

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE CHILD IN THE MIDST.*

By Rev. W. D. Armstrong, D.D.

It makes a very great difference to a teacher as to the point of view from which he conceives his work and his preparation for that work. A teacher may say, "I am to teach the BIBLE, therefore, I must study that Book, I must know it altogether, I must know its history, its contents, the methods of its interpretation; I must study up the antiquities, the customs and manners of the people and a great many other things. I must know the Book I am going to teach." Or the teacher may say, "I am going to teach, and put an emphasis upon that word TEACH, and therefore I must study the Art of Teaching. I must take a course in Pedagogics, I must learn all about methods new and old in order that I may be a scientific teacher." Most assuredly our Sunday School teachers should not, if possible, lag behind any others in scientific methods and teaching. But the teacher may say, "I am going to teach children, I am going to teach the CHILD, I am going to teach the boy and the girl, and I must study the child, I must study the boy, I must study the girl, and I must know their characteristics, their dispositions, I must be able to adapt myself to them, and to adapt my teaching to them." Well, most assuredly, that is primarily necessary. We shall possibly say that all three are necessary. But this last is what I intend to emphasize.

One of these restless little lads of the city, in his curiosity, got in the way of a very busy man and annoyed him, and the man said: "Get out of my way, you little nuisance: I wonder what boys were made for!" The little lad looked up in his face and said: "I sav, mister, they make MEN out of little kids like us." There is the heart of the whole matter. What are little boys good for? To make good men of. And what are little girls good for? To make good women of. What are we for, as ministers and teachers, but to see that these little boys shall make good men and these little girls good women: and, therefore, we must study the child.

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I think it is the ground of very great hopefulness in the present day that so much attention has been turned to the child and to the study of the child and to the study of child nature. Never in all the history of mankind has there been so much attention given to the study of the child, and so we have men most scientifically studying the child. As soon as the child is born they will study how he may open his eyes, when he may show the first little spark of intelligence, when he first smiles back at his mother, when he first attempts to speak, when he first is able to make a perception of this thing and the other thing. Now, you say this child study is a fad? Yes, a fad, but it is a good fad, and whilst there are many things that are written that are not very wise, there is a great deal that is useful that tells us very much concerning the characteristics of the child. As some watch the processes to see how the grub is transformed into the butterfly, so they watch to see how the infant is transformed through the different states of childhood, boyhood and adolescence, up to perfect manhood. It is of very great value, and the Church of Christ is going to be a very great gainer when the

church puts the child in the midst, and thus studies the child. We have the child, and the child is to be educated and the child is to be developed. We consider the boy, the girl.

The greatest word in the vocabulary, so far as the boy or girl is concerned, is education. It covers everything, probably, that we may desire here this evening. Professor Butler has defined education as the adjustment to our spiritual possession, the gradual adjustment, say, of the child to the spiritual possessions of the race. That is a very good definition, and he gives us certain particulars in which this adjustment takes place. He enumerates them. The adjustment of the child to its scientific inheritance, to its literary inheritance, to its aesthetic inheritance, to its institutional inheritance, to its religious inheritance, and these cover very largely the education of the child. We are prepared to accept Professor Butler's definition; but we wish to infuse, perhaps, a little content he has not infused into it. If a child is to enter into his scientific inheritance, that is if he is to know something concerning the world into which he has come, something concerning this great universe that is around him, if he is to enter into that inheritance, he should enter into it also with the thought of the great God who made the world, the God who is working in every atom of the universe, and when he is beholding some of the grand forces and laws of nature he is to be told that these are the thoughts of God, and when he is searching into and finding out some great discovery, some things that are new, he must remember, as the great philosopher said, that he is but thinking God's thoughts after Him, and that God is everywhere, and if he sees grandeur and glory in the heavens, and grandeur in the earth, it is only that he may exclaim, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth is full of His goodness!" It is only thus that he is truly entering into his inheritance.

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If we turn to another portion, his literary inheritance, when we see a little one just beginning, how our hearts go out in sympathy for the little fellow that has to climb up that great hill of learning! In this leading of the child into his literary inheritance, that great Book of Books, that greatest classic of all literature of the world, the Bible, should have its place of pre-eminence, and the child should be led because of its literary merits and in a literary way into the beauties of that greatest literary production, if I may speak of it in that way. Why, where is there an educational book like the Bible? Where are there stories that can be told again and again to a child like the stories of the Bible? Where is there any book in the world that is so adapted, from a pedagogical standpoint, for drawing out and building up the child as the Bible? Was it any loss to Scotland that for many years the child's primer was the Book of Proverbs? The child began to learn in that Book of Proverbs, and he had to spell out such a sentence as this: "A-wise-son-maketh-a-glad-father," and sentence after sentence like that. I presume it had more to do with building the sturdiness and strength of their character than some of the modern sentences like, "The-cat-has-got-a-rat," or something like that. What I say is this, that the child should be led into the fullness of its literary inheritance, and here is this great Book with all its wonderful adaptations, with its passages of great

beauty and pathos and power, and it is an utter mistake in the education of the child and the education of the youth, that he should be enabled to pass through his whole curriculum without being thoroughly trained in the literature of the Bible.

Then here is the entrance into the aesthetic, that is the child is to be taught to recognize the beautiful, to see the beautiful, to enjoy the beautiful, to appreciate the beautiful—the beautiful in the sky, the beautiful in the glorious tinted landscape of the autumn. Why, as he enjoys them and is taught to enjoy them, is He who made beauty to be left out. He who painted these miles upon miles of glorious landscape these last few days, not to be thought of? I have stood before this thought of beauty trembling, and in wonderment. What is beauty? Whence did it come? Whose is it? I know of no interpretation of beauty, but this, that beauty is directly from God, whether it is beauty in the universe or beauty in the minds, in the human face, or beauty in character. God is the all-beautiful. Love makes us realize the nearness of God, the beautiful makes us realize the nearness of God, and we learn to appreciate the beautiful all the more when we feel that beauty must come directly from Him. I know of no other interpretation, and the child should be led into his inheritance of art, and into the inheritance of the beauty of nature with thoughts like these.

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Then, further and in a larger measure, the child is to be led into his great inheritance, the institutional inheritance. He is born into society. It was the great apostle who said that no man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself. The greatest of all institutions is the church, and the Christian child is born into the church, and into relationship to the church, and the Church of Christ should never let go the child for a single moment. The Church of Christ should never let any other institution get possession of the child. The Church of Christ should keep hold of the child from beginning to end, not merely by the Sunday school which is the great instrument, the arm of the church in taking hold of these children, but by every instrumentality possible. The child should be brought up right in the very heart of the church, belonging to the church, and never knowing anything else but that he did belong to it.

Then the child enters into his spiritual inheritance, and that is the last point following out this classification: The religious environment, the religious inheritance. Now, you will see that I have filled, as it were, all these departments, science, literature, aesthetics, the institutions with religion, because I hold this, that RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IS SIMPLY COMPLETE EDUCATION, and that no education is complete that is not religious. But there is then this distinct and this very definite education and training in religion. I read in a good authority, a man who said that the knowledge of the Bible was dying out of the schools entirely, and that even educated men whose privilege it was—I am not quoting the exact words—whose privilege it was to have this great literature of the Bible in their hearts as part of their possession, were ignorant of it. Now, then, if this is so, and I believe it is to a large extent so, if this is so, it is time the church woke up, it is time that the Sunday School become more alert, it is time for the Bible Schools to have all

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