

ON METHODS OF TEACHING THE RUDIMENTS

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Very many people are at the present time very seriously busy finding, borrowing, or inventing the best method for the instruction of reading; very many have invented and found this best method. We frequently meet in literature and in life with the question: By what method do you teach? I must, however, confess that this question is generally heard from people who are very little educated, and who for a long time have been instructing children as a trade, or from people who sympathize with the popular education from their cabinets, and who, to help it along, are ready to write an article, and to take up a contribution for the printing of a primer according to the best method, or from people who are biased in favour of their one method, or, finally, from people who have never had anything to do with teaching, – from the public who repeat that which the majority of men say. People who seriously busy themselves with it and who are cultured no longer ask such questions.

It seems to be an accepted truth with everybody that the problem of the public school is to teach reading, that the knowledge of reading is the first step in education, and that, therefore, it is necessary to find the best method for its instruction. One will tell you that the sound method is very good; a second assures you that Zolotov's method is the best; a third knows a still better method, the Lancasterian, and so forth. Only a lazy man does not make fun of teaching "buki-az-ba"¹ – and all are convinced that for the sake of disseminating education among the people all that is necessary is to send for the best method, to contribute three roubles in silver, rent a house, and hire a teacher, or, from the superabundance of their own education, to offer a small particle of it, on Sunday, between mass and visits, to the unfortunate people that are perishing in ignorance, – and the deed is done.

Some clever, cultivated, rich people have come together: a happy thought flashes through the head of one of them, and that is, to confer a benefit on the terrible Russian people. "Let us do it!" All agree to it, and a society is born, the aim of which is to foster popular education, to print good, cheap books for the masses, to found schools, to encourage teachers, and so forth. By-laws are written up; ladies take part in it; they go through all the formalities of such societies, and the society's activity begins at once.

To print good books for the masses! How simple and easy it looks, just like all great ideas. There is just one difficulty: there are no good books for the people, not only in our country, but even not in Europe. In order to print such books they must be written first, but not one of the benefactors will think of undertaking this task.

The society commissions somebody, for the collected roubles, to compose, or select and translate the very best (it is so easy to select it I) from the European popular literature, – and the people will be happy, and will inarch with rapid strides toward education, and the society is very much satisfied.

The Slavic names of the first two letters are az, buki, hence azbuka – alphabet.

This society proceeds in just the same way in respect to the other side of the schools' activity. Only the rarest, swayed by self-sacrifice, apportion their precious leisure to the instruction of the masses. (These people do not take into consideration the circumstance that they have never read a single book on pedagogy, and have never seen any other school than the one in which they have studied themselves.) Others encourage the schools. Again it looks so simple, and again there is an unexpected perplexity, which is, that there is no other way of promoting education except by learning and completely devoting oneself to this matter.

But beneficent societies and private individuals somehow do not notice this perplexity, and continue in this manner to struggle on the arena of popular education, and remain very much satisfied. This phenomenon is, on the one hand, amusing and harmless, because the activity of these societies and of these people does not embrace the masses; on the other, this phenomenon is dangerous in that it casts a denser mist over our still unformed view of popular education. The causes of this phenomenon may be partly the irritable condition of our society, and partly the universal human weakness to make out of every honest idea a plaything for vanity and idleness. The fundamental cause, it seems to us, is in the great misapprehension of what the rudiments are, the dissemination of which forms the aim of all the educators of the people, and which has caused such strange discussions in our country.

The rudiments, a conception which exists not only in our country, but in all Europe, are acknowledged to be the programme of the elementary school for the people. Lesen und schreiben, lire et écrire, reading and writing. What are these rudiments? and what have they in common with the first step in education? The rudiments are the art of composing words out of certain signs and of representing them. What is there in common between the rudiments and education? The rudiments are a definite skill (Fertigkeit); education is a knowledge of facts and their correlations. But maybe this skill of composing words is necessary in order to introduce man into the first step of education, and maybe there is no other road? This we do not see at all; we very frequently perceive the diametrically opposite, if, in speaking of education, we shall understand not alone the scholastic, but also the vital education.

Among people who stand on a low level of education we notice that the knowledge or ignorance of reading and writing in no way changes the degree of their education. We see people who are well acquainted with all the facts necessary for farming, and with a large number of

interrelations of these facts, who can neither read nor write; or excellent military commanders, excellent merchants, managers, superintendents of work, master mechanics, artisans, contractors, and people simply educated by life, who possess a great store of information and sound reasoning, based on that information, who can neither read nor write. On the other hand, we see those who can read and write, and who on account of that skill have acquired no new information. Everybody who will seriously examine the education of the people, not only in Russia, but also in Europe, will involuntarily come to the conclusion that education is acquired by the people quite independently of the knowledge of reading and writing, and that these rudiments, with the rare exceptions of extraordinary ability, remain in the majority of cases an unapplied skill, even a dangerous skill, – dangerous because nothing in life may remain indifferent. If the rudiments are inapplicable and useless, they must become injurious.

