THE ESSENTIALS IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION.

In the preceding article, the opening one of this series, I discussed the possibility of securing satisfactory results in the so-called essentials if the course of study in the elementary schools were materially enriched. I argued, that nothing definite could now be said on this subject, because no agreement had yet been arrived at, either in regard to what is essential, or as to what results in individual branches may be deemed satisfactory. Until our ideas are clear on these matters, we shall of course be unable to estimate how much time it is necessary to devote to the formal studies, and how much should be set aside for work that is purely educative in its nature.

Before it will be possible to decide how far the curriculum may be safely broadened, then, it will be necessary to define clearly the limits of the essentials, as well as to establish standards that will enable us to tell how much time is required to cover satisfactorily the indispensable ground. And the purpose of the present article is to throw some light on these points. For want of space the discussion of the problem from the psychological standpoint, which I had intended to undertake in the present paper, will be deferred to the next number.

In endeavoring to define the legitimate limits of the positive knowledge and skill that may be regarded as essential, a process of exclusion will be required. It will be necessary to exclude, first, matters belonging to the category of mental gymnastics, *i. e.*, measures introduced into the school course solely with a view to the development of the faculties; and, second, matters of detail that the layman is not expected to possess in the form of ready knowledge, and which are found in the school course simply because they have been handed down by tradition.

At present the time devoted to the three R's alone, in the mechanical schools, is about 70 per cent. It might be possible, however, through a process of exclusion such as I have indicated, to reduce this time by 50 per cent or more. Indeed, so great may be the change brought about, that what is now regarded as the body of the work of the elementary school would constitute only a side issue. If this

should be true, then of course the possibilities of enriching the course of study would be almost unlimited. Moreover, the exclusion of unnecessary material would form only one part of the reduction in time. An equal reduction might be secured by an exercise of economy in actual teaching,—a subject that will be discussed in my next article.

As I have drawn a line between the essentials in a course of study and measures of educational discipline, it may be thought that I do not appreciate the value of the latter. This, however, is by no means the case. My reason for making the distinction is that, while I am of the opinion that the people are fully justified in demanding certain results in matters of useful knowledge and skill, I believe that in questions of educational discipline no universal course should be laid down, but that considerable freedom should be allowed to the exercise of judgment on the part of individual educators. The problem of mental gymnastics is still so completely veiled in obscurity, and opinions among educators in regard to the relative values of disciplinary measures vary so markedly, that dogmatism is entirely unjustifiable.

While some educators believe that the most valuable disciplinary work lies in pushing the formal branches of study beyond a reasonable point, others are of the opinion that the disciplinary value of the formal studies is far inferior to that involved in *content* studies; and that, in consequence, the time not devoted to instruction in what is actually indispensable, in the formal lines, should be devoted to such branches as the arts, the sciences, history, and literature,—subjects having a direct influence in developing æsthetic taste, as well as interest in nature and humanity. It follows, therefore, that while the individual educator oversteps the limit of his authority when he fails to give due recognition to the conventional side of education, the people overstep their authority when they needlessly condemn the child to a life of drudgery, and deprive him of elevating influences, by demanding more than their due in the way of conventionalities.

One more point requires to be mentioned before entering into the discussion of details. It may be argued that, as our ideals are not fixed, the essentials of a school course cannot be clearly defined. While it is true that the demands of society are constantly changing, and that what may now be regarded as useful knowledge may not be so regarded at some indefinite period in the future, history nevertheless proves that the process of evolution is so slow, that, if standards should be set in accordance with the demands of to-day, they would answer the purpose for many years to come. Indeed, I do not think it an exaggeration to

say, that, if standards should once be fixed, the labor involved in changing them, to keep pace with the process of evolution, would be, figuratively speaking, as insignificant as that involved in repairing a building, from time to time, as required by ordinary wear and tear.

The time may arrive when every individual will be permitted to spell as he chooses. But the educator who to-day should prepare his pupils for such an era would not be entitled to encouragement. Nor are we justified in believing that the period is near at hand when neat and legible writing will no longer be regarded as a necessary accomplishment. Again, the ability to use good English, and facility in handling figures, will not grow out of fashion within the next decade. Taken all in all, then, whatever may be said of the evolution of pedagogical ideals, we cannot consider as serious any arguments to the effect that, because we do not know exactly what the future may bring forth, we cannot tell what should now be taught in the elementary schools.

The dividing line between positive knowledge and skill on the one hand and mental gymnastics on the other may be made clear by a simple illustration.

