offices, and government service.

But you retort that there are still more would-be teachers than there are positions. True, and perhaps some of those who have failed to secure positions are of the vine type, while the positions they should hold are occupied by thorn bushes.

Criteria of Teacher Fitness.

One cannot make a silk purse of a sow's ear. No school of pedagogy can make a real teacher out of a dumb-bell. Native intellect of a high order is the first requisite in a teacher. No other can acquire that far-reaching and thorough-going understanding that is needed to develop the understandings of his or her wards. No training can compensate for a shortage of native intellect. The machine grinds out its grist but the bolting cloth that should separate the flour from the bran has been lacking. The nursery contains in the same row both vinelets and young thorn bushes, but no discriminating hand sorts them. The consequence is that while there are many A-1 intellects in the North Carolina schools there are altogether too many of second, third, or fourth grade.

The result in mental coaching is similar to that in athletic coaching. It is hardly conceivable that a physical punyling, however well he may be acquainted with the rules of the game, could stimulate or challenge the members of a football or baseball team to their best physical efforts. It is pitiable when a bright boy or girl discovers the insipidity of his or her teacher's intellect. The mental, moral, or physical mentor most forcibly teaches by an example or a personality that inspires the respect of the taught. A punyling on the athletic field or in the algebraic field cannot inspire that respect.

An intellect of high type or quality assures, unless clogged by sheer laziness or dissipation, an understanding of whatever its possessor undertakes to teach, and there is no pedagogical scheme that can supersede a thorough knowledge of the subject matter. Instruction in methods may save time in perfecting a method through experience. But such a mind will not resort to any undigested scheme of instruction. Understanding, himself, a highly intellectual teacher knows when the pupil understands, and knows that he has accomplished nothing till understanding is attained. On the other hand, the person who has never had more than a hazy idea of the principles of the subject can neither appreciate understanding nor induce it.

Some Handicaps of Low Intelligence.

The low-grade intelligence tends to perpetuate its kind. When it thinks it knows, it often allows the real truth to be covered by the prevailing form. It would be exceedingly enlightening to know how many algebra teachers in North Carolina who have taught the adopted textbook from six to ten years have ever recognized the fact that problem 9 in the series involving time, distance, and rate of speed does not require the application of the formula used in the solution of the batch of problems. The problem reads like this: A and B are 150 miles apart; A travels twice as fast as B; it takes them five hours to meet; how far will each have traveled when they meet?

I happened to be present when that problem

was presented to a class. I instantly recognized its faultiness. The real intellectual feat for a teacher or pupil to perform there is to detect that faultiness. Not to do so and to apply the formula is to play the dumb-bell. I remarked that the five hours isn't involved at all—that it makes no difference how long or how short a time it takes to meet, the two would meet at the same point, and as A traveled twice as fast as B he would travel two-thirds of the distance and B one-third, or 100 miles and 50 miles, respectively.—That was all. Yet I wonder how many North Carolina boys and girls who were supposed to be cultivating a thorough-going mentality have been allowed by teachers who know only forms to apply the form to this problem and thus miss the opportunity to develop in a measure one of the most important of all the faculties—that of discrimination.

The same unintelligent method of approach to the actual problems of life would result in frequently going around by the elbow to reach the thumb, even if there were any assurance at all that such a non-penetrating intellect would be able to determine any method at all applicable to the problem. Try your son or daughter with a problem off-hand and see if he asks "under what head" it comes or "what's the rule," though the real intellectual test is to determine the character of the problem itself.

Failure to Differentiate Between the Tools And the Task.

Many teachers, and the general public, fail to differentiate between tools and the work for which the tools are intended. It is, I believe, a common opinion that learning to read, in the sense of recognizing and pronouncing words, is an educational achievement. The fact is if an adult illiterate should awake some morning with the power to read glibly he would be no better informed or wiser than if he had awakened with the power of playing a perfect game of checkers, marbles, or poker. The art of reading is the universal means of learning from the printed page. It is a tool, but to be most serviceable it must be as sharp as a razor. Many a pupil fails in his arithmetic, history, geography, etc., because of being pushed into those subjects before having his reading tool sufficiently sharpened. I recall being asked by a ninth-grade pupil who afterward graduated with distinction at State College to read the mediaeval history lesson to the class, as he could learn it when I read it but couldn't learn it by reading it himself. As a matter of fact, I found that that was the only way in which I could pull that class through that subject. The power of interpretation had not kept pace with the mastery of word forms. They could "read," but they had undertaken, one year after another, to wield the reading axe in timber too large and tough for them. They had learned just about as much as if they had been pronouncing the words in a Latin text. The ideas were Greek to them. My reading, accompanied by comments, served to break the barrier to the entrance of the ideas and to the formation of concepts.

Words represent ideas, but do not produce or introduce them. The range of ideas must keep pace with the reading vocabulary of word forms. The child's environment, as well as his native endowment, determines the range of ideas with which he enters school. And here is an answer to Captain S. A. Ashe's question in the December 15 issue of the *Voice*. He wishes an explanation of the basis of illiteracy. Why do some people, even some who are supposed to know how to read, never take any pleasure in the mental activities of the intellectual?—One year in a real kindergarten would have been of more educational value to many a child who has spent several sessions in school than all those years in school, even though he should never have learned to read. Amassing ideas, like rolling a snow ball, requires a nucleus

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