But perhaps a certain degree of education, standing above those examples of the rudiment-less education which we have adduced, is impossible without the rudiments? Very likely it is so, but we do not know that, and have no reason to suppose that for the education of a future generation. All we know is that the degree of education which we have, and outside of which we are not able and do not want to imagine any other, is impossible. We have an example in the primary school, which, in our opinion, forms the corner-stone of education, and we do not want to know all the degrees of education which exist, not below, but entirely outside, and independently of, our school.

We say: All those who do not know the rudiments are equally uneducated, – they are Scythians for us. The rudiments are necessary for the beginning of education, and we persist in leading the masses by that road up to our education. Considering the education which I possess, it would please me very much to agree with that opinion; I am even convinced that the rudiments are a necessary condition of a certain degree of education, but I cannot be convinced that my education is good, that the road over which science is travelling is the right one, and, above all, I cannot leave out of account three-fourths of the human race, who receive their education without the rudiments.

If we by all means must educate the people, let us ask them how they educate themselves, and what their favourite instruments for attaining this end are. If we want to find the foundation, the first step of education, why should we look for it perforce in the rudiments, and not much deeper? Why should we stop at one of the endless number of the instruments of education and see in it the alpha and omega of education, whereas it is only one of the incidental, unimportant circumstances of education?

They have been teaching the rudiments for quite a time in Europe, but still there is no popular literature; that is, the masses – the class of people exclusively occupied with physical labour – nowhere read books. We should think that this phenomenon would deserve

attention and elucidation, whereas people imagine that the matter is improved by continuing to teach the rudiments. All the vital questions are extremely easy and simple of solution in theory, and it is only when it comes to applying them that they prove not so easy of solution and break up into thousands of difficult questions.

It looks so simple and so easy to educate the masses: teach them the rudiments, if necessary, by force, and give them good books, and the deed is done. But in reality something quite different takes place. The masses do not want to study the rudiments. Well, we can force them. Another impediment: there are no books. We can order them. But the ordered books are bad, and it is impossible to order people to write good books. The main difficulty is that the masses do not want to read these books, and no one has as yet invented a method of compelling them to read these books; besides, the masses continue getting their education in their own way, and not in the primary schools.

Maybe the historical time for the people's participation in the common education has not yet arrived, and it is necessary that they study the rudiments for another hundred years. Maybe the people are spoilt (as many think); maybe the people must write their own books; maybe the best method has not yet been found; maybe, too, the education by means of the book and of the rudiments is an aristocratic means less adapted to the working classes than other instruments of education which have been evolved in our day. Maybe the chief advantage of instruction by means of the rudiments, which consists in the possibility of transmitting science without its auxiliary means, does not in our time exist for the masses. Maybe it is easier for a workman to study botany from plants, zoology from animals, arithmetic from the abacus, ■with which he has to deal, than from books. Maybe the workman will find time to listen to a story, to look at a museum or an exhibition, but will not find time to read a book. Maybe, even, the book method of instruction is absolutely contrary to his manner of life and composition of character. Frequently we observe attention, interest, and a clear comprehension in the workingman, if a knowing person tells or explains to him something; but it is difficult to imagine that same labourer with a book in his blistered hands, trying to make out the sense of a science popularly expounded to him on two printing sheets. All these are only suppositions of causes, which may be quite erroneous, but the very fact of the absence of a popular literature, and of the people's resistance to education by means of the rudiments, nevertheless exists in all of Europe. Even thus the educating class in all of Europe looks upon the primary school as the first step to education.

The origin of this apparently unreasonable conception will become very clear when we look closely at the historical progress of education. First were founded, not the lower, but the higher schools: at first the monastic, then the secondary, then the primary schools. From this standpoint, Smaragdov's text-book, which on two printing sheets presents the whole history of humanity, is just as necessary in the county school, as the rudiments are needed in the

primary school. The rudiments are in this organized hierarchy of institutions the last step, or the first from the end, and therefore the lower school is to respond only to the exigencies of the higher schools.

But there is also another point of view, from which the popular school appears as an independent institution, which is not obliged to perpetuate the imperfections of the higher institution of learning, but which has its independent aim of the popular education. The lower we descend on this ladder of education, instituted by the state, the more the necessity is felt at each step of making the education independent and complete. From the gymnasium only one-fifth enter the university; from the county school only one-fifth enter the gymnasium; from the popular school only one-thousandth enter the higher institutions of learning. Consequently, the correspondence of the popular school to the higher institution is the last aim to be pursued by the popular school. And yet, only by this correspondence can be explained the view which looks upon the popular schools as upon schools of the rudiments.

