Methods in elementary school studies, a brief outline

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METHODS

IN

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDIES
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A BRIEF OUTLINE

BY

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“Theory alone is inspiring, but vague; practice alone is definite, but formal; theory combined with practice is inspiring, rational, and definite.”
PREFACE.

A knowledge of specific methods is a necessary preparation to the art of teaching, because —

1. Method is the medium between teacher and pupil. It is not the question whether the teacher understands the rationale of the processes that concerns the child, but the validity or the falsity of the method employed. Teaching, or the process whereby one mind causes knowledge to arise in another, is an art; the teacher, during the performance of his task, is an artisan; and as such he should know how to use his tools, namely, his methods.

2. The mere study of the science of education does not of itself insure the mastery of methodology any more than theoretic knowledge in any other field carries with it also skill in application. Even Ruskin, with all his keen insight, would scarcely be regarded as a competent teacher of painting. And why not? "There is in the master's profession," observes J. G. Fitch, "the same difference which is observable in all other human employments between the skilled and the unskilled practitioner, and . . . this difference depends in a large measure on a knowledge of the best rules
and methods which have to be used. It is easy to say of the schoolmaster, 'nascitur non fit,' and to give this as a reason why all training and study of method are superfluous. But we do not reason thus in regard to any other profession, even to those in which original power tells most, and in which the mechanic is most easily distinguishable from the inspired artist."

3. The study of the science of education and the subsequent deduction of methods by the individual teacher will not satisfy the demands of a common-sense pedagogy, because —

(a) The average man fails to trace back deductions to their underlying principles for verifications, and rests content in the belief that his practice is in accord with his theory. The teacher is no exception,—he masters his science, then, blissfully unconscious, proceeds with wrong applications.

(b) It takes years of unaided effort to build up a satisfactory method, and if we take into consideration the fact that the number of years thus spent in preparation is greater than the average teacher devotes to his profession, it will be readily seen that the benefits accruing to the teacher in power and breadth, not to mention freedom, will scarcely offset the injustice to which the child is subjected during that period,—and the child has a right to object to being made the subject of experiment.

4. Nor is the claim valid that training in specific methods unfits the teacher for spontaneous, independ-
ent, characteristic work. "No natural educator," says W. Rein, "is so gifted through divine favor from the beginning as to be able to reach the highest results entirely without the aid of methodical schooling, and there will never be a method so wonderful as to be able to supplant the power of a strong personality. . . . This truth must nevertheless be advanced against the scorners of all method: even the most happily constituted nature, the teacher by divine grace, is not restricted nor rendered ineffective by the directions of method; on the contrary, his activity is promoted and insured of its effectiveness." There is indeed no more valid reason for the claim that the study of method tends to suppress the individuality of the teacher than there was in the claim that the teaching of penmanship by printed models would crush the individuality of the child's handwriting. There is more in human nature, in human character, in the human mind than what is put there by the pedagogue. Nay, more, nature will have its say in spite of him; so that the student with a taste for investigation will not renounce his work simply because such work has been facilitated for him; while he who is not so inclined will certainly not be assisted by the fact that the study of methods formed no part of his preparation.