Society expects, for example, that the individual shall be able to write a letter in well-constructed sentences and without grammatical errors. It is not concerned, however, as to whether or not the writer is able to analyze the sentences, or to parse the words in his letter. If facts should prove, beyond question, that individuals who can parse and analyze with facility are able to construct better sentences than those who are unfamiliar with technical grammar, this subject might rightly be placed among the essentials of school work. If, however, it should be proved that the English employed by those who had not studied technical grammar was practically as good as that employed by those who had had a thorough grounding in the subject, then it could not be regarded as essential, but would belong to the domain of mental gymnastics.

In the latter case, the question of introducing technical grammar into the school course would be purely and simply a problem of relative values, *i. e.*, a question as to whether it would pay best to devote, say, thirty minutes daily, for four or five years, to grammar, or whether more profit would be derived by devoting this time to matters of importance and interest now crowded out of many of our schools on the plea of lack of time. Whether, or in how far, it is possible to lead the child to use good English without instruction in technical grammar, is an entirely different question. It is one, however, that cannot be

decided by *a priori* reasoning. Nothing short of the study of results will suffice to bring the truth to light.

As in language, so in arithmetic the question of mental gymnastics plays a prominent part. While facility in ciphering, to a certain point, is demanded of every individual, whatever is done in this branch beyond what is directly useful and practical must be regarded as disciplinary in its nature. Consequently, the question arises, whether, in the arrangement of a school programme, it is advisable to allow a certain amount of time for purely disciplinary arithmetic, or whether this time might not bring a greater return if given to matters more directly destined to elevate our social ideals.

The importance of such questions of relative values becomes strikingly apparent when we consider that thirty-five minutes a day is equivalent to an entire year out of the eight devoted to elementary education. Consequently, by economizing only a little here and there, by the exclusion of merely a part of the disciplinary measures of minor or doubtful importance,—such as drill in arithmetical puzzles, in superfine penmanship, in parsing and analysis beyond what is actually needed,—it might be possible to save as much as the equivalent of two school years, which might then be utilized toward enriching the course of study, without in any way neglecting the essentials. When the time wasted in reading aloud merely with a view to the development of oratorical power is taken into consideration, the estimate of two years is probably too conservative.

When the purely disciplinary elements in instruction are clearly determined, one step will have been made toward defining the limits of the indispensable. The next point will lie in a process of exclusion applied to matters of detail that lie beyond what the individual may be reasonably expected to possess in the way of ready knowledge and skill. This would mean in large part the elimination of many things now taught in the schools not because they are supposed to meet any particular requirement, but simply because no concerted effort has ever been made to exclude them from the traditional course of study.

The subjects that, without harm in any direction, will bear a rigid test of exclusion are spelling and penmanship. Every moment devoted to these subjects beyond what is actually needed may be regarded as wasted. When we consider that, in spite of their lack of educational value, nearly one fifth of the time in some of our schools is devoted to these two subjects, it becomes apparent that the importance of exercising economy in teaching these branches cannot be

over-estimated. In determining the ground to be covered in spelling, it is necessary simply to secure an agreement as to where the line may be drawn between words that the average individual ought to be able to spell without referring to a dictionary and those that might be safely relegated to the latter. This would lead to the omission of a very large number of words now taught in the schools and which the child may never be called upon to use.

In penmanship, it will be necessary to determine what standards of legibility may be deemed satisfactory. Owing to the importance of this subject, I beg to repeat what I stated in my last article; namely, that over-attention to penmanship, for the purpose of securing elegant writing, may mean the waste, both directly and indirectly, of an enormous amount of time. As the child, during the entire school course, is obliged to do considerable writing, apart from that intended to improve his penmanship, undue slowness in the use of the pen must be regarded as a waste of time against which provision should be made.

In arithmetic, aside from the disciplinary element, the question of how much ground it is necessary to cover in order that the pupil may be sufficiently well equipped to meet the ordinary demands of life, requires careful consideration. By exercising a wise process of exclusion, the course might be considerably abbreviated. It would be necessary here to make a careful distinction between those parts of arithmetic with which everyone ought to be conversant, and those parts concerning the more complicated calculations belonging to special lines of business, and which need to be mastered only by the specialist.

In English, in addition to the problem of mental discipline, the question as to how high the goal should be placed comes into play. In written language, limitations that do not appear in any other subject are set by the immaturity of the child-mind. In other branches, however high the goal may be placed, there is a reasonable assurance that it will be reached, provided the instruction be thorough, and ample time be provided for the purpose. In composition, however, in establishing our aims, the powers of the child must be taken into consideration. Consequently, before instruction in this subject can be conducted without undue waste, it will be necessary to learn just what the child is able to do under the most favorable circumstances. When we have learned what the most successful teachers have accomplished, and how much time they expended in reaching their ends, we shall have a sensible basis for determining what may be reasonably expected of the child, and how much time it is wise to devote to this branch.