The discussion in our literature of the usefulness or injuriousness of the rudiments, which it was so easy to ridicule, is in our opinion a very serious discussion, which will elucidate many questions. However, this discussion has existed elsewhere, too. Some say that it is injurious for the masses to be able to read books and periodicals, which speculation and political parties put into their hands; they say that the ability to read takes the labouring class out of their element, inoculates them with discontent with their condition, and breeds vices and a decline of morality. Others say, or infer, that education cannot be injurious, but must always be useful. The first are more or less conscientious observers, the others are theorists. As is always the case in discussions, both are entirely right. The discussion, we think, is due to the fact that the questions are not clearly put.

The first quite justly attack the rudiments as a separately inoculated ability to read and write without any other information (as is actually done by the vast majority of the schools, for that which is learned by rote is forgotten, and all that is left is the art of reading); the last defend the rudiments, understanding by it the first step in education, and are mistaken only in the wrong conception of the rudiments. If the question were put like this: Is the primary education useful to the people, or not? no one could answer it in the negative. But if we ask: Is it useful, or not, to teach the people to read when they cannot read and have no books for reading? I hope that every unbiassed man will answer: I do not know, just as I do not know whether it would be useful to teach the whole nation to play the violin or to make boots.

Looking more closely at the result of the rudiments in the form in which they are transmitted to the masses, I think the majority will express themselves against the rudiments, taking into consideration the protracted compulsion, the disproportionate development of memory, the false conception of the completeness of science, the

loathing for a continued education, the false vanity, and the habit of meaningless reading, which are acquired in these schools. In the school at Yasnaya Polyana all the pupils who come to it from the primary schools constantly fall behind the pupils who enter from the school of life; they not only fall behind, but their backwardness is in proportion to the time they have spent in the primary school.

What the problem and, therefore, the programme of the popular school consists in, we cannot explain here, and do not even regard such an explanation as possible. The popular school must respond to the exigencies of the masses, – that is all which we can positively assert in regard to this question. What these exigencies are, only a careful study of them and free experiment can teach. The rudiments constitute only one small, insignificant part of these exigencies, in consequence of which the primary schools are probably very agreeable to their founders, but almost useless and frequently hurtful to the masses, and in no way even resemble the schools of primary education

For the same reason, the question how to teach the rudiments in the shortest possible time and by what method is a question of little importance in the matter of popular education. For the same reason, people who out of amusement busy themselves with primary schools will do much better if they will exchange this occupation for a more interesting one, because the business of popular education, which does not consist in the mere rudiments, presents itself not only as very difficult, but of necessity demands immediate, persistent labour and a study of the masses.

The primary schools make their appearance in measure as the rudiments are necessary for the masses, and they exist of their own accord to the extent to which they are wanted. These schools exist with us in large number for the reason that the teachers of these schools can impart nothing else of their knowledge but the rudiments, and that the people have the need of knowing, a certain amount of these rudiments for practical purposes, – in order to read a sign, write down a figure, read the psaltery over a deceased person for money, and so forth.

These schools exist like workshops for tailors and joiners; even the view held by the masses in respect to them and the methods of those who study are the same. The pupil in time somehow manages to learn by himself, and as the master employs the apprentice for his own needs, sending him to fetch brandy, chop wood, clean the gutter, just so there is here a period of apprenticeship. And just like the trade, the rudiments are never used as a means for further educating themselves, but only for practical purposes. A sexton or a soldier is the teacher, and the peasant sends one of his three sons to be an apprentice at the rudiments, as he would send him to a tailor, and the legal exigencies of both are satisfied. But it would be a crime and a mistake to see in this a certain degree of culture, and on this foundation to construct the state school, putting all the fault only on the method of the primary instruction, and to inveigle and force the people into it.

But in the school of popular education, as you understand it, they will tell me the teaching of the rudiments will still form one of the first conditions of education, both because the need of knowing the rudiments lies in the popular conception of education, and because the great majority of the teachers know the rudiments best of all, and thus the question of the method of primary instruction after all remains a difficult question and one demanding a solution.

