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The Mineral Argus.

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AN ADDRESS.

Delivered Before the Teachers' Institute of Meagher County, Sept. 25th, 1884, by Miss Alice Nichols, County Superintendent of Public Schools.

Friends and fellow teachers:

Again have we met for the pleasant duties of our annual Institute. In most of the states and territories, appropriations for this work are made by the legislature, whereby the Institute, under the leadership of professors educated and prepared for the work, takes the place of a Normal school, continues two or three weeks, establishes a regular course of training for the teachers, and consequently lends an important influence to the educational progress of the state or territory in which it is held. But Montana has as yet no such appropriation, therefore we are obliged to do the best we can among ourselves. It is highly desirable then, that we should meet together with a feeling of freedom as of one family, with one common interest, and without restraint express our thoughts and opinions on the different subjects brought up for discussion. With no spirit of censure, but one of kindly criticism, may we each give and receive all the aid possible, and endeavor to make the work practical that real benefit may accrue therefrom. Fine theories clothed in well chosen language are very fascinating to read or listen to, but our time is too limited, and our schools are too much in need of earnest work for us to give our thoughts and attention to such fancies, which, as Dr. Mayo has expressed, can never be practical until we reach a better world, and have a higher type of humanity with which to deal.

These meetings should form a kind of educational exchange, where teachers may meet and discuss the value of current educational doctrines and demands. In this transfer of opinions all may be the gainers. Those who present information acquire greater clearness by the necessity of making the statement of their views plain to others, while the listeners have an opportunity of enlarging and correcting their ideas. We visit, as it were, each other's schools in spirit when we listen to the relation of each one's mode of teaching and general management. Associations of this character also possess an equal, if not a greater value in the personal intercourse the teacher has with those of the same vocation. In others we may often see our own position to better advantage, and discern traits which we lack or possess and which it would be desirable to cultivate or discard. The position of the teacher, occupying as he does the place of authority in the school-room, controlling others according to the dictates of his individual judgment and accustomed to having his will observed as law, is liable to exert an undesirable influence on his mind and habits. There is a tendency to grow rigid in manner and assert himself dogmatically. This is not well. Freshness and buoyancy of spirit should be cultivated and the cares and daily round of school life should not be allowed to narrow thought or render inflexible the lines of personality. The best remedy for this evil, which constantly besets the professional teacher, is social intercourse with those he can meet as equals or superiors. It has been said and it is a principle as old as fixed as the mountains, "educate the child, not for the school, but for life." In order to do this effectually we must be constantly on the alert, we must ourselves be fitted for life, we must avoid the deep grooves and rut work to which there is so great a tendency in the regular routine of school duties. The intellectual eye compelled to dwell on details naturally becomes near sighted, and we lose the grander outlines of wider views, unless we give a portion of our time, not only to the social element but to reading and study. It is our great privilege to see life through the eyes of the deepest thinkers and highest cultured when we peruse the printed page and have our minds imbued with their thoughts arisen into newness of life. Our reading should be general, that we may be able to stand on a broader plane and judge wisely of the demands of the times, for it is not always the newest plan or the loudest claim that is the most important. The well-being of society and the safety of our Republic demands a deeper general education, not only in school, but in home and

church, a reserve of knowledge and power greater than we have at the present time; for one of our greatest defects, and one that threatens to be a curse to our nation, is a superficial, shallow theory of education; the tendency of the American boy and girl to rush into the responsibilities of life, lacking competent knowledge, with no reserved force from which to draw as a mental capital. It is next to impossible to convince the precocious boy of sixteen, who has acquired quite a share of information and a smattering of most of the studies taught in our high schools, the necessity for a few years more of study, that he may lay up a store of information for maturer judgment. No, to him life is too short to be spent thus; he must start out for himself and be getting along in the world. So he rushes on like a wild mountain torrent into any business that strikes his fancy or seems most lucrative, from a news-boy on the train to the presidency. And what is the result of this feverish haste, which fills society with a vast multitude of youth, smart as steel traps, but with no habits of mental discipline, no stock of general information, no reserve of moral force? If we look carefully we can but note innumerable wrecks of life, ability and character along the way, that instead of illustrating the truth "Life is real, life is earnest," are the results of making of it a game of chance. How far are we teachers responsible for this state of affairs? As the schools of our county are with few exceptions still in a primary state, it is with elementary education that we have largely to deal, and as the foundation underlying all future attainments, no department is more important or needs greater skill, a finer touch or more thorough workmanship than this grade so often put off with an indifferent instructor.

