

The Deaf Child at School.

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Parents of little deaf children are annually called upon to part from the most helpless of their family that the future life of their children may be lightened. When they have finally brought themselves to the point where they can consent to be separated from their children, and place them in the care of entire strangers, they can but trust their action may be for the best good of themselves and their children. Whatever the age of the child, it is like placing a helpless infant among strangers, to be at the mercy of the unkindly disposed, equally with those of the opposite temperament, and the entire care, responsibility, and training of the child is taken from them.

Persons who have had long experience in the education of the deaf can realize more clearly than the parents themselves what the change means to these afflicted children; how, barring inherited physical and mental traits, characteristics, and temperaments, the teachers of the deaf can make almost anything they wish of the children entrusted to their care. The average young deaf child is the merest infant, so far as mental development is concerned, and it is only in exceptional cases that the knowledge of right and wrong has been correctly developed in deaf children, or that they have been taught to distinguish between their own and others' personal rights, the "mine and thine." But this is one of the things they most quickly comprehend under right influence and guidance.

The only means by which most of them can assert their rights is by a fistie encounter with the party who is opposed to their personal view of matters. They have been almost absolute despots of their own homes and all connected with them, for it is easier to indulge the child than control it. The members of their own families dread them, while the neighbors have a horror of them, as a peculiar species of creatures of whom they are most thankful not to have the responsibility. Whole neighborhoods draw a united sigh of relief when some small terror, in spite of kicks, bites, and shrieks, has been safely placed on board the train that is to bear it away to a place where strangers, with kind fluniness, soon transform it into a child of whom none need be ashamed.

Do we ever fully realize what this sudden transition from home surroundings and home faces means to these helpless children?

Fortunately, children's spirits are buoyant and new interests help to dull the first pangs of homesickness, but while nostalgia endures it is a most distressing and depressing disease, and calls for the greatest patience and tenderness from those who have charge of the sufferers. Many a little one has sobbed itself to sleep and wakened suddenly in the night to a terrified remembrance of the strange faces and surroundings and a dreadful longing for home. Poor children! Innocent victims of accident, disease, or willful disregard of Nature's laws! "Do we believe God sends these children into the world without taking bond and security of those in whose care he places them? Or do we fancy that by accident the little ones are tumbled on to this 'sorrowful star,'—little treasures in earthen vessels to be scattered to the four winds, or gathered in the dust heap at last, and earth's none the brighter for their luminosity as they struggle and strive to shine through the cumulation of grime gathered in their unchecked, undirected wanderings?" asks a writer in the *Outlook*. They are in no way different from other children excepting in the lack of one important sense. Could they hear they would speak, for it is not often that the vocal organs are impaired also, yet the lack of the one faculty of hearing has completely cut them off from intercourse with their fellows. They enter our schools at the age of seven or eight, with minds almost as blank as that of an infant; their observation has been cultivated to some extent, they are capable of reasoning out simple phenomena of every day occurrences, and they have greater physical strength. Beyond that they differ

little in their mental development from a normal infant. Everything they learn is to come to them through the medium of their teachers and their associates, their sight must serve them a double purpose.

Why be surprised at their keenness of observation, or quickness in arriving at conclusions satisfactory to themselves, though oftentimes so erroneous.

These children with the purity and innocence of absolute ignorance, some of whom have lived lives almost as free as those followed by the birds and squirrels, are carried to a strange place, put among strange people, and for the first time in their existence learn that there is such a thing as obedience and that there are others like themselves, who obey willingly the unseen force which demands this obedience. Imitative, as all children are, our newcomers speedily fall into the daily routine with their companions and it is only upon rare occasions that the refractory spirit, so rampant at home, is in evidence at school.

Another thing they soon learn is the common mode of communication among their companions, and thus the most frequent and irritating cause of their insubordination is removed. Who is to blame if the child is not sent to school, and so comes to maturity a self-indulged, undisciplined nature, ready to add to the evil and disorder in the world?