To this we will reply that, in the majority of schools, on account of our insufficient knowledge of the masses and of pedagogy, education actually begins with primary instruction, but that the process of teaching the printed signs and the art of writing presents itself to us as very insignificant and long known. The sextons teach reading in three months by the " buki-az - ba " method ; an intelligent father or brother teaches by the same method in much less time; according to the Zolotov and Lautir-method, they say, reading may be learned faster still; but, whether they learn to read by one or the other method, nothing is gained if the children do not learn to comprehend what they read, which is the chief problem of primary instruction; and yet no one hears anything about this necessary, difficult, and undiscovered method. For this reason the question of how to teach the rudiments most conveniently, although demanding a reply, appears exceedingly insignificant to us, and the persistency in finding a method, and the waste of energy, which finds a more important application in the more advanced education, seem to us to be a great misunderstanding arising from an improper comprehension of the rudiments and of education.

So far as we know, all the existing methods may be classified into three methods with their combinations.

1. The method of " azcs," of letter combinations and spelling, and the learning by rote of one book, - Buch-stabirmethod.

2. The method of vowels with the attachment of consonants which are expressed only in connection with a vowel.

3. The sound method.

Zolotov's method is a clever combination of the second and third, just as all the other methods are only combinations of these three fundamental methods.

All these methods are equally good; every one has its advantages over the others from some one side, or in regard to a given

language, or even in respect to a certain ability of a pupil, and every one has its difficulties. The first, for example, makes the learning of the letters easy, by calling them az, buki, vyedi, or apple, book, and so forth, and transfers all the difficulty to spelling, which is partly learned by heart and partly acquired instinctively from reading a whole book by heart with a pointer.

The second facilitates the spelling and the consciousness of the vowellessness of the consonants, but complicates the study of the letters, the pronunciation of the semivowels, and in the case of the triple and quadruple syllables, especially in our language. This method in Russian makes matters difficult on account of the complexity and greater variety of shades in our vowels. " " and all the vowels formed with it, 'a – ya, 'e = ye, 'u = yu, are impossible; ya with b before it will be b'ya, and not bya. In order to pronounce bya and byu, V and bye, the pupil must learn the syllables by rote, else he will say b'ya b'yu, b, and b'ye.

The sound method, one of the most comical monstrosities of the German mind, presents greater advantages in compound syllables, but is impossible in the study of the letters. And, notwithstanding the regulation of the seminaries which do not acknowledge the Buchstabil-methode, the letters are learned by the old method, only, instead of frankly pronouncing as before ef, i, scha, teacher and pupil contort their mouths in order to pronounce f-i-sh, and, at that, sh consists of sch, and is not one letter.

Zolotov's method presents great conveniences in combining syllables into words and in gaining the consciousness of the vowellessness of the consonants, but offers difficulty in learning the letters and in complicated syllable combinations. It is more convenient than the rest only because it is a combination of two methods, but it is still far from being perfect, because it is – a method.

Our former method, which consisted in learning the letters, naming them be, ve, gc, me, le, sc, fe, and so forth, and then spelling aloud, by throwing off the useless vowel e and vice versa, also offers its conveniences and disadvantages, and is also a combination of three methods. Experience has convinced us that there is not one bad and not one good method; that the failure of a method consists in the exclusive adherence to one method, and that the best method is the absence of all method, but the knowledge and use of all methods and the invention of new ones according to the difficulties met with.

We have divided the methods into three categories, but this division is not essential. We only did so for clearness' sake; properly speaking, there are no methods, and each includes all the rest. Everybody who has taught another to read has made use for the purpose, though he may not know it, of all the existing methods and of all those that may ever exist. The invention of a new method is only the consciousness of that new side from which the pupil may be approached for his comprehension, and therefore the new method does not exclude the old, and is not only no better than the old, but

even becomes worse, because in the majority of cases the essential method is divined in the beginning. In most cases the invention of the new method has been regarded as the annihilation of the old, although in reality the old method has remained the essential one, and the inventors, by consciously refuting the old methods, have only complicated matters and have fallen behind those who consciously had used the old and unconsciously the new and the future methods.

Let us adduce as an example the oldest and the newest methods : the method of Cyril and Methodius ¹ and the sound method, the ingenious Fischbuch, in use in Germany. A sexton, a peasant, who teaches as of old az, buki, will always hit upon explaining to the pupil the vowellessness of the consonant by saying that buki is pronounced as b. I once saw a peasant who was instructing his son and who explained the letters as b, r, and then again continued to teach by the composition and spelling of the words. Even if the teacher does not hit upon it, the pupil will himself comprehend that the essential sound in be is b. That is the sound system. Nearly every old teacher, who makes the pupil spell a word of two or more syllables, will cover one syllable and will say: This is bo, and this go, and this ro, and so forth. This is in part the artifice of Zolotov's method and of the method of vowels. Every one who makes a pupil study the primer points to the representation of the word God and at the same time pronounces God, and thus he reads the whole book with him, and the process of spelling is freely acquired by the pupil, by uniting the organic with the dismembered elements, by uniting the familiar speech (the prayer, as to the necessity of the knowledge of which there can be no question in the child's mind) with the analysis of that speech into its component parts.

