

REMINISCENCES.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF EARLY TIMES.

One peculiarity of our institution is the possession of ninety acres of land for a model or experimental farm, and the idea early prevailed that agricultural chemistry was to be taught in the school. Accordingly the Board of Managers provided for a course of lectures on that subject, and employed an eminent man as lecturer, who delivered highly interesting discourses on the principles of the science. At that time there was no laboratory or other means of experiment and illustration, and the lecturer was compelled to rely wholly on oral statements and explanations. But he was by no means discouraged. He laid down the law with much precision and at a galloping pace, taking us below the crust of the earth and beyond the planetary bodies as he went along. Had we been given time to memorize and digest his store of information it is probable we might have acquired some knowledge of the great science of chemistry and might have been able, while teaching thereafter in the rural districts, to have rendered the State some return for our instruction in this branch of knowledge. But unfortunately we took no notes and had little time to give to this subject; and so it happened that our chemistry lectures went in at one ear and out at the other without effecting a lodgment or leaving any appreciable trace behind.

After the lectures had progressed for several months some one, possibly one of our hard-working drill masters, with a weary experience of our general dullness, suspecting that we might not be profiting very greatly by the lectures on chemistry, suggested an examination. The lecturer seemed glad of an opportunity to test the knowledge of his pupils, because he believed they had mastered the subject on account of the complete and lucid manner it had been presented; and he prepared a set of elaborate questions to be

propounded to the members of his class at the quarterly examination. According to the usual custom these were submitted in writing, and the students were called upon to answer them in writing, for which purpose an abundance of blank paper had been furnished. We got along pretty well with the few general and routine questions; but when we reached those of a technical nature the paper was not more blank than we were. One of these interrogatories fairly upset the whole class. I shall never forget it. I do not understand it yet, though twenty years and more have come and gone since then. Here is the wonderful question—"What is Allotropism?" Only four attempted to grapple with the terrible fiend. No. 1 believed he had heard of the thing before, but what it was he could not tell; No. 2 thought it might be a system of medicine in opposition to homeopathy; No. 3 suggested that it was a species of extinct mammalia, while No. 4 insisted that it was a kind of dynamite and had better be handled with care. He supposed it had been compounded in the interest of the then recent "Gunpowder plot," inasmuch as that plot was impossible of execution without the aid of chemistry. But whatever it was, it contributed, or was supposed to have contributed, toward raising a doubt in the minds of the Governing Board as to the practicability of making much headway in teaching chemistry by lectures in the absence of a chemical laboratory.

Another theory was tested to the satisfaction of the school, but it never came to a full and final end in my time, and it was the idea that each and every person can be made a musician, or a teacher of music. Some of the members of the State Board went so far as to refuse to believe a pupil should be allowed to graduate unless he was able to teach music and lead in singing. Prof. C. M. Cady, of Chicago, was employed, with strict instructions to spare no pains to prove the correctness of the theory of the existence of universal musical ability. He divided the school into four sections. "A" was made up of good singers, those who had good voices, and also could read music readily by sight. "B" included moderately well-informed singers, and those who were capable of being rapidly advanced. "C" comprised all with a natural ear for music; those whose voices needed training to fit them for a place in the upper classes. According to popular report, section "D" was made up of "birds that couldn't sing, and that could never be made to sing." This class was small, but desperate. It labored zealously to grasp the rudiments of the grand art, but its best efforts were failures, and it became, in the course of a year or so, the laughing stock of the entire school. Being an early and constant member of this class, I have a

right to mention its woes and tribulations, and to observe that it finally graduated from the pursuit of knowledge under these difficulties, by rising in a body and leaving the hall when the music hour arrived,—no permission being asked or given,—it being tacitly conceded that the pet theory of universal musical training had broken under the strain.

If any have never heard of the great and good Prof. Washington Irving Vescellius, or the great American card writer, they would thank me for the information that he was the first “professor” employed in the Normal University. Before his time, down to a somewhat later date, all our instructors were teachers, and they were unsparing in ridiculing the ordinary professors of the State. How the title ever took root here, after our experience with the great Vescellius, passes my humble comprehension. This remarkable professor gave general writing lessons to the whole school, much after the fashion of the agricultural chemistry class. Under his tuition, all the students were to be brought to the highest style of penmanship, and after graduation, were to be prepared to compete with other American card writers, and might be supposed capable of conducting an evening writing school. This accomplishment, when added like a mansard roof to the ability to teach music, would effectually dispense with the traveling professor, whose cards displaying impossible doves and eagles are hung up in the postoffices and other public resorts, and with the above-mentioned musical accomplishment, render writing and singing teachers extinct races, only to be met with in the lightest of light literature of the day. Professor Washington Irving Vescellius was considerably inflated by the promotion thus accorded to his merit, gave his whole soul to the work, and delighted himself and the school by the most brilliant blackboard exercises. Upon one unfortunate occasion he told the school the lesson of the day was to be the “shyrographic curve,” and the general subject of “shyrography.” I believe the gentleman wondered why this particular lesson proved so amusing to the school, and that he believed himself a much injured person, when the faculty soon after dispensed with his further services.

Music and penmanship were to be supplemented by the elegant accomplishment of drawing, and we were engaged three hours each week in this delightful pastime. Our instructor was a sedate Episcopal clergyman, whose home was at Springfield. He believed in training all the faculties, and was anxious we should acquire proper ideas of perspectives, and lines, and shades, and shadows, and become experts in some one branch of this delightful art. He conceived the idea of teaching the construction of capital letters on a

large scale, giving blackboard exercises to the whole school by sections, in hopes, I suppose, that we might some day compete with sign painters. I remember that when his class was examined at the close of the winter term in 1860, our beloved professor requested section "C" to give an illustration of the method of constructing the letter "E." History compels me to remark that several of his pupils had attained such proficiency that they certainly were fully worthy of taking rank with second-class sign painters, and their capital letters were really almost capital specimens of art.

Our Mr. Hewett was perhaps as much given to bright sayings and happy retorts in those days as he is at present, and on this occasion he perpetrated one of his very best. Passing in review in front of the long blackboard in company with our professor, he quietly remarked: "Section C has performed to-day with great ease." (E's.) Our quiet teacher, not given to wit and humor, agreed with a gentle laugh, and through his mind there galloped no idea of the peculiar humor of the remark. During the evening of that day, at a social gathering of teachers and pupils, some one explained to our drawingmaster, with not a little difficulty, the real point of Mr. Hewett's little joke. When he thoroughly took in the situation, his joy and gratification knew no bounds. "Section 'C' performed with great E's," he repeated over and over again, and seemed at last to fully realize that something truly good had actually been said.

Scene: assembly room. McMackin standing at the dictionary-table looking up a word; no member of the faculty in the room, Dr. Edwards in charge, having stepped out; Frank Searles, going out to the reading-table, meets a greenhorn just in to enter school, who inquires, "Say, Mister, where can I find the president? I want to come to school." Searles directs him to "that man standing by the table," pointing out McMackin. He walks through the room and approaches Mc., with "Say, er you the president?" Mc. (very coolly and complacently), "Yes, sir; what can I do for you?" "I want to come to school." Mc. looks at him a moment in a dignified manner, "Oh,—ah,—yes; well, I never attend to matters of that kind myself; you'll have to see my private secretary."—[Enter Dr. Edwards.] "There he comes now; that bald-headed man. You just step to his desk; he will tell you what to do."

THE ECLIPSE OF THE MOON.

In the fall of 1874, on a certain Saturday evening, a total eclipse of the moon was advertised. The performance was to begin at one o'clock Sunday morning. After society meeting, those who were