One of the most interesting and wonderful things, to one who takes an interest in these children, is the marvellous change that comes over the small creature within a very few weeks after their admission to school. The dulness of expression vanishes, the listless, inert carriage, the wandering eyes all become things of the past which never return. Life becomes a delight and holds an object other than three meals a day.

Their introduction to the school room is a revelation, and, as time passes, the possibilities it presents to them fill them with an ambition to excel, even if it is for no more laudable an object than to beat one of their own classmates. The spirit of friendly rivalry is a commendable thing in a class or school, but that which emanates from unkind motives is a curse, and its contaminating influence will permeate an entire school unless checked in good time.

The children come to us equals. There is no social caste nor color line known to the existence of these children, but in course of time the superiors find their places and the inferiors sink to their proper level. This is one of Nature's laws. But just at this time one of the frailties of human nature becomes evident and favoritism begins to be shown. The superiority of certain children may be owing to one of three causes, natural endowments, superior home training and surroundings, or greater power of acquisition.

All of these are advantages much to be desired, but their possession should not blind those in charge of them to the rights and needs of their less fortunate companions.

Children are distressingly observant in some cases, and they speedily discover whether or not they are favorites and they are not slow in noting which are the preferred ones.

The first session or two, being the most democratic of mortals, they do not resent the evidence, but later they begin to draw invidious comparisons, with the result that they become quite discouraged in their efforts to equal those who have been placed above them, or they develop an active dislike and distrust of both the favorites and of those who single out individuals for marks of favoritism. They are not capable of reasoning out the why and wherefore of such treatment, though often from the point of view of thoughtless officers and teachers there may appear to be no valid objection to their course. Could these officers and teachers know all the heart burnings, jealousies, and intrigues their action gives rise to, they would never allow a suspicion of favoritism to gain ground from their treatment of those under their charge.

A school for the deaf conducted on the plan of the majority of such schools constitutes the home of a great family for one or ten months of the year. Within the four walls of this home should reign the greatest harmony. The first rule to be impressed upon all persons in authority therein should be absolute impartiality of treatment of the children committed to their care. The bright children should not have their superiority in that respect continually brought forward for parade, the dullards

should never see the name seriously applied to themselves, nor be made to feel their inferiority at every turn.

Call a child stupid and impress the fact upon its mind, and the chances are you will never receive from it a spontaneous and eager effort, give a clever child an exalted opinion of its own qualities and you speedily realize it from an innocent, if not little creature to an insolent young prig, whose prig-gishness does not grow less as its years increase. Give a child a bad character, and its companions will see to it that it lives up to the character for there is no human being quite so thoughtlessly brutal in its epithets as an indiscriminating deaf child and it is many years before some of them acquire any sense of tact or discrimination. The hours of torture that are inflicted upon these poor backward or indiscreet children by those who have been taught to consider themselves superior mortals can never be appreciated but by one who has suffered. Every fibre in their being revolts against an injustice, but they have neither the language nor the power to express themselves, so they suffer in silence. They may be slow of movement and slower of thought, but the injustice rankles and breeds distrust, which is the forerunner of a long train of evils that leave their impress on the innocent minds of the children, and influence their actions to a very considerable extent after life.

If Johnny is unusually dense one day is it any reason why he should be publicly labeled a dunce and made a target for ridicule within and without the school room? It does not brighten his face nor clear his befuddled mind, it adds no joy to his life, and certainly none to his feeling of regard for his teacher.

Because Mary is particularly clever is no reason she should be held up as a shining example to her less fortunate classmates rather let her think it is within their power to become like her by application and attention. Why should Mary be taught to consider herself infallible? It does not develop in her the virtues of humility nor modesty, nor does it awaken in her a greater ambition. Too much such teaching is sometimes indulged in, to the great detriment of a class. If favoritism is harmful in the school room, it cannot be otherwise outside. Those in authority in and out of school, should be of one opinion on the subject, and no discrimination what ever should ever be shown, excepting possibly in the case of age or illness.