Such are all the new methods and hundreds of other artifices which every intelligent old teacher unconsciously employs in order to explain the process of reading to his pupil, giving him all liberty to explain to himself the process of reading in a manner most convenient to the pupil.

1 The proto-apostles of the Slavs, the inventors of the Slavic alphabet, of which the Russian is but a variation.

Leaving out the fact that I know hundreds of cases of rapid acquisition of the art of reading by the old method buki-az - ba, and hundreds of cases of very slow acquisition by the new methods, I only affirm that the old method has till advantage over the new, that it includes all the new methods, even though it be only unconscious, while the new excludes the old, and also this other advantage that the old method is free, while the new is compulsory. What, free ? they will tell me, when with the old methods the spelling was beaten in with rods, and with the new children are addressed as " you" and politely asked to comprehend ?

It is right here that the strongest and most injurious violence is practised on the child, when he is asked to comprehend in precisely the same manner that the teacher comprehends it. Anybody who has

himself taught must have noticed that b, r, a may be combined in as many different ways as 3, 4, and 8 may be added up. With one pupil 3 and 4=7, and 3 more =10, and 5 is left; even so a, or az, and r, or rtsy, and b in front of ra makes bra. With another 8 and 3 = 11, and 4 more = 15; even so buki, rtsy must be bra, because they had been spelling bra, vra, yra, and so forth, and if not bra, then bru, and a thousand other ways, out of which b, r, and a will make bra, and this will be one, and, in my opinion, one of the last. One must never have taught and know nothing of men and children, to imagine that, since bra is only the combination of b, r, and a, every child needs only to learn b, r, and a, in order to be able to pronounce it. You tell him: B,r, a is what sound ? he says ra, and he is quite right, – he hears it so; another says a, a third br, just as he will pronounce shell as sch, and f as I'hv,¹ and so forth. You tell him a, e, i, o, u are the main letters, but to him I, r are the chief letters, and he catches entirely different sounds from what you want him to.

1 In the popular speech every f is in Russian changed into khv, etc.

This is not the worst yet. A teacher from a German seminary, who has been instructed by the best method, teaches by the Fischbuch. Boldly, self-confidently he sits down in the class-room, – the tools are ready: the blocks with the letters, the board with the squares, and the primer with the representation of a fish. The teacher surveys his pupils, and he already knows everything which they ought to understand; he knows what their souls consist of, and many other things, which he had been taught in the seminary.

He opens the book and points to a fish. "What is this, dear children ? " Tins, you see, is the Anschauunys-unterricht. The poor children will rejoice at this fish, if the report from other schools or from their elder brothers has not yet reached them, what the sauce is which goes with this fish, how they are morally contorted and vexed for the sake of that fish.

However it be, they will say: " This is a fish."

"No," replies the teacher (what I am telling here is not a fiction, a satire, but the recital of facts which I saw in all the best schools of Germany and in those schools of England where they have succeeded in borrowing this most beautiful and best of methods).

"No," says the teacher. " What do you see ?"

The children are silent. You must not forget that they are obliged to sit orderly, each in his place, without moving – Buhe und Gehorsarii.

" What do you see ?"

" A book," says the most stupid child. All the intelligent children have in the meantime thought of a thousand things which they see, and they know by instinct that they will never guess that which the teacher wants them to say and that they ought to say that a fish is

not a fish, but something else which they cannot name.

" Yes, yes," joyfully says the teacher, " very good, – a book."

The brighter children get bolder, and the stupid boy does not know himself what he is praised for.

" And what is in the book ?" says the teacher.

The quickest and brightest boy guesses what it is, and with proud joy says, " Letters."

" No, no, not at all," the teacher replies, almost dolefully, " you must think what you say."

Again all the bright boys keep a sullen silence and do not even try to guess, but begin to think what kind of glasses the teacher has, why he does not take them off, but keeps looking over them, and so forth.

" Well, what is there in the book ?"

All are silent.

" What is here ?"

" A fish," says a bold little lad.

" Yes, a fish, but not a living fish ?"

" No, not a living fish."

" Very well. Is it dead ?"

« No."

" Very well. What kind of a fish is it ? "

" Bin Bild, – a picture."

" Yes, very well."

All repeat that it is a picture and imagine that all is ended. No, they ought to have said that it is a picture representing a fish. And this is precisely the way by which the teacher gets the pupils to say that it is a picture representing a fish. He imagines that the pupils reason, and does not have enough shrewdness to see that if he is ordered to get the pupils to say that it is a picture representing a fish, or that if he himself wants them to say so, it would be much simpler to make them frankly learn that wise saying by heart.

