

son who is generally reputed to have been the master of this art was Socrates. The chief purpose of his dialogues, which Plato and Xenophon have handed down to us, was to clear men's minds of illusions, and of the impediments to learning, and to put them into the best attitude for receiving knowledge and for making a right use of it, rather than to give them definite dogmas, or authoritative statements of truth. He aimed to shew that there were latent difficulties in many things which seemed very simple; that plausible and well-sounding general propositions admitted of exceptions and qualifications which were often unsuspected; and that, till these things had been recognized, and carefully examined, it was premature to dogmatize about them.

In like manner we shall do wisely as teachers, if we seek, before giving a new lesson, to ascertain by means of questions what previous knowledge exists, and what misconceptions are in the minds of our pupils on the subject we want to explain. Doing this serves two purposes. It reveals to you the measure of the deficiency you have to supply, and it awakens the sympathy and interest of the pupil by shewing him what he has to learn.

The first requisite of a question is that it should be in perfectly clear, simple language, the meaning of which admits of no mistake. It should be expressed in as few words as possible consistent with this. I heard a man questioning a class the other day in physical geography. He said: "Where do you expect to find lakes? For instance, you know the difference between a chain and a group, don't you? Well, you know the water comes down the side of a mountain, and must go somewhere. What is a lake?"

Here are four sentences, and two totally different questions. The questioner knew what he wanted, but while he was speaking it dawned upon him

that he might make it clearer, so he interposed a little explanation, and ended by putting a different question. It was amusing to see the puzzled and bewildered looks of the children, as they listened to this, and to many other of the like clumsy and inartistic questions. In this particular case he should have shewn a drawing or a little model of a chain of mountains, and then have asked them to tell him what became of the streams that rolled down into a plain. Soon he would have elicited a good general notion of the course of rivers as determined by a watershed. Then he should have asked what would happen if the mountains were not in a chain but in a group, so that when the water rolled down one side it could not get away but was stopped by another mountain. "What becomes of the water?" It must stop in the valleys. "And when water remains in a valley, what do we call it?" A lake. "Now tell me what a lake is."

Let me warn you also to avoid the habit of introducing your questions with such expletives as "Can any one tell me?" "Which of you know?" "Will those hold up their hands who can answer?" Strip your question of all such verbiage, and say plainly what you want. Practise yourself in economising your words and reducing all such questions to their simplest forms. Avoid, too, all vague inquiries. I heard a teacher giving a lesson on the atmosphere. He described a man drowning, and brought out that he died for want of air. "Now," said he in triumph, "what is the thought that occurs to our minds?" Well, I am sure I could not have answered that question; a good many occurred to my mind, but as I had no clear knowledge of the particular thought which was in his, I should certainly have been as silent as his class was.

Need I warn you against that style of questions in which the whole of