

SCHOOL WORK.

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THE RECESS QUESTION.

THE recess question has been much discussed of late, and many schools have adopted the plan of shortening the school session, and giving up the recess altogether. There are two sides to the question, of course, and some strong arguments can be brought to bear from both points of view.

On the one hand, it is claimed that the recess is an actual injury to the health of children, especially in the winter time, when it is the cause of many and serious colds. The children often injure themselves and each other by reckless, boisterous play, the strong boys choose this time to bully and torment the weak boys, and five-sixths of the cases of discipline that worry the life out of the teacher can be directly traced to quarrels begun at recess. The opportunities for the bad children to contaminate the good, moreover, would be very greatly lessened by doing away with the general recess.

There is much force in these arguments, but there is something to be said on the other side.

In the first place, children need during their study this short interval of relaxation. It is absolute rest from work, for no healthy child ever thinks of anything during the intermission except how he can get the most play into the few minutes granted. Every teacher knows that the last hour of the school session is a most intolerable and profitless drag if the recess has been omitted. The scholars cannot or will not study or recite during that time, and it is impossible to induce them to give their minds to any labour. The teacher must spend his time trying to amuse them, a task peculiarly hard upon nerves and patience. Of course with the total abolition of the recess comes a much shortened session, but it is doubtful, unless the school hours are very much cut down, if as much work can be done, especially in the intermediate grades, as formerly. The

needed relaxation in the midst of work has been sought in an intermission devoted to gymnastic or calisthenic exercises, but this is too much like work to serve the purpose.

The arguments concerning the troubles caused by the recess is answered by the plea that the play-ground is the scene on which the individuality of youth is most likely to develop, and the opportunity given to it cannot wisely be lost. Here if the big boy is tyrannical, the little boys can combine against him. And if the teacher is often harassed by cases of ill-behaviour on the play-ground, he is compensated by thus learning more about the real character of his pupils in half an hour than he could learn in the routine of school-work in a month.

It is replied to the plea that the recess affords an occasion for the spread of bad morals, that this opportunity is afforded still more abundantly by the streets. That in a well-governed school this exists in but a slight degree, and that the absorption of the children's thoughts in their sports renders their tendency to impart evil ideas, habits or language to their companions to a minimum.

There are good arguments, it will be seen, on both sides. The value of the recess, as affording a short time of absolute relaxation is the strongest argument in its favour. The fact that it is a cause of innumerable disciplinary troubles is the very strongest one against it. The claim that it is a source of contamination, some teachers may not admit, but we think the preponderance of evidence seems to show this to be true.

We think the no-recess plan will work better in the higher and the primary schools than in the intermediate department. Little children do not study enough to need recess, and, besides, it can be made up to them by indoor amusements. With older pupils, too, the recess is hardly needed. We would like to hear from some teacher who had tried the no-recess plan, giving some details of its practical working.—*Ex.*