Fortunate are the pupils if the teacher will stop here. I myself heard one make them say that it was not a fish, but a thing – ein

Ding, and that thing only was a fish. This, if you please, is the new Anschauungsxintcrricht in connection with the rudiments, – it is the art of making the children think. But now this Anschauungsunterricht is ended, and there begins the analysis of the word. The word Fisch, composed of letters, is shown on charts. The best and most intelligent pupils hope to redeem themselves, and at once to grasp the forms and names of the letters, but that's where they are mistaken.

" What has the fish in front ? "

The intimidated ones keep silent, and finally a bolder boy says: " A head."

" Good, very good. Where is the head ?"

" In front."

" Very well. And what comes after the head? "

" The fish."

« No, think!"

They must say: " The body – Leib." They finally say it, but they lose every hope and confidence in themselves, and all their mental powers are strained to comprehend that which the teacher needs. " The head, the body, and the end of the fish – the tail. Very well! Say all together: A fish has a head, a body, and a tail. Here is a fish composed of letters, and here is a painted fish."

The fish which is composed of letters is suddenly divided into three parts: into F, into i, and into sch. The teacher, with the self-satisfaction of a sleight-of-hand performer who has showered flowers on the audience, instead of sprinkling wine on them, removes the F, points to it, and says: " This is the head, i is the body, sch is the tail," and he repeats : " Fisch, ffff iiii shshshsh. This is ffff, this is iiii, shshshsh."

The poor children writhe, and hiss, and blow, trying to pronounce the consonants without vowels, which is a physical impossibility. Without being conscious of it, the teacher himself uses a semivowel, something between *n* in *urn* and *y* in *pity*. At first the pupils are amused by that hissing, but later they observe that they are supposed to memorize these *ff*, *ii*, *shsh*, and they say *shif*, *shish*, *fif*, and absolutely fail to recognize their word *Fisch*, *ffff* – *UH* – *shshshsh*. The teacher, who knows the best method, will not come to their rescue, but will advise them to remember *f* from the words *Feder*, *Faust*, and *sch* from *Schiirzc*, *Schachtcl*, and so forth, and will continue to ask them to say *shshshsh* ; he will not only not come to their rescue, but will absolutely prohibit their learning the letters from the pictorial *A B C*, or from phrases, such as *a* stands for *apple*, *b* stands for *boy*; he will not permit them to learn syllables and to read what is familiar to them, without knowing

syllabication; in short, to use a German expression, he ignores, – he is obliged not to know any other method but Fisch, and that a fish is a thing, and so forth.

There is a method for the rudiments, and there is a method for the primary development of thinking – An-schauung sunterr icht (see Denzel's " Fntwurf"); both are connected, and the children must pass through these eyes of needles. All measures have been taken so that there should be no other development at school, except along this path. Every motion, every word and question are forbidden. Die lldndc scicn zusammcn. Ruhc und Gchorsain. And there are people who ridicule buki-az – ba, insisting that buki-az – ba is a method which kills all the mental faculties, and who recommend the Lautir-methode in Vcrbindung mit Anschauungsuntcrricht; that is, who recommend to learn by heart a fish is a thing, and f is a head, i a body, and sch the tail of a fish, and not to learn by rote the psalter and the Book of the Hours. English and French pedagogues proudly pronounce the difficult word Anschauungsuntcrricht, and say that they are introducing it with the primary instruction. For us this Anschauungsuntcrricht, of which I shall have to say more in detail, appears like something entirely incomprehensible. What is this object-teaching? What other kind of teaching can there be, if not object-teaching? All five senses take part in the instruction, therefore there has always been and always will be an Anschauungsuntcrricht.

For the European school, which is trying to get away from mediaeval formalism, there is some sense in the name and idea of object-teaching as opposed to the former mode of instruction, and some excuse for the mistakes, which consist in retaining the old method and in changing only the external manner; but for us, I repeat it, Anschauungsuntcrricht has no meaning. Up to the present I have, after vain endeavours to find this Anschauungsuntcrricht and Pestalozzi's method in all Europe, discovered nothing but the statements that geography is to be taught from surface maps, if they can be had, colours from colours, geometry from drawings, zoology from animals, and so forth, something which each of us has known ever since our birth, which it was not at all necessary to invent because that has long ago been invented by Nature herself, so that anybody who is not brought up under contrary views knows it well.

