

The Interests of Beginners

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INHERITED INTERESTS

Boys and girls have, to begin with, certain *inherited* interests out of which *special* or *acquired* interests grow; and, in making a study of interest, we must at the outset find out what these natural or "inherited" interests are.

INTEREST AND INSTINCT

All children begin life with certain inborn tendencies to action, which we call *instincts*. At one period in our life, for example, the fighting instinct is strong within us; at another, the collecting instinct; at another, the altruistic instinct, which makes us think of the happiness of others. For the time being, when these instincts are strong within us, they seem to us to be the only thing worth while, and this feeling that we have regarding them in each case is a natural interest. Instincts do not all appear at the same time, but develop at different periods of life when they are called forth by our bodily needs; and so, likewise, it follows that our natural *interests* change from time to time as different instincts develop. If the instinct dies out, the interest dies with it, and once the natural period for its development is past, it is difficult to create an interest.

If the instinct for hunting and fishing, for example, does not get a chance to develop at the proper period of boyhood, it is not likely that the grown man in later years will show any special interest in these things. It is of value to the teacher, then, to know just what instincts and interests to look for at a certain period in the child's growth; for, under proper conditions, it is possible, to some extent at least, to adapt the lesson to the particular interests of the child.

At the age of four or five the child begins to attend Sunday School, and up to the age of six or seven, he remains under the care of the teacher in the Beginners grade. He has, by the time he has reached his fourth year, passed the period of infancy. He is now growing rapidly, and is active in his bodily movements. His acquaintance with the world about him is limited for the most part to the familiar objects around his own home; but his senses are keen, and he is eager to know all about the people and things which he sees in the outside world.

CURIOSITY

This eagerness to examine and explore and find out for himself we usually speak of as curiosity. The child's curiosity shows itself, not only in the questions which he asks, but in his desire to touch, taste, smell and feel for

himself. And very often his curiosity leads him to imitate the actions of others, just because he wishes to know for himself what it *feels* like to do these things.

"MAKE-BELIEVE"

One of the most common forms of imitation is the one which is usually spoken of as "make-believe." When grown-up people indulge in make-believe, they speak of acting out a play or drama; and the child's make-believe is just a piece of dramatic acting in which he identifies himself with the person or thing that he imitates. The make-believe drama is the way which the child takes to satisfy his curiosity regarding the outside world. The little girl who serves make-believe tea to her dolls is, of course, merely imitating her mother. It is the same with the boy who drives imaginary horses or plays the part of a storekeeper or a policeman or a fire-engine or a runaway horse.

But, fortunately, in most cases, the child's make-believe serves other purposes besides giving free play to his powers of imitation. Most of these make-believe games provide a means both for bodily exercise and companionship with other children. Indeed, if there are no other children for the child to play with, he is pretty sure to create out of his fancy an unseen playmate who is almost as real to his childish imagination as a brother or sister in actual flesh and blood.

We often hear it said of children in this make-believe stage, that they have strong imaginations; but that is hardly the proper way to put it. The truth of the matter is, that the world is still very vague to them, and they are equally ready to listen to impossible tales of fairies and giants and talking animals and to make up impossible stories of people and things in the world as they know it.

"STORIES" AND "LIES"

The boundary line between these vivid mental pictures and their real experiences is so shadowy that the two are confused in his mind, with the result that the child tells and himself believes "stories" which staid old-fashioned grown-ups, who never were children themselves, are almost sure to denounce as "lies."

I once knew a teacher who was very angry with the principal of her school because he would not allow her to punish a six-year-old boy for telling "stories;" but the principal in this case was much wiser than she.

Just because the child lives in this world of make-believe, he requires very little in the way of toys to amuse him. It is the spirit