It has been truly said that "the grandest of the arts is the development of the infant mind." Fellow-teachers, let us keep this definite aim constantly before us. Let it be our mission, which shall be to us a labor of love, and to it let us bring our best powers, our most earnest, faithful and devoted endeavors, that we may so prepare the mind of the little child, and so carefully select the tiny seeds to be sown there, that a rich harvest of real knowledge and power of self reliance may be the result. Does anyone ask farther how this can be secured? Certainly not by allowing the pupil to be satisfied with a glimpse of the truth, by helping him over every difficulty, and hastening him on to studies beyond his years of comprehension; neither is it by filling his mind with dry facts and statistics which serve merely as information, soon to be forgotten or retained in so confused a state as to be of little worth; but it is by studying the child's nature and ascertaining, if possible, the natural method by which he had acquired the knowledge already gained, and following out that plan; first, objects should be presented, then he may be taught to recognize by sight as he had before by hearing the word which stands for the object, and thus may be led step by step, always within the power of his full comprehension, using every truth gained as a stepping-stone to a higher and broader plane.

We need to study the theory of the new education so widely discussed at the present time, though it must be admitted that instead of new, they are old methods, for Plato taught by objects and Quintilian dwelt largely upon the importance of studying individual character, while the great Teacher of mankind, drew from surrounding objects,—the grass, the lilies and the trees—those deep lessons fraught with living truth, that have influenced humanity for more than eighteen centuries.

There are teachers of high culture and successful experience, who consider it small work and beneath their dignity to teach children in the lower grades of instruction. If there are any such here let me say to them, "you have mistaken the real work of the teacher." When the illustrious deeds and character of a statesman, patriot or warrior, are to be commemorated, an artist of the greatest skill and experience is sought to make the design and block out the work; after that any work-man, who can use the chisel well enough to finish the statue or monument may be employed. Thus in teaching or moulding the young undeveloped mind, (of greater importance than any human structure) in giving it a right start in educational growth, the most experienced and successful, with broad information and ready knowledge should be employed. It is a noted fact that the chief difficulties that trouble the teacher of higher grades come from defective primary teaching. May the importance

of giving the best talent and most earnest work to this class be more fully realized in the future and dignity added to it by making the salary of the primary teacher at least equal to the higher grade, then will the children come to their advanced work with a knowledge of how to study and a power of investigating whatever comes before the mind, which will develop thought and research and enable them to garner up that mental capital which alone can ensure true success in life. When our children are taught from the first the use, not simply to acquire knowledge, that learning is gained as a weapon, to be wielded by them for effect, not merely as a luxury for display, then will the shores of professional life be strewn with fewer wrecks of noble aspirations.

As the school supplements the home training and the child spends a large portion of his time during those important years of his physical growth and development in the school-room under the immediate direction of the teacher, it is of the greatest importance, that all who hold the position of instructors, should understand the common laws of health; many a pupil has had all his future prospects of usefulness blasted by the carelessness or ignorance of the teacher, who allowed him to study constantly in a poorly ventilated room with little or no physical exercise. A thorough knowledge of the laws of ventilation and of the necessity for a frequent supply of fresh air is as important for the teacher as to be well versed in the branches taught. It is impossible for pupils to study to advantage, or to be orderly in their behavior, when the room is filled with vitiated air; and often a weary, dispirited teacher, will find that a change of atmosphere in his little domain will serve to cast out many an evil spirit from his subjects. True education consists in a gradual advancement of the physical, mental and moral nature. Neither should be cultivated at the expense of the others; not that we would advocate teaching any religious, or sectarian views, far from it. But morality in its truest and deepest sense, should be instilled into the growing characters of the little ones, by the daily example and precept, of those whose work it is to mould them for life.

In conclusion let me adopt the eloquent words of Miss Frances Willard: "Christ called unto him a little child and set him in the midst. The nineteenth century is doing the same thing. There is not on the round planet today a group at once so significant, hopeful and pathetic, as this gathering up of wise and thoughtful men and women, reverently to study the child and set in the midst. Childhood is humanity's fortress against the encroachments of sin. Give to the little soldiers newly mustered in, the weapons of character, the ammunition of health and the drill of education, they will hold the fort for humanity in every age."

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