

On the Use of Stimulants in Schools.

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In the pursuit of any monotonous avocation the benefit of an occasional and safe stimulant will hardly be questioned. My object at this time is to draw attention to some, which, under proper restrictions, may be useful in our schools; and to which so used, no reasonable exception can be taken. The nature of one's ordinary business does often tell on the individual; then a safe stimulant may come seasonably to his relief. Scholars may be plodding along diligently, yet languidly, who, by such means, may be roused to more active and hopeful efforts. Under due regulations at such times, a right stimulant may prove of real value. In what follows, I desire simply to refer to certain stimulants, which, when prudently taken advantage of, may, I think, at certain seasons, be found exceedingly useful.

1st. — Justifiable self-approval in the discharge of duties assigned, is exceedingly valuable, but in all circumstances this may not be of itself sufficient to sustain everyone. The merited approbation of those whom we value and esteem, exhibited in a direct, marked, and open manner, will often act as a yet more powerful stimulant to continued exertion. Coming into daily contact with pupils of all temperaments, it must be no easy matter for a teacher to avoid the error of doing most for those of his scholars who really need his help and sympathy least; bestowing most attention on promising and satisfactory pupils, while those who are naturally possessed of less amiable or hopeful traits of character may get but a small portion of such treatment as might place them more on a level with the others. Is it not the case that what is awarded to such scholars by way of encouragement is frequently given as if it were more than their due, while the error and blame probably belong to the teacher, who, if he recognizes, fails to make allowance for inevitable difference of conduct, and mode or degree of effort in those of dissimilar dispositions. By sympathy, and by a certain amount of assistance, varying in degree according to the circumstances of the particular case, a good and wise teacher will seek to arouse dormant sensibilities, which, when once awakened, may lead the scholar honestly to endeavor to improve. Unmerited praise should certainly never be given; but even the least amiable or praiseworthy may be made to feel that there is praise even to them, if they only choose: that they will be more than met in advances to improvement, welcomed in the first steps to diligence, aided in any honest, however feeble effort to do well. The same difference, however, that may be found among scholars in respect of natural disposition and temperament, will be observed among teachers; and to one class, the employment of the mode now recommended may be greatly more difficult than to those of another class. A bright eye, a cheerful demeanor, and a frank, open disposition, may be altogether foreign to some teachers; they may regard such characteristics of others as wholly beyond their control or attainment. They are, in fact, natural gifts, but may to some extent be secured by anyone who is really desirous to have them. Can the teacher, I ask, however unexceptional in mental or moral qualifications, who cannot say a kind word to his scholars, or look pleasantly on them, or make the very smallest allowance for some of their youthful indiscretions,

be really fitted in a very important respect for the responsible position he holds? If he has not mistaken his profession, has he not at least a very inadequate idea of all its real requirements, which has prevented his seeking to correct or overcome certain peculiarities of disposition, which must be serious obstacles to his highest success as a teacher?

2nd. — A very common stimulant, and one which has official sanction and recommendation, is the bestowal of prizes on scholars who are judged to deserve them. I think the question of expediency or non-expediency in this respect should not be settled in any case on general grounds. One cannot deny that there may be risk of evil where only good is sought. If envious and jealous feelings are excited in the breasts of some who do not succeed; if others are discouraged and led to relax efforts they had previously been making with some degree of benefit to themselves; if a boastful, bragging spirit of superiority is assumed by successful candidates; if dishonest practices have been resorted to without detection in the effort to secure prizes; if the idea, however unfounded, has gone abroad that partiality has been exercised in their bestowal; if it has been scarcely possible to make allowance for the particular circumstances of some competitors; where this has been the result of an honest effort to benefit the scholars by this means I should be disposed to say, the practice might thereafter for a while be more honored "in the breach than the observance." We know that envy, jealousy and ill-will do sometimes arise, and we are not always ready to rejoice in another's gratification, if we appear to suffer by it, and those who are awarded honors, be they young in years or more advanced, are not on all occasions known to bear such honors with extraordinary humility. In addition to this, approbation does sometimes run no small risk of diverging into partiality, and disapprobation into prejudice; combat these feelings as he may, and do the best he can, a teacher cannot in some cases, when awarding prizes, make the allowance he should for disadvantages some of his scholars, owing to no fault of their own, have labored under. I have mentioned several cases where evil rather than good might result from giving prizes, and would give these their due weight while feeling that the evils complained of are on many occasions either altogether imaginary, or at least unduly magnified. However this may be, it is sometimes wise, by a little self-denial, to prevent allegation as facts of frequent and necessary occurrence, of what may be merely exceptional and possible to be guarded against. There is one reason for questioning in some cases the good effects of the practice, the undoubted fact, that distinctions obtained in this way are sometimes of little real value to their possessors, in consequence of their not having been secured by habitual application, but by a spasmodic effort without any determination or perhaps even thought of keeping up to the standard temporarily aimed at, still less of aspiring in consequence any higher. An indirect benefit from the bestowal of prizes where we do not feel inclined to give the practice a cordial and unqualified sanction may be found in its leading teachers to keep a record of their scholars' daily standing in their studies. The main object may be in many cases to ward off possible exceptions, and secure a greater measure of fairness in the bestowal of prizes. The design is good, and is even laid down officially as indispen-