Much more trouble is made by some of those who have been singled out for particular attentions than by any other class of children. The ingenious cruelty displayed by some children is beyond belief, unless one has had personal experience in dealing with them. It is not by physical methods that they claim attention. Having learned that what they say and do is generally considered right because of their recognized superiority, unprincipled children can create serious troubles, make life for their companions a very purgatory, undermine discipline and moral training, destroy reputations and spread discord right and left, with less fear and possibility of detection in their nefarious misdeeds than would seem possible at first thought. Until that disturbing element is discovered and summarily dealt with, the warfare is almost hopeless. Should they be seized with a desire to satisfy a spite upon one for whom they have no particular love or to revenge themselves for a fancied wrong, by a subtle but ingenious cunning they drop a word here and a criticism there, they make great show of secrecy and gather about them their particular enemies, who, hoping to be in favor by being intimate with them, listen willingly to the poisonous insinuations. Thus does the mischief breed and grow until all at once the unsuspecting victim is completely snared, with no clear idea of what it is all about. In situations, unnumbered, open insults, suggestive shrugs of shoulders and grimaces follow in quick succession until the victim is driven in self-defense to report to those in authority, or, if too diffident for that, to endure in an agonized silence what there seems to be no means of curing.

Too rarely does the instigator of all the mischief suffer the just penalty, for, with the cunning that characterizes the whole proceedings, the cat's paws are thrust forward to receive the punishment, they may deserve this, but their fault is by no means equal to that of their leader.

That deaf children are much more easily influenced by one of their own

number, whether it be for evil, is the consensus of opinion of prominent educators who spend the greater part of their lives among them.

Possibly one great reason may be due to the fact that they so constantly together, as many common bonds of interest have but little association with other than those who exercise authority over them. In fact there are persons who have affection nor sympathy for them, and a child is not slow to take a fact. Their natures crave sympathy and gentleness, and the flowers need light and water to blossom, and without these they show their most lovable traits.

Fear of punishment may keep these children from wrong, but the large majority of cases that will induce them to do wrong. They reason that a punishment is over, but the possibilities of favors open to them an extension of good things, which may be definite period. Some of them are sharp enough to know that those who promise favors in return for services chief and themselves secure a refusal to comply with their demands, the fulfillment of promises, they are unprincipled person is always ready and will fight until the last moment, separately to cover his retreat, and favor with those whom they wish to be most popular and exact the consequences of possible wrong consequences of their acts. Their lives are so circumscribed and their interests so narrow that the mere trifles of estimation, and they will insist on their certainty to be observed.

A school has its honor and they may be models of propriety and joy and delight, or they may be the opposite stamp.

An intelligent supervision of children out of school hours will not only but much incipient mischief in a mixed company which comprises the membership of our schools, but generally one or more of doubtful purity, who need very close watching that their evil inclinations do not become obtrusive and sordid in the minds about them. The training in morals and manners should be attended to outside of the school as within, but in neither place sarcasm or ridicule be tolerated in persons who can enforce discipline by other means than sarcasm or ridicule has no business with the education of children.

Persons who will thing into their poverty, personal malcontents, family affairs should be given a dose of their own medicine. Sarcasm is particularly reprehensible coming from a teacher, as the children make their teachers their models, and one who uses such methods to enforce discipline sows most dangerous seeds. Can they realize the enormity of an offence against the divine rights of a child? In a sudden passion a trifling mistake or indiscretion may have been cases where teachers and their reprobs used language upon the personal character of the less children as to cloud their memory years after passing from the room. The narrowness of their and the limited education of them seem to incline them to more deeply over an unkindness of justice than is the case among people, whose multitudinous claim their attention in other ways.

The deaf have an unfortunate reputation to resurrect old grievances and offences, and a child who has suffered public reproof from a teacher in which there has been even a liberate intention to degrade it by companions, has an almost ineradicable stigma cast upon its character, to be regretted that there is no prevent persons committing such pardonable offence against childhood, nor any that can hold responsible for the consequences of words. Children frequently require refection and reproof, but there is no reason why correction and should take the form of abuse or gradation. One can be both gentle, firm, strict and kind, and can order and command respect in either clays or an iron hand in velvet.—*The Annals*.