Complaints to the effect that the results in written language are highly unsatisfactory are commonly heard from individuals in all walks of life, and particularly from instructors in high schools and universities. As the unsatisfactory results are usually attributed to insufficient attention to the subject in the elementary schools, the demand is made that still more time be devoted to English. But if the circumstances should be such that it is impossible to lead the average child beyond a certain point, however great the pressure may be, then of course the time expended in endeavoring to do so is wasted.

An important point to be decided before definite goals can be established, is the question of literary style. When we know the average child's limitations in this direction, we shall be able to tell whether or not it will pay to spend a great deal of time in endeavoring to lead the child to acquire the ability to write an original story, a reproduction, or a description, in good style on the first draft. Again, we shall be able to determine whether or not time and energy expended in rewriting will be sufficiently rewarded to warrant the teacher in compelling the child to labor over a composition until he feels that he can no longer improve it. That the properly trained child is able to appreciate good literary style when he finds it in the writings of others, is quite possible; but whether he is able to imitate it in his own writings, is an entirely different question.

Next, geography, and particularly that phase which treats of the location of places, the boundaries of states and countries, the length of rivers, the height of mountains, etc., offers a broad field for exclusion without true loss in any particular. How much waste there is in the old-fashioned method of teaching this subject, becomes apparent when we consider how exceedingly little the average individual has to show, a year or two after leaving school, for the numerous hours a week, during five or six years, devoted to this study. And not only from the standpoint of economy, but for other reasons as well, would the elimination of cut-and-dried facts, that properly belong to books of reference, exert a most salutary effect. For, while geography when treated in the traditional manner is one of the most burdensome subjects in the curriculum, yet, when the matters of minor importance are excluded, and substituted by valuable ideas, it becomes converted into perhaps the broadest as well as the most interesting in the entire list of school branches. While the number of facts in topographical geography that the individual is required to know in order that he may be able to take an intelligent interest in the affairs of the world is

considerable, it is, nevertheless, very small when compared with that which the child is compelled to acquire in the traditional course of instruction. Indeed, so great, in my opinion, is the discrepancy between what the child is compelled to memorize in the old-fashioned schools and what the citizen is expected to know, that I do not regard it as an exaggeration to say that the traditional course in topographical geography might be shortened by 70 or 80 per cent without neglecting what is useful.

Last, I desire to call attention to the waste in a mechanical course in history. As in geography, so in this study would the preparation of a list of facts, limited to what is helpful and what the individual may be expected to possess as ready knowledge, bring about an enormous reduction in memory material. Of course, there are many facts that the individual ought to know and that every educated person is expected to know. But just what these facts are, and how many might be excluded, without impairment, from the traditional course, has never been properly determined. By a wise substitution of historical ideas for cut-and-dried facts of minor importance, history, like geography, would be converted from a mechanical study into a most valuable and interesting one.

What is needed, then, in order that a beginning may be made toward the solution of the problem of the course of study, is to undertake measures that will speedily lead to a clear definition of the essentials. In my opinion, the most rational plan would be to place the matter in the hands of committees, appointed preferably by the National Educational Association. If committees of, say, ten members should be appointed for each branch, the labor so divided that proper attention could be paid to details, and meetings held at frequent intervals, enough might be done in a single year to clear the course of study at least of those matters that are retained simply by tradition.

In drawing conclusions in regard to what to retain and what to omit, ordinary experiences would suffice to set the matter well under way. For the rest, it would be necessary to undertake researches leading to the discovery of the exact limits of our social demands. But the latter course would represent a later stage, which might be carried on in a more leisurely manner. In order that the work might be thoroughly conducted, a special appropriation should be made by the Government, to be placed at the disposal of the Association.

Besides defining the essentials, it will be necessary to secure standards that will give us a basis for judging what results in the essentials

may be deemed satisfactory; and not until we have these standards can it be determined how much pressure it is advisable to put on the conventional side of school work, and which methods of teaching are the most economical in point of time. But to obtain such standards, ordinary experience will not avail; nothing short of careful research, on a very broad basis, will supply the needed information.

In our country, where elementary education is characterized by absence of system, it is not unusual for individuals, whether educators or laymen, to examine a class on a set of questions selected in an arbitrary way, and to judge by the results whether or not the teacher has done satisfactory work. So long, however, as we have no standards, judgment based on the results of an examination, in a single room, school, or city, is not only absolutely worthless, but may mean a gross injustice, in estimating both the qualifications of the teachers and the value of the methods employed by them. Under existing conditions, there is only one way in which definite information in this matter can be obtained. It is by extending a reasonable test to a large number of classes, in different localities, so that all methods and conditions may be represented, and by judging of the results on a comparative basis. In this manner we are enabled to learn what results were secured by teachers in general, which classes exceeded and which fell below the average, and how much time was consumed by different methods in securing the various results. It is only in this way that we can judge whether the results obtained in any particular class, school, or city may be regarded as satisfactory.

