

## \* Special Papers. \*

## THE BACKWARD BOY.

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How shall we teach backward children? This is a question which sorely perplexes parents and teachers. We are not now considering the case of what we call feeble-minded children. We are speaking of those who have unusual difficulty in learning, of those who have little interest in study, and of those who have slow or tardy mental development.

These three classes obviously differ from each other. The first class is not likely, under any treatment, to furnish eminent scholars; the second and the third may do so in due time under judicious training.

In some cases the backwardness is owing to the mental constitution of the children, in others it is caused by bad teaching. I knew a lawyer who talked of seeking in the courts damages of a wretched teacher, for the injury he had inflicted on the lawyer's son by unwise methods of instruction. Though the boy was bright, he had been taught in such a manner that he had no mental discipline.

Some teachers, in giving instruction to classes, take no special pains to help the dull and backward pupils. They hold that their function is to teach those who are teachable under the ordinary methods, and that the rest are not worth spending time on.

It must be confessed that a teacher who has a large class may, with reason, be perplexed to decide how much the bright scholars are to be delayed, or to be deprived of the instructor's inspiring help, for the sake of the backward pupils. But surely he is not justified in refusing to give some special attention to the most needy section of the class. A skilful teacher can do much for them without seriously retarding the progress of the better scholars.

Many a devoted instructor has found a rich reward for giving them special help outside of the regular hours of school.

If children are very backward, doubtless it is best for them to have the special services of a private teacher for some time. Although they thus lose the inspiring aid of companionship, which affords so much joy and stimulus in a school, yet they escape the depressing and mortifying influence of seeing their dullness exhibited at every recitation to that most merciless of audiences, a company of school children who are outstripping them, and ridiculing their stupidity.

But what shall the private teacher do? He must begin at the beginning, at the zero point of the pupil's knowledge, and with patience proceed only so rapidly as the slow mind can master each step, and he must lend interest to this tardy march by all the resources at his command.

Often, if the child lacks interest in the studies first taken up, it will be found on trial that he can readily be interested in some other study. Then begin with this last study, and link it, if possible, in some way with the less interesting pursuit. A boy who abominates grammar may have a passion for some branch of natural history. Be sure that he has a chance to gratify this passion. An apt teacher may sometimes save a boy by discovering a talent which none of his elementary studies has tested.

I once knew a boy in college who evinced no interest in any of his regular work. He was deemed hopelessly lazy. He was generally busy making caricatures of his fellow students and of the professors.

One day a caricature of a certain professor, which had much amused the students, fell into the hands of the professor himself. He summoned the young man to his room. The student went with some trepidation, supposing he was to be reprimanded. But the wise teacher said to him: "You seem to have a talent for Drawing. No one of the Faculty has been able to find out what you were made for. All have despaired of making anything of you. But evidently you are intended for an artist. You ought to go abroad and study art."

And then, having himself lived many years in Rome, he gave his astonished and gratified hearer suggestions concerning the best method of pursuing art studies, and tendered him letters to distinguished artists at Rome. This indolent student

followed the advice given him, and became a painter of distinction. The timely counsel of his teacher was the making of the man.

We should not be too easily discouraged at finding the mental operations of a child slow. I know a man of advanced years, one of the most eminent scholars in one department of learning, whom I have met, whose mental processes have always gone on with a slowness which is surprising, but with an accuracy and sureness equally surprising. He sometimes has difficulty in following a speaker, because his mind cannot keep pace with the speaker's utterances. But his attainments are so ample that he is justly considered an authority in the branch to which he has given the leisure of a long life.

Still less should we be disheartened at a lack of precocity in our children. Many a man of great intellectual force has ripened late. Sometimes very rapid physical development seems to absorb all the vital force in a boy so that his mental development lags. One need not be unduly disturbed by such a phenomenon. After a little the intellectual growth will be resumed. The observant teacher or parent will wait with patience for this result.

But do what we may, we shall, of course, find a certain number of children who can never become eminent scholars, or even passably complete a college course. We must then honestly recognize the fact, and inquire what they can best do in life. Not unfrequently they have executive talent which fits them for some worthy career.

