

SCHOOL GOVERNMENT.

MEANS OF SECURING GOOD ORDER.

[Extracted from Page's *Theory and Practice of Teaching*, New Edition by W. H. Payne. By kind permission of the Publishers, Messrs. A. S. Barnes & Co., New York.]

I. BE CAREFUL AS TO THE FIRST IMPRESSION YOU MAKE. It is an old proverb, that "what is well begun is half done." This holds true in school-keeping, and particularly in school-government. The young study character very speedily and very accurately. Perhaps no one pupil could express in words an exact estimate of a teacher's character after a week's acquaintance; but yet the whole school has received an impression which is not far from the truth. A teacher, then, is very unwise who attempts to *assume* to be any thing which he is not. He should ever be frank; and in commencing a school he should begin as he can hold out. Any assumption of an authoritative tone is especially ill judged. The pupils at once put themselves in an attitude of resistance, when this is perceived by them.

A teacher should ever remember that among children—however it may be among adults—*respect* always precedes *attachment*. If he would gain the love of the children, he must first be worthy of their respect. He should therefore act deliberately, and always conscientiously. He should be firm, but never petulant. It is very important at the outset that he should be truly courteous and affable. It is much wiser to request than to command, at least until the request has been disregarded. There are usually two ways of doing a thing,—a gentle and a rough way. "John, go and shut the door," in a gruff tone, is one way to have the door closed. John will undoubtedly go and shut the door—perhaps with a *slam*,—but he will not thank the teacher for the rough tones used in commanding it. Now it costs no more time or breath to say, "John, I'll thank you if you will shut that door." Most cheerfully will John comply with the request, and he is grateful that he has heard these tones of kindness. If he could but know the teacher's wishes afterward, he would gladly perform them unasked. I would by no means recommend the adoption of the fawning tone of the sycophant, by the teacher. He should be manly and dignified; but the language of that courtesy which springs from real kindness, and which ever becomes the gentleman, is always the most suitable as well as most expedient to him.

II. AVOID EXHIBITING OR ENTERTAINING A SUSPICIOUS SPIRIT. It is a maxim of law, that one charged with crime is always to be presumed innocent, until *proved* guilty. This should be a maxim with the teacher who would govern well. There is no more direct way of making a school vicious, than by showing them that you suspect they are so. A good reputation is dear to all; and even a bad boy will be restrained from wicked acts as long as he thinks you give him credit for good intentions. But if he finds that he has lost your good opinion, he feels that he has nothing further to lose by being as bad as you suspect him to be. A teacher is wise, therefore, if he tries to see something good even in a vicious pupil. It may be, as it often has been, the means of saving such a pupil. I have known a very depraved boy entirely reformed in school, by his teacher's letting him know that he had noticed some good traits in his character. He afterward told his teacher that "he had been so often suspected to be a villain, that he had almost come to the conclusion that he would be one; but that, when he found one man who could do him the justice to give him credit for a few good feelings—for he knew he had them—he at once determined to show that man that his confidence had not been misplaced; and that he would sooner die than knowingly offend the only person who ever had understood him."

It is wise sometimes, not only to withhold the expression of suspicion, but give some token of our confidence to the pupil who is troublesome. Intrust him with some errand involving responsibility, or assign to him some duty by way of assistance to yourself, and very likely you will gain his good-will over after. This is founded upon the well-known principle in human nature acted upon by Dr. Franklin, who, when he would gain his enemy, asked him to do him a favor.

III. AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, GIVE REGULAR AND FULL EMPLOYMENT. It is an old proverb that "idleness is the mother of mischief." The nursery hymn also contains a living truth—

"And Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

It is the law of a child's nature to be active; and as the teacher is placed in the school to give direction to such minds, he can hardly complain of their going upon forbidden objects, unless he seasonably provides something better for them to do.

Very early, then, the teacher should endeavor to classify his school, and furnish constant and full employment—whether of study, recitation, or relaxation—for every hour in the day. The teacher should have a plan when he opens the school, and the sooner it is carried into full operation the better.* Besides, when a teacher has given employment, he has a right to insist upon the pupil's being engaged in study. No one will question this *right*; and it is far more profitable to require a positive duty than to enjoin a negative,—such as abstinence from whispering or from mischief in general.

IV. MAKE BUT FEW RULES. It is a very common thing for teachers to embarrass themselves by a long code of requirements and prohibitions. Some go so far as to write out a system of laws; and, annexing to each the penalty for its infringement, post them up in a conspicuous place in the school-room. Others content themselves with a verbal announcement of them, and rely upon the memories of the pupils to retain the details of them and to govern themselves accordingly. This, it seems to me, is a great mistake. The multiplicity of specific rules for the government of a school, will naturally lead to a multiplicity of offences. Children will be confused by the varying and sometimes conflicting demands of a formidable code of regulations, and in endeavoring to avoid Scylla will be likely to fall into Charybdis. It is believed by some honest statesmen that "the world has been governed too much"; and it is often alleged in support of this belief, that successful compliance with the laws requires far more wisdom than was displayed in making them; that is, the *science of obedience* is far more abstruse than the *science of legislation*! Whether this be true in the civil world or not, I shall not attempt to decide; I will only say that such has too often been the fact in the school-room.

It is, in my opinion, the part of wisdom, and I think also the teaching of experience, that it is best to make but few rules. The great rule of duty, quoted once before, "Do unto others as you would that they should do to you," comprises quite enough to begin with. The direction—Do *RIGHT*, is a very comprehensive one. There is in children an ability to distinguish between right and wrong, upon which the teacher may ever rely; and by insisting upon this as the standard, he daily brings into exercise the conscience of the child, who is called upon to decide, *is this right?* Besides, if a school is to be governed by a code of laws, the pupils will act upon the principle that *whatever is not prescribed is admissible*. Consequently, without inquiring whether an act is right, their only inquiry will be, *is it forbidden?* Now, no teacher was ever yet so wise as to make laws for every case; the consequence is, he is

* See Chap. xi. of this work.