




The School



The Teacher

OW much of the child's enthusiasm, or lack of it, to give up vacation rest and begin the school year depends upon the teacher! The teacher is the child's first object of study, and if it likes that great living book, there is a fair chance that the class-work will become attractive and enjoyable.

Learning and the other refinements of life are expensive, and the teacher must share the price with the pupils by her sympathetic service. She must stand over her children with a trusting hand that invites their confidence, and draw forth the hidden and often reluctant genius of every plastic little mind she shapes. Her power must be unquestioned, her influence assured. A well-exercised authority is as essential to her success as a competent judiciary is to a prosperous state. She must know first how to gain this supremacy and then how to hold it: by the practice of severity at times, but always with loving persuasion, forbearance, and gentleness of manners. Her own highmindedness and virtue, her reverence for law and religion must be communicated to her pupils. She will always be in close contact with her children; and if she fails in her duty, if she misguides the tender impulses or allows the seeds of indolence to enter and grow, it is judging her mildly to pronounce her entirely unworthy of her sacred duty.

The ways of learning are so tortuous and broken that even the well-tried halt and stumble at times. Surely then the little minds that are just beginning call for all the encouragement and inspiration which the teacher can give! She must try to understand their shortcomings, their mental inexperience, their natural love of play and freedom which, thank God, will persist in spite of every attempt to repress it. There are many things that may arise to hinder the pupils' best efforts: their physical handicaps, their illnesses, their work outside of school hours, sordid conditions of home which are so uninviting to study, the first claims of parents. To know each child and to appreciate

the fullness of its difficulties may require some breadth of mind and generosity of nature, but every teacher must have these qualities or she cannot succeed. In the school-room she must be careful to avoid sarcasm toward the less-gifted minds, and flattery toward the brilliant. The one hurts delicate feelings, the other gives occasion for unnecessary envy or notions of self-importance. She must learn the ability of her children and not expect more of them than the Lord Himself will demand accordingly as He has given the talents and the opportunities.

It is the duty of the teacher to instil a pleasurable and instinctive love of learning. She must make her lessons interesting, agreeable, even delightful. She must recognize what Pliny recognized two thousand years ago, that "where there is gayety, there is progress with the studies." But it is not an easy matter to interest children. The teacher must make an appeal to the very depths of their tiny minds to the farthest limits of their experiences, likes and preferences! This "interest" reaches into the recesses of the mind, unconsciously, by a word, look, or gesture. Its influence is aided by trifling suggestions, hints, diversions, momentary pauses, personalities. Its existence and persistency is more fully warranted by encouragement and sympathy which foster love and make the children devoted to their Minervan goddess. The teacher too must know when to stop, when the sands of youthful endurance have run out and the curve of fatigue has risen to the danger-mark.

To develop the habit of original thinking among her pupils, the teacher must keep their intellects fertile in bright ideas. The boy and girl who, as a result of their mental training, can produce new and refreshing thoughts, bear testimony of the highest order to the kind of education they have received, and the ability of the teacher in imparting it. To secure this originality it is necessary to suggest the children into expectant and energetic attitude of mind, to play upon their imaginations, to foster the natural mental processes that go on so quietly yet so surely beneath the surface of consciousness.

Above all, the teacher must remember that no education is complete which stops at the school-door. She must look to the future, by the care and exactitude with which she fashions and directs the character of each child that comes into her charge. For character, after all, is worth far more than knowledge. Yet she must aim to cultivate both.