

TOO MANY STUDIES.

At a meeting of the principals of the city schools held not long since, it was recommended that certain things be dropped, and that calisthenics, music and drawing be restricted in time to the limits prescribed by the rules and regulations governing these subjects. Several other changes, all improvements, were also decided upon with the utmost unanimity. The tendency to put too much into the courses of study has cropped out all over the country, and the disposition to unload is generally manifesting itself not only here, but elsewhere. As to the Boston schools, in a recent report of a special committee the following language is used:

"In the schools of Boston during the last five, ten and even twenty years, one study after another, one subject upon another, topic after topic, exercise upon exercise, have been added to the intellectual side of the school curriculum until, as is now well known, it is next to impossible for the high school, grammar school, or even the primary school, to perform in a thorough way the work laid out in the prescribed course of study.

"To remedy this difficulty a special committee has lately given careful attention to this subject, and, with much painstaking and good judgment, has revised the course and introduced many improvements.

"But, doubtless, if all were known, the members of this committee found the task before them more difficult than one might naturally suppose. The demands of the public, the ambitions of the teachers, the wishes of the pupils, the tendencies of the times, the known position our city maintains in educational affairs, and from which no one wishes a step to be taken backwards, all these and other causes have made it difficult for the committee to bring about all the improvements they might, under other circumstances, have deemed desirable."

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The extract is given in full that the disposition and the temper of the committee may be better understood, and it also may be taken as a fair statement of this question in other localities. The multiplication of studies has gone on so extensively that unless a halt is called somewhere, there is no telling when or where it will stop. The principle underlying it is based upon a wrong notion of the child's mind, to-wit, that multiplied diversity in subjects is the natural method or way that the child must learn and does learn his lessons. It is evidently true that the child should not be kept at one subject too long, but it does not follow with the force of a demonstration that because he studies one subject, he is not to take it up at different intervals each day, any more than after one has walked awhile that he should not walk again during the day. There ought to be just enough variety to introduce changes and needed rests to keep the mind fresh and vigorous. Continual changes produce confusion and distorted notions of objects and ideas in general. It is yet to be proved that a learner will not make greater and more lasting progress if he takes only two or three subjects, and puts in all his time on them till he learns something about them, than for him to be carrying forward a half dozen simultaneously. Enough to give the necessary variety is all that is required. There are grave reasons against a dull monotonous course, and equally as serious objections against too great a diversity.

The argument from the endless variety which nature presents in some localities has little force if strictly applied, when, in fact, nature in many cases is the dullest uniformity. A prairie or patch of brush may teach a lesson on some subjects, but the endless repetition there found is not always to be imitated. In the economy of animal work and endurance, it is found that the horse as well as the man travels best and can stand it longer, if the road is not a dead level. Some up-and-down-hill work, if not too much of it, rests both man and beast.

The colleges and high schools have a better way of arranging courses of study and restricting to fewer subjects than the graded schools. Yet the analogy is not so sharply defined as to make it entirely safe for either to pattern too closely after the other, and new subjects in the higher institutions cannot be so easily correlated with the previous ones as in the case of lower and more elementary work. In the lower work, it is a beginning and a regular continuation for several years, while in the higher it is a taking up of new subjects every half year usually, or at most once a year.

It is indeed quite possible for a child to learn to read and to spell well first by giving its attention almost exclusively to these two subjects, and perhaps with writing added, and then to attack geography, arithmetic and grammar in detail and it will make far greater headway than if these subjects be attacked simultaneously, although called by other names. The old adage about "too many irons in the

fire," has its counterpart in school work also. Probably the greatest impediment to teaching in this country today is that "things are taught in a small way." It goes without saying that the teacher must teach a good many things. A child needs to walk well, to sit well, and to bear himself with proper respect toward his inferiors, equals and superiors. To read books; study nature and human nature, to think intelligently on ordinary subjects, and to know something of what is going on in the world; to write letters with a degree of accuracy that will command respect, if they do not inspire confidence; to have some knowledge of his own bodily and physical powers; that he prefers to do right rather than to do bad things; that he inclines to honesty instead of to dishonesty; the true rather than the false; the pure to the foul and obscene—much has been done along these several lines.

But to bring in these things and to liberate the mind and to bring it up to a higher state where the circle of ideas

are grander and nobler, an energy must be imparted which carries with it a desire to expand in broader fields of knowledge, duty and unselfishness. The worst education a human being ever has is that which makes him low, mean, suspicious, envious, jealous, and dishonest. Such unhappy little souls are such as Dante found with their heads stuck into the mud and slime and ooze.

To avoid shallowness in character as well as in knowledge, pupils must be put to fewer subjects, and these they should master reasonably well, and then they are, in part, equipped to go forward in their work with a prospect of success.

Specialists are always well-meaning persons, and they are largely responsible for the shallowness of American scholarship at present. If all specialists were first general scholars, and then specialists afterwards, they would have better and more accurate views of education and how to educate children generally. It is better to be a specialist than to be a zero in society, but it is much more preferable to be an intelligent man first and afterward work out in several directions.

Each specialist, being anxious to see his specialty given due prominence, has come forward and put his preference into the common school studies. Thus one after another has brought his offering until now it is well nigh all offerings and no altars, the little children as well as the larger children being loaded down till they are sinking beneath the enormous burdens they have to carry.

Our children are stout, and they should be kept so, and the public-school principals are right in keeping the children in good traveling condition.