

EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT.

WHAT SHALL THE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACH?

Is there a more important question before the public to-day than "What shall the public schools teach?" When we look at this question from all sides, it seems as if too much attention can not be given to it.

Unfortunately, a large majority of boys and girls receive but a common school education; therefore the necessity of teaching in the public schools just as much of the required subjects as will be necessary to the pupil in his after life, is apparent to the observer.

The great cry is that the course of study is too full, and for the purpose of reducing it so as to meet the requirements of the pupils without over working them, the superintendents of the schools of California convened at Sacramento, December 4, 1890, and decided to recommend to the Legislature that certain branches be dropped. What subjects can be dropped to the greatest advantage, is a question that requires much consideration.

From earliest ages, some branch of mathematics has been taught, and to think of dropping such a subject as arithmetic would be absurd. Still, too much of the subject is being forced upon the pupils. There is a great deal of mechanical work laid out in arithmetic that one will never use in business life and that seems merely a device for using up time. In most schools, arithmetic is taught from ten to fifteen years, and then usually in such a way that it has to be learned all over before it is adaptable to practical uses. If the subject were well taught, and the unnecessary parts omitted, one third of the time now spent on the subject would be sufficient for the pupil to master it. Five years work in the essentials of arithmetic is better than fifteen years of the present easy-going, take-it-all-in work. Many believe that book-keeping should be taught as a special branch, but it is quite evident that all the book-keeping necessary for pupils in the public schools can be taught in connection with arithmetic. There they may obtain sufficient knowledge of bill-forms, accounts, and receipts to suffice for any business they may do.

One of the first things, and nearly the last thing, that the public schools ought to teach, is language, or expression. This will afford one

no end of mental discipline, "and will at the same time put in one's hand the key to every door he may need to swing farther on." In order that the most practical results may be reached, it is necessary to lessen the time given to the study of technical grammar, for grammar as a separate subject, like arithmetic, may be taught for years with no valuable results. You ask, "How shall grammar be taught?" If one wishes to talk correctly, let his talk be subject to correction. Let him observe carefully the language of educated people, which will ever be found in the good books he may be directed to read. And in this way, in the time usually devoted to the study of grammar, where the pupil is required to apply himself to the study of rules and set forms that are of no practical value whatever, he will have made three times the progress.

In this language, or expression work, the pupil should be obliged to read, write, spell, and to express his thoughts. By the use of suitable reference books, in reading, the pupils may be initiated into history, geography, grammar, and various other subjects that are now taught separately. Reading thus broadly treated would usually clear elementary schools of many subjects. Writing should include not only penmanship, but also written expression of thought. Composition is associated with reading; it cultivates memory and the power of expression, and with the teacher's correction, aids in teaching grammar and spelling.

Science is of quite as much importance as mathematics. Of the sciences taught in the public schools, geography receives much special attention. Truly it is convenient to know something about one's own country, but in order to obtain such information is it necessary that months and years be spent in learning geographical details? If one quarter of the time that is spent in learning facts about inaccessible regions were employed judiciously, the child would have more practical knowledge of the world.

History of the United States is an essential subject, but much of the discourse on battles could be advantageously dispensed with. As has been previously stated, history would occupy less of the school time if it were made more of a matter of reading.

Entomology and botany are indispensable. They not only cultivate judgment and memory, but also observation, "which is the basis of all knowledge."

If industrial drawing were dropped from the