And it is these methods and others similar to them, and the methods of preparing teachers according to given methods, which are in all seriousness proposed to us, who are beginning our schools in the second half of the nineteenth century, without any historical ballast and blunders weighing us down, and with an entirely different cognition than that which lay at the foundation of the European schools. Even leaving out of discussion the falseness of these methods and the violence exercised upon the spirit of the pupils, – why should we, with whom the sextons teach to read in six months, borrow the Lautiranschauungsuntcrrichtsmcthodc, under which they have to study a year and more?

We have said above that, in our opinion, every method is good and,

at the same time, one-sided; each of them is

convenient for a certain pupil and for a certain language and nation. For this reason the sound method and every other un-Russian method will be worse for us than buki-az-ba. If the Lautiranschauungsunterricht has produced such inglorious results in Germany, where several generations have been taught to think according to certain laws, defined by a Kant or a Schleiermacher, where the best teachers are trained, where the Lautirmethode was begun in the seventeenth century, – what would happen with us if a certain method, a certain Lesebuch with moral sayings should be adopted by law? What would be the result of an instruction according to any newly introduced method which is not assimilated by the people and by the teachers ?

I will tell a few cases near at hand. This autumn a teacher, who had studied in the Yasnaya Polyana school, had opened a school in a village, where out of forty pupils one-half had been instructed according to the azcs and syllabifications, and one-third could read. After two weeks the peasants expressed their universal dissatisfaction with the school. The chief points of accusation were that the teacher taught in German a, be, and not az, bv.ki, that he taught fairy-tales and not prayers, and that there was no order at school. Upon meeting the teacher I informed him of the opinion of the peasants. The teacher, a man with a university training, explained to me with a contemptuous smile that he taught a, be, instead of, az, buki, in order to facilitate spelling; that they read fairy-tales in order to get used to understanding what was read according to the pupils' intellects ; and that, in conformity with his new method, he considered it unnecessary to punish the children, and that, therefore, there could not be that strict order to which the peasants were accustomed, who had seen their children with pointers on the syllables.

I visited this school two weeks later. The boys were

I began to examine them in sacred history: nobody knew anything, because the teacher, according to the new method, did not make them memorize, but told them stories from the abbreviated sacred history. I examined them in arithmetic: nobody knew anything, although the teacher had, again according to the new method, been showing all the pupils together numbers up to millions all at once, without making them learn by heart. I examined them in the prayers: not one knew anything; they said the Lord's Prayer with mistakes, as they had learned it at home. And all of them were excellent boys, full of life, and intelligence, and eagerness for instruction! The most terrible thing about it is that it was all done according to my method! Here were all the devices employed at my school: the study of the letters written by all at once with chalk, and the oral spelling, and the first intelligible reading for the child, and the oral account of sacred history, and mathematics without memorizing. At the same time, in everything could be felt the device, most familiar to the teacher, of learning by rote, which he consciously avoided, and which alone he had mastered and against his will

applied to entirely different materials: he made them memorize not the prayers, but Ershov's fairy-tale, and sacred history not from the book, but from his own poor, dead recital; the same was true of mathematics and spelling. It is impossible to knock it into the head of this unfortunate teacher of university . training that all the accusations of the rude peasants are a thousand times just; that a sexton teaches incomparably better than he; and that if he wants to teach, he can teach reading according to the *бук-аз-ба*, by making them memorize, and that in that way he could be of some practical benefit. Put the teacher with the university training had, to use his own words, studied the method of the Yasnaya Polyana school, which he for some reason wanted to take as a pattern.

Another example I saw in the county school of one of our capitals. After having listened with trepidation to the best pupil of the highest class, as he rattled off the waterways of Russia, and to another, in the middle class, who honoured us with the story of Alexander the Great, my companion, with whom I was visiting the schools, and I were on the point of leaving, when the superintendent invited us to his room to look at his new method of primary instruction, invented by him and in preparation for the press. " I have selected eight of the most indigent boys," he said to us, " and am experimenting on them and verifying my method."

We entered: eight boys were standing in a group. " Back to your places! " cried the superintendent, in the voice of the most ancient method. The boys stood in a circle in soldierly fashion. He harangued us for about an hour, telling us that formerly this beautiful sound method had been in use in the whole capital, but that now it was left only in his school, and that he wanted to resuscitate it. The boys were standing all the time. Finally, he took from the table a chart with the representation of c-a-t. " What is this ?" he said, pointing to cat. " Cow," replied a boy. " What is this ? - c." The boy said c. " And this is a, and this t, together - cat. Add mp to this, and you will get camp." The children had the greatest difficulty in reciting to us these memorized answers. I tried to ask them something new, but nobody knew anything but cat and cow. I wanted to know how long they had been studying. The superintendent had been experimenting for two years. The boys were between the ages of six and nine, - all of them wide-awake, real boys, and not dummies, but living beings.

