

The district school; by J. Orville Taylor.

Taylor, John Orville, 1807-1890.

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number of the states, all that legislation can do has been done. The public officers, who have the distribution of the school-fund and the more general management of the schools, are faithful in their duties, and receive the approbation of their fellow-citizens. The school-reports are prompt, minute, and accurate; and every thing relating to the more general supervision usually satisfactory. The two great things which are still wanting are well-qualified teachers, and a disposition, on the part of the parents, to pay these teachers a reasonable compensation. I will speak of this disposition with parents in another place. The requisite qualifications of teachers is the subject now before us.

In the first place I will mention some of the deficiencies of common school-teachers; and in the second place some of the qualifications which their office requires. I hope that I shall be excused for being plain; the good of all demands that I should be so.

The people of the United States employ, annually, at least eighty thousand common-school instructors. There are in the twenty-four states not less than sixty thousand common schools (we do not include either the public or the higher schools).

Among these eighty thousand teachers, but a very few have made any previous preparation for their duties; the most of them accidentally assume this office as a temporary employment. They seek it to fill up a vacant month or two, when they ex-

pect something else will offer far more lucrative or suitable to their wishes. Many, again, teach for a short time, that they may obtain a little money to assist them in a higher course of studies which they have commenced ; others make the business a mere step-stone to something which they consider far more honourable ; and a few become school-masters because their health will not sustain the exposures of the out-door weather, or, what is more frequently the case, because they suppose the labours of a teacher are not as rough and arduous as the winter-labours of a farm.

Having become teachers from motives like these, they have never thought of the responsibilities of their office ; they see not the fearful and momentous relations which they hold to the immortal souls committed to their care ; and can they discharge their duties faithfully and conscientiously, when ignorant of what they are doing ? They intend to teach but a short time, and therefore care nothing about making improvements in their method of instruction, or of becoming better qualified for their business. They know that the unpleasant occupation will soon cease, and they do not wish to task their minds with it any more than is absolutely necessary : they probably have no love for the society of children, and in many cases have a decided dislike to any intercourse with them. They have associated with children but little, and are ignorant of the manner in which they learn. They know not how to sympathize with chil-

dren, or how to please or interest them : and they hope soon to be free from their stupidity and vexation, and shun all present intercourse as much as possible.

Many are not able to discriminate between the different characters of their pupils, and have one unchanging treatment for all : they meet with difficulties in pleasing the parents, or in governing the larger scholars, and then threaten, stamp, scold, and whip, and conclude by losing all government over themselves : they have no system, and nothing comes in the right time or place ; every thing is in confusion ; eight or ten noisy scholars vociferating for some privilege or information at the same time : this throws them into a passion, and they sputter about without accomplishing any thing, or producing any order ; their patience is soon lost, and the irritability of their temper is worked off on some unlucky urchin who happens to be in the direction of their wrath.

What I have said is not from the imagination ; I have seen many such scenes ; and so, either with high glee or trembling fear, has many a school-boy. Many, many instructors are ignorant also of what they are expected to teach ; they become teachers that they may learn,—not that they may teach others. Many take this office that they may acquire that knowledge which they now begin to feel the want of, but which was regarded as useless when they idled away their school-days. They feel the necessity of becoming the *learner* ;

but to save the profession of ignorance, and the disgrace of their advanced age, they assume the name and office of *instructor*. Their labour in acquiring the studies prevents them from attending to the children, in giving them that aid which they require: the teacher's acquirements are suspected, and being measured by the acquisitions of some of the more advanced scholars, are frequently seen to suffer from the comparison; this makes the teacher either embarrassed or arrogant, and therefore impatient and techy.

These are some of the defects of many of our teachers. Much more might be said in the way of finding fault, but I have not space or inclination to pursue this unpleasant task. One mend-fault is worth ten find-faults, all the world over. I will now, in the second place, mention some of the qualifications which every teacher should have; and from these, others, which I may not notice, may be inferred.

In the first place, teachers should well consider the *nature of their business*. You are now acting upon mind—mind that is young and flexible. Your example, your opinions, your address, are to form in your pupils such characters as will make them either useful and happy, or useless and miserable. You are acting upon minds which will act upon other minds, and your whole influence will go towards the formation of the character of society. You should, then, consider well the nature of your business. You should examine yourselves, and see