

Educational Department.

Sawdust.

BY ANNA C. BRACKETT.

Sawdust may be defined as "the dead product of a living growth, deprived of its organizing principle, and reduced to mere indigestible powder."

This may sound like some of the definitions of common things which are often attributed to Dr. Johnson, and which seem to make out a very simple thing, a very incomprehensible one; yet it so exactly expresses the stuff which is crammed down the minds of many school children that it is excellently well worth retaining and examining.

"Sawdustism" is one of Carlyle's happy expressions, and was applied by him to the writings of John Stuart Mill, and to essays on political economy generally. But it is no more appropriate a term for political economy than it is for all the natural sciences in the way in which they are taught. Take for example, geography. Nothing can be truer than that we have in this science the product of living growth. There is not the smallest part of the science which is not the result of a ceaseless play of cosmic forces, and of the action of human intelligence on natural material. The outlines of the continents themselves—what are they but ever-changing lines, representing the momentary compromise of the land and ocean? At every moment the shape of the mountain is altered by the persistent forces of cold, heat, moisture and dryness. Rivers seek for themselves new channels, and carve their beds into new depths and shallows.

When we come upon the domain of political geography—the constant aim to which all teaching in this department should gravitate—we have all the phenomena of the dividing lines of countries, cities, races, manufactures, agriculture and commerce. History and geography here overlap each other, and one can hardly tell on which domain he is treading, and here as elsewhere, it is all a changing scene of the most active life, "the result of a living growth," informed by the Divine Soul, and reaching ever onward.

Botany, zoology, physiology, geology, astronomy, all are outgrowths, to mention only a few of the sciences of which geography forms a part, and which must form

a part of it.

Now I do not mean to say that a child can be taught anything "thoroughly." I believe that there is a great deal of nonsense eagerly talked and carelessly accepted as to the "superficiality" of school work. This must all necessarily be superficial from the two reasons of the shallowness and lack of experience of the child's mind, and the greatness of the storehouse of knowledge.

In the school life of a child, he can be led to see only the merest rudiments of any subject, and rudiments are doubtless always superficial.

This is no reason, however, why we should not allow him glimpses into the different sciences which hold so much to reward the patient work of his possible after life. The main thing is to keep his mind clear and balanced, to help him to acquire the faculty of correct and cool thinking. But when, instead of looking out for this, and this alone, we make his study of geography, for instance, to consist of the memorizing of facts, are we not acting as if we thought that by constant effort he could learn geography by these dead facts?

The facts are lies, most of them—true only for a year—for a day—for there is nothing of persistent truth in the *outré niatory* of the globe.

The child is made, for instance, to commit to memory the boundaries of all the divisions of the old map of Germany, and Bismarck reduces the value of such knowledge to zero the next summer; or he is forced to learn the names of all the islands in the Arctic ocean—land which exists only as a lure to tempt to their deaths so many brave men; or he is required to commit to memory word for word the text of some audaciously stupid book on the great and small circles, length of degrees, etc., etc., and made to believe that he knows something of geography.

We have taken "the product of a living growth, deprived of its organizing principle, and having reduced it to indigestible powder," are compelling him to swallow it.

The result of the experiment of the man who thought to economize by putting green spectacles on his horse and feeding him with shavings; or rather, we do not know it, for unfortunately the horse died before he became accustomed to the new diet. But we do know the re-

sult of a precisely similar experiment on the minds of school children. The green spectacles which we put on them, are those of their faith in us, and we feed them on the indigestible powder of dead facts, till we ourselves are stupefied by their stupidity.

Every graded series of geographies put forward by the publishers, makes the matter worse. Grinding up the powder finer and finer for the primary children, does not make it any more digestible.

One geography book with a living teacher behind it, ought to be enough for any pupil; and until we stop testing the pupil's gain from the study by the list of dead facts which he can recite at call, we are simply dealing out sawdust.—*Am. Journal of Education.*

A bill is now before Congress appropriating \$10,000,000 for educational purposes throughout the States and Territories. The proposition is to divide the money according to the illiteracy of the different parts of the country, as shown by the late census, to be expended by the States and Territories, respectively. There is strong opposition to the measure on the ground that educational functions belong to the States, and not to the general government. The present bill, however, goes no further than to put funds for educational purposes in the hands of the States and Territories, making the whole nation share equally in the burden of overcoming the ignorance of its various parts. We hope to see the time when there will be a national system of education, worthy of the name—not a mass of State systems in many respects in conflict with each other, but one harmonious system, whatever part the States may retain it, for the entire nation. And we trust that, when that time comes, the true relation of public education to religion will be understood and exemplified in our land.—*Christian Statesman.*

Please do not demand that our young and inexperienced teachers should "make bricks without straw." They are too frequently put into unattractive, unfurnished school-rooms, with bare walls and hard, back-breaking, spine-curving benches, and without any "tools to work with," are expected to impart instruction to young children at the very age and time of life when only the perceptive faculties can be used. Of course there must be failure and loss of time, as well as loss of the money paid for wages.

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