

—In the Foster National competition in writing in the schools of Great Britain and Ireland, the highest four prizes were awarded to Irish girls. The first prize has been won by a girl every time for ten years, with one exception.

Contributions and Correspondence.

OVER-PRESSURE IN EDUCATION.

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The re-opening of the schools after the summer vacation is an opportune time to consider the causes of the alleged over-pressure on pupils, and to suggest some way in which it can be beneficially relaxed.

It cannot be denied but that the utterances of eminent physicians on this subject are justly founded on the practice of carrying out too rigidly a prescribed programme, regardless of the physical condition or health of the pupils, or of hygienic causes which, to a professional eye, would sufficiently account for the general listlessness and apathy of the school children. When these things are unobserved by the unpractised, or are overlooked by the trustees and teacher who know something of the matter, the results are, as might be expected, in both cases, highly pernicious.

It cannot, however, be doubted but that much of the ill effects of over-pressure on pupils is due to want of information as to the natural laws which unerringly govern in such cases. It is nevertheless true that even when these laws are understood by the teacher, he is not always, but he is often powerless to give them effect. The ill-ventilated school houses in some localities, and the over-crowded school rooms, with the consequent imperfect classification of the pupils, render it, in a large number of cases, utterly impossible for teachers to give more than a theoretical assent to the principles laid down for their guidance by medical men. They entirely despair in such cases of the opportunity to give them practical effect, and hence the perpetual outcry against teachers for not doing what, either the thoughtlessness of the school authorities, on the one hand, or their parsimony or ignorance, or both combined, on the other, render it impossible for them to do. It is, however, greatly in the power of judicious teachers to mitigate the evils complained of.

The defects and carelessness in school management to which medical men have called attention, may be classified under the three heads of long lessons, long school hours, and an indiscriminate and thoughtless pressure on all pupils alike. Others add to these a pernicious system of discipline, and a no less injudicious system of rewards and punishment. As this latter is, however, a subject which involves the consideration of the personal and moral qualification of a teacher for his high office, we shall not now enter upon it.

With a view to furnish specific information on the subject, as well as a few practical hints to teachers on this important question of over-due pressure on pupils, I prefer to quote the opinions of eminent medical men, rather than to indulge in any reflections of my own. Not only have leading physicians in our own country called frequent attention to the grave questions of over-pressure, but several distinguished writers in England and the United States have uttered words of warning which should not be disregarded by teachers. Of these latter, one of the most noted and practical is Dr. Richardson, of London. In an able lecture on "Learning and Health," he deals with the general question under the heads of *Education in Childhood* and *Education in Boyhood and Girlhood*. I propose under each of these heads to give a few extracts contain-

ing some hints of practical application to the subject in hand. Dr. Richardson under the first heading says :

"The first serious and increasing evil bearing on education and its relation to health lies in too early subjection of pupils to study.

"For children under seven years of age, the whole of the teaching that should be naturally conveyed should be through play, if the body is to be trained up healthily as the bearer of the mind.

"It is in this period that education is too often made for the first time to stand at variance with health. It is in this period that the enforced lesson so often harasses, wearies, and at last darkens the mind. It is in this period that the primary fault is committed of making play a set-off against work, and a promise of a good game an inducement for the persistence in hard labour.

"What is constantly attempted to be taught in this period of life is the saddest detail. I have known a regular imposition of work per day, equal to the full complement of natural work for many a man or woman. There are schools in which children of eight, nine, and ten years of age,—and, it may be, younger children still,—are made to study from nine o'clock till noon, and again, after a hasty meal and an hour for play, from two to five in the afternoon, and later on are obliged to go to lessons once more, preparatory for the following day.

"If you inquire as to the sleep these children get, you will hear that it is disturbed, restless, and often broken. In a healthy child the sleep comes on irresistibly at an early hour, and when the eyes are shut and the body composed, and sleep is carried out till waking time without a movement of position of the body. You ask the healthy child about his sleep, and he says that he is simply conscious of having closed his eyes and opened them again. But these unhealthy, overtaught children have no such elysium. They sleep perchance to dream; passing through strange abodes and narrow crevices which it seems impossible to squeeze into, and waking with a start, in what is commonly called a nightmare. The bad sleep naturally leads to a certain over-wakeful languor the next day; but strangely enough, it interferes with the natural advent of sleep the next night, so that sleeplessness at night becomes a habit. The child must be read to sleep, or told stories until it is off; and thus it falls into slumber fed with the food of dreams, worries, cares, and wonders.

"For fourteen years of my life I was physician to one of the hospitals in this metropolis, in which so many of those who are afflicted with consumption find their way. Twice, and occasionally three times a week, the duty of inquiry into the origin of this disease came to my share of professional work. The field of operation was extensive, and no fact was yielded in it so definitely as this fact, that the larger portion of the consumptive population has been brought up in close school-rooms, where the hours were far too prolonged, and then in close rooms at home, where other work, in confined space, filled up the remaining life time. For such a state of things there are no insurmountable difficulties to improvement. An intelligent public demand for improvement would very soon lead to an extension of what are called garden-schools for the young, in which teaching by amusing lessons or games of learning, in a pure air, and ample space, would secure all the advantages which are now so much desired. In our large and splendid town and city schools, which are becoming distinct and beautiful social features of the age, something of this system is approached, if not attained."

A practical solution of the difficulty of dealing satisfactorily with the question of "Home Lessons" was adopted some time since in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was there arranged that the whole of the forenoon should be devoted to school recitation, and the afternoon to the explanation of the next day's lesson, with directions as to "how to study" it. The result was, we believe, highly satisfactory. At all events, it greatly lightened the dreary labor of poring over the next day's lessons during hours when the pupil should have been enjoying reasonable recreation and the pleasures of home.

Under the second heading of *Education in Boyhood and Girlhood*, Dr. Richardson speaks with gravity and directness. He says :

"The period of life (from eleven to sixteen or seventeen years of age) is in many respects extremely critical. The rapid growth of the organs of the body; the still imperfect and imperfed condition of the most vital organs; the quick changing and yet steadily developing form of mind; and not to name other peculiarities, the intensity of feeling in the way of likes and hates—all these conditions, physical and mental, make this stage of a human career singular, both to disorders of a functional or even of an organic kind.

"The lines of error carried out in this period are in three directions at least, all tending to impair the healthy and natural growth. The first of these errors is over-work, which is often useless over-work. The second is deficient skill or care in detecting the natural character of ability; in other words, the turn of mind, and, it may be said, capability of the