

Primary Schools.

From the port of Rochefort, in the west of France, on the 17th of June, 1816, there sailed an expedition, bound for the colony of Senegal, on the western coast of Africa. This colony had been captured from the French, by British power, in 1809, and ceded back again by the conditions of peace which were agreed upon in 1815. The squadron fitted out for this expedition consisted of four vessels; the principal of them was the *Medusa*, a frigate of forty-four guns. On board this vessel were the governor, his chief associates in office, a considerable number of soldiers, besides a large number of women and children. The whole number of individuals in the frigate was four hundred. The command of this vessel was entrusted to Captain Lachanmareys. He was remarkable for his ignorance of seamanship, cruelty of disposition, and a firmness, which, coalescing with his other qualities of mind and heart, was nothing less than wilful obstinacy. Wise in his own conceit and indisposed to heed the advice and warnings of others, as ignorant men are prone to be, he persisted in a careless management of the frigate. Paying no attention to the admonitory signals, which were given by another vessel of the squadron, and intended to warn him that the course which he was pursuing would bring him upon dangerous shoals, he soon lost sight of the other vessels of the expedition, and, in a few days, the dingy, sandy coloring of the water gave unmistakable evidence that real danger was close at hand. The stupid captain, being at length aroused from his stolid and reckless indifference, gave orders to change the ship's course. But the time when human effort and skill could avail had passed. A sudden shock assures all on board that their worst fears are realized; deep in the sands of the shoals the vessel is immovably fixed. Then followed a catalogue of woes, that makes the heart shudder to read—watery graves, starvation, maddening thirst, mutinies, and the development of fiendish passions to which human beings fall victims by scores.

I have thus briefly sketched this historical incident because it seems to me to illustrate, truthfully, the almost reckless indifference, with which, in educational matters, the most sacred trusts are committed to incompetent and inexperienced hands. With a skillful captain, one, who by tact and education had become master of his profession, the *Medusa* would, doubtless, have sailed safely into her destined port. The dreadful wreck was the result of no defect in the ship, and of no violent storms. How many men are wrecked upon the shoals and quicksands of life, because of the wrong direction given them in the earliest years of life's voyage!

The foundation of the character of the future man is laid while the boy is attending the Primary school. Every one knows that susceptibility to the influences which affect the conduct decreases with the increase of years, but all do not so fully believe that the influences which operate upon the child of a few years are wont to give decided and permanent direction to character. I doubt whether parents often think it possible, that the intellectual habits which their child may form before he is eight years of age, may practically determine whether that child shall be a dolt or an enthusiast in science. Yet all this is often true; I do not say always. This, however, cannot be controverted; all the teachings of the Primary school will inhere in the future character, intellectual, moral, and religious; they can no more be eradicated than the crooked and ungainly oak can be straightened so that its fibres and layers shall tell no tale of the early bending of the pliant twig. Is it, then, a trivial question, who shall have the training of twenty, thirty, fifty, or a hundred pliant men and women twigs? Is it just, is it rational, that any one should thoughtlessly, without fitness and without experience, assume a trust so laden with momentous consequences? No one ought to commence a Primary school without an adequate appreciation of the great responsibilities that are to be assumed, and of the controlling and far-reaching influences, for good or for evil, which he will inevitably exert.

If it be absolutely necessary that one should have clearly before him a high and correct standard, in order that he may secure any kind of excellence in his own personal attainments, it is equally indispensable that teachers should keep continually before themselves a high, correct and symmetrical standard of the combined excellences, such a combination of excellences as will constitute a noble and influential character; to this standard they should aim to bring all their pupils.

The next indispensable requisition in the teacher, is, ability to govern properly. I think it doubtful whether the qualities which constitute such ability can be very satisfactorily presented by any method of sharp analysis and synthesis. It seems to be a spontaneous force of manly development and symmetry. A very eccentric person is rarely, if ever, a good disciplinarian. We may

safely assert, then, that the teacher must have genuine integrity, or, as it is sometimes termed, weight of character, and a sound, practical mind. The whole list of virtues is very needful, but without some of them, which may be readily named, the teacher can do nothing. There must be patience to endure perplexities; patience to repeat and unfold truths that appear very simple, until sleepy minds are awake enough to catch a glimpse of them; patience to work and wait months for results that you wish to accomplish in a day. To patience we must add firmness, that healthful, wholesome kind which is not liable to be mistaken for obstinacy; a steady, persistent adhesion to a carefully considered purpose, which is based upon a settled conviction that the end sought is the Good and the True. To firmness we must add cheerfulness. This is spontaneous when, within self, evil has been overcome and moral harmony restored. It is certain that moroseness or ill-humor, in any degree, is contagious, and if its opposite is not equally so, experiment has already proved that it is not entirely incapable of diffusion. Cheerfulness lubricates both the physical and mental systems, causing both to run much more swiftly, smoothly, and with exemption from harsh grating and wear. To cheerfulness add kindness. This virtue is more active and positive than the preceding. Let the teacher but make an unmistakable impression on a school that their happiness, as well as their highest excellence, is heartily desired, and that teacher wields over those scholars a wand more magical than birch or hickory.

A good teacher will possess a ready faculty of imparting knowledge in such a way as to create and stimulate a healthful mental appetite. To be lavish in the presentment of valuable truth, when there is no inclination to receive and devour it, argues a lack of sense, to say nothing of economy. Such ability implies some knowledge of mind, some understanding of the order in which the mental faculties are naturally and properly unfolded, some acquaintance with the relative capability of these faculties in the different stages of their development. If all teachers entered the school-room thus prepared, great evils, that are now very prevalent, would be rapidly corrected. In the young child both body and mind are exceedingly active, but both alike are incapable of constrained and protracted exercise; variety and activity are indispensable to the healthful condition of both. The teacher who attempts to keep the young child in a single rigid posture, for any considerable length of time, sins against the laws of nature; it is an equal violation of the same sacred laws to attempt to chain the young mind to continuous intellectual effort. It has been said that this is an age of compromises. Perhaps this prevalent spirit of the times has exerted an influence in the schools. Many teachers seem to have let themselves half-way down to childhood, and are expecting that childhood will meet them there. They are willing to be simple in their behavior, and to use simple text-books, but they require their youngest scholars, unaided, to abstract their lessons from the printed page, while the recitation is merely a dry, verbal repetition of the contents of the book, unqualified by any comment or illustrations. To expect that youthful minds will develop healthfully and thrifflily under such treatment argues a lack of reason and common sense. You might as well expect that the delicate plant that demands your daily nursing, would still thrive and produce its beautiful blossoms, when transplanted from the green-house to the arid sands of the African desert. Children love to learn, and are quick to perceive and grasp new truth, if it be rightly presented. The power of abstraction is not developed, but the senses are all awake, and their exercise affords peculiar pleasure. Before the child we should hold up truth in its objective forms, not enveloped in mist, but clear and bright, fresh from an appreciative mind. Curious and wonderful facts culled from the book of nature, facts about stones, trees, plants, flowers, insects, birds, fishes, animals of every species, are proper and useful themes for familiar discourse. Let the teacher be intelligently communicative upon such topics, adopt such methods of review and examination as will fasten in the mind the information given; then may he expect that his pupils will be bright scholars, and parents will be relieved from the task of driving their children to school.—*N. H. Journal of Education.*

The Teacher's Library.

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