When I remarked to the superintendent that in Germany the sound method was used differently, he explained to me that in Germany the sound method was unfortunately falling into disuse. I tried to convince him of the opposite,

but he, in proof of his idea, brought me from another room five German A B C's of the thirties and forties, composed by another than the sound method. We were silent and went away, while the eight boys were left to the superintendent to be further experimented upon. This happened in the fall of the year 1861.

How well this same superintendent might have taught these eight boys

reading, by putting them orderly at tables with ABC books and pointers, and even pulling their toplocks, just as the old deacon, who had taught him, had pulled his I How very, very many examples of such teaching according to new methods may be found in our day which is so prolific in schools, not to mention the Sunday schools that swarm with such inconsistencies!

And here are two other examples of an opposite character. In a village school, which was opened last month, I in the very beginning of the instruction noticed a sturdy, snub-nosed fourteen-year-old boy who, whenever the boys repeated the letters, kept mumbling something and smiling self-contentedly. He was not inscribed as a pupil. I spoke to him and found that he knew all the letters, now and then falling into buki, rtsy, and so forth; as with others, so he, too, was ashamed of it, supposing that it was prohibited and something bad. I asked him syllabication and he knew it; I made him read, and he read without spelling out, although he did not believe he could do it.

" Where did you study ?"

" In the summer I was with a fellow shepherd ; he knew, and he taught me to read."

" Have you au A B C book ?"

<< Yes."

" Where did you get it ? "

" I bought it."

" How long have you been studying ? "

"During the summer: I studied whenever he showed me in the field."

Another pupil of the Yasnaya Polyana school, who had studied before from a sexton, a boy ten years of age, once brought his brother to me. This boy, seven years old, read well, and had learned to do so from his brother during the evenings, of one winter. I know many such examples, and whoever wants to look for them among the masses will find very many such cases. What use is there, then, in inventing new methods and by all means abandoning the az-buki - ba, and to regard all methods as good except bukir az - ba ?

Besides all that, the Russian language and the Cyrillian alphabet surpass all the other European languages and alphabets by their distinctive features, from which must naturally spring the especial mode of teaching reading. The superiority of the Russian alphabet consists in this fact, that every sound in it is pronounced just as it is, which is not the case in any other language. Ch [which we throughout this work transliterate as tsK\ is pronounced tskhe, and not she, as in French, and not kite as in German; a is a, and not i, e, a, as in English; s is s, and c [f\$] is ts, and not ch and k, as

in Italian, not to mention the Slavic languages that do not possess the Cyrillian alphabet.

What, then, is the best method for teaching the reading of Russian ? Neither the newest sound method, nor the oldest of the* azcs, letter combination, and syllabication, nor the method of the vowels, nor Zdlotov's method. The best method for a given teacher is the one which is most familiar to the teacher. All other methods, which the teacher will know or invent, must be of help to the instruction which is begun by any one method. In order to discover the one method, we need only know according to what method the people have been studying longest; that method will in its fundamental features be most adapted to the masses. For us it is the method of letters, combinations, syllables, – a very imperfect one, like all methods,

and therefore capable of improvement by means of all inventions, which the new methods offer us.

Every individual must, in order to acquire the art of reading in the shortest possible time, be taught quite apart from any other, and therefore there must be a separate method for each. That which forms an insuperable difficulty to one does not in the least keep back another, and vice versa. One pupil has a good memory, and it is easier for him to memorize the syllables than to comprehend the vowellessness of the consonants; another reflects calmly and will comprehend a most rational sound method; another has a fine instinct, and he grasps the law of word combinations by reading whole words at a time.

The best teacher will be he who has at his tongue's end the explanation of what it is that is bothering the pupil. These explanations give the teacher the knowledge of the greatest possible number of methods, the ability of inventing new methods, and, above all, not a blind adherence to one method, but the conviction that all methods are one-sided, and that the best method would be the one which would answer best to all the possible difficulties incurred by a pupil, that is, not a method, but an art and talent.

Every teacher of reading must be well grounded in the one method which has been evolved by the people, and must further verify it by his own experience; he must endeavour to find out the greatest number of methods, employing them as auxiliary means; must, by regarding every imperfection in the pupil's comprehension, not as a defect of the pupil, but as a defect of his own instruction, endeavour to develop in himself the ability of discovering new methods. Every teacher must know that every method invented is only a step, on which he must stand in order to go farther; he must know that if he himself will not do it, another will assimilate that method and will, on its basis, go farther, and that, as the business of teaching is an art, completeness and perfection are not obtainable, while development and perfectibility are endless.