It was with a view to the development of standards for measuring results, as well as to discover the most economical methods of teaching, that the tests in spelling, penmanship, composition, and arithmetic, to which I referred in my last article, were made. In penmanship and composition, it is of course a simple matter to employ tests that are universally applicable. In spelling and arithmetic, although the ground covered in different cities varies considerably in regard to details, I nevertheless found that, by exercising care, the tests might be so formulated that they would cover a common ground, and thus be suitable for the schools of any locality. In spelling, three different tests were employed. One was a column of fifty words; another consisted of sentences, fifty test words being employed in the lower, and seventy-five in the upper grades; and, third, the spelling in the composition test was examined. In arithmetic, the questions were so arranged as to fit the various grades. In penmanship, the general written

work was used as a test. And, finally, in composition, I employed as a test the reproduction of a story read by the teacher to the children. This story was written specially for the purpose, and was accompanied by a picture intended to aid the children in their work. The grades examined included the fourth to the eighth school years. The results will be published in detail in future articles.

While such work as this represents only a temporary stage in the development of standards, I nevertheless believe that it will suffice to lead to definite information on the most important educational problem of the day; namely, whether or not it is possible to broaden the curriculum without detriment to the three R's. To reach a conclusion on this point, it is but necessary to learn whether or not the results in the formal studies obtained in the progressive schools compare favorably with the results in the formal lines obtained in the mechanical schools. If the pupils educated in the schools in which the bulk of the work is thoughtful and interesting should do as well in the formal studies as those brought up in the schools where the work is almost entirely formal, the feasibility of the new education would be practically proved.

Until the essentials are clearly defined, then, the question of satisfactory results must be decided on a purely comparative basis. For, as long as the ground to be covered represents a very wide area, and no discrimination is made between matters of primary and those of secondary importance, the results of an examination in a given school might be apparently so unfavorable as to convey the impression that the teaching had lacked in thoroughness, while in fact the results would compare quite favorably with those secured in other schools. By a comparative study of results, even on a much narrower basis than I have indicated, a great deal might be accomplished in a very brief period toward the solution of the problem of methods. It would simply be necessary for superintendents and teachers in neighboring localities to coöperate in a series of tests which would show the rate of progress under different methods.

When the requirements in positive knowledge and skill are limited to a reasonable point, the ideas will have an opportunity to become more thoroughly assimilated, and definite results may be demanded. Under these circumstances, it is possible that, in the course of time, absolute standards would be developed, so that it would be no longer necessary to draw comparisons on a wide basis before reaching conclusions in regard to the qualifications of a particular teacher or the excellence of a particular school.

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MODERN COMPOSERS IN THE LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM.

"By favor illumed, by hatred obscured, his character meets us in history." What musician or artist can entirely free himself from the conditions or escape the limitations of the judgment thus expressed by the poet; and, touching more particularly the composer to whose personal activity we have been witness, what intelligent observer may venture to assume the character of an infallible judge?

A purely objective estimation and an entire impartiality are alike impossible to the conscientious critic; at the most he can only be expected to reject the favoritism and the hatred of the cliques, and to transfer historical methods to the conditions of the present. The words of the poet indicate with particular clearness the fate of the eminent men of whom this article proposes to treat.

The character of Richard Wagner has yet to be presented to us in classical purity; for his partisans and opponents still continue a struggle in which favoritism on the one hand confuses contemporaneous judgment as much as do the outbursts of hatred on the other. It may be said without exaggeration, that by far the greater part of those obstacles which it became the life-work of Wagner to overcome were occasioned by persons who the most loudly proclaimed themselves his heralds, as well as by others who professionally assumed to be the apostles of the Messiah of musical drama. Under the pretext of serving the Master, this Bayreuth advance-guard had been for more than a decade successfully endeavoring to discredit the cause, to render more difficult its comprehension, and to frighten off its true adherents. Throughout this entire period it was well-nigh impossible for an honest and respectable lover of music to declare himself a follower of Wagner, lest he should be associated with those howling dervishes of Bayreuth whose grotesque dances compromised and injured the Wagnerian cause. True and natural relationships were completely ignored. He who, revering the great creative genius of Wagner, had also the courage to maintain the rights of other composers,—even the most modern ones,—was derided: he who acknowledged the musical-philosophical