We must with patience and persistence, strive to impart to them, by however slow a process, such an amount and kind of training as will enable them to fill, without discredit, the place allotted to them in life.—*The Youth's Companion.*

## CONCERNING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT.

BY PROF. GEORGE GRIFFITH.

## CO-OPERATION OF PARENTS.

ONE of the greatest aids to the successful and easy management of a school is the co-operation of the parents of the pupils. Without this the teacher labors at a great disadvantage; with it his efforts are much more likely to succeed. In some districts this co-operation is easily secured, is given unsought; while in other districts considerable skilful effort on the part of the teacher is needed to win the parents from their indifference or antagonism to the school. Some teachers, though poor in many respects, are very skilful in this influence, and hence have a comparatively successful, and always an easy, management.

To win this co-operation a teacher must generally do something more than be worthy of it, though that is an indispensable condition of its permanency.

First, the teacher should as soon as possible become acquainted with the parents of the pupils. Nine out of ten parents will welcome a call from the teacher of their children. Nor need the teacher wait for a formal invitation. In most sections short informal calls may be made before, or shortly after, the opening of school. During these calls the teacher may converse upon school affairs, and especially concerning the hopes and desires entertained for the children of the parent visited. In this way, without being at all inquisitive, the teacher may come to know much of the condition of the educational atmosphere of the district, will discover some snags to be avoided, and more than all may convince the parents of the teacher's interest in their children, and thus lay the foundation for a mutual good understanding. There is one danger here to young and strong teachers, and that is that the teacher will modify his teaching from what is right to what will accord with the wishes of the parents. This mistake need not be made and should not. But the teacher who best knows his environment is best prepared to put successfully into use the best ways of teaching.

Again, a teacher can secure the co-operation of the parents by making his teaching, especially some parts of arithmetic, practical in the every-day life of the community. He should study the most common occupations and forms of business of the vicinity, and shape part of his instruction in arithmetic toward fitting his pupils for these practical affairs. It may be in a lumber region. Here thorough and correct instruction may be given in measuring and computing the cost of piles of lum-

ber, logs or wood. It may be near a large co-operative cheese factory or creamery. Here the pupils should be taught to apportion the proceeds of the sales to the several persons by the means of a ratio table. This same method will teach them how to make out the district tax list. If the teacher does not know how to do this he should learn how before he again attempts to teach taxes. A double benefit will arise from this, bringing some of the teaching into close application to the practical affairs of the community. Not only will the parents be interested in the school, and hence will more likely co-operate with the teacher, but the teacher himself will learn much of what "practical arithmetic" really means.

Again, the teacher should generally consult with parents concerning the study and department of their children. Seldom should important steps be taken in discipline without first trying to secure the co-operation of the parents. This effort alone will often remedy the evil without any severe measures on the part of the teacher, and it will nearly always strengthen the teacher for any severe conflict that may arise between him and any of his pupils. With most parents the teacher can safely discuss many of his plans. How often this will forestall opposition and misunderstanding.

The teacher should mingle, so far as he will be welcome, and so far as he considers right, in the social life of the community. This often removes many captious barriers to a good understanding, and furnishes an excellent field for that influence for good upon the community that every teacher ought to wield.

The teacher should make special effort to secure the visits of the parents to the school, and to this end should frequently extend cordial definite personal invitations to them to do so.

In conclusion, I urge another reason for all this effort on the part of the teacher to come into close sympathy with the life of the community. Not only will it make the management of the school easier, not only can he thus influence for good the community as a whole, but he can thus best come into that close and intimate relationship with his pupils by which he can stimulate them to a higher moral as well as mental life.

To the teacher who, wrapt in the cloak of his inherent right to this co-operation of parents without effort on his part, scornfully neglects suggestions to that end, I will simply say that generally he will not get it, does not deserve it, and may fail for want of it.—*The School Journal.*

## MANNERS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

UNDER the heading of "Manners in the Public Schools," a late number of the *Nation* dwells especially upon the necessity for teaching school children a horror of scattering scraps of paper, banana and orange peel, and refuse of various sorts through the streets.

"It is not easy to teach neatness to grown men and women, but it is possible to infuse into children a horror of the anti-social practice which helps a good deal to disfigure and vulgarize our cities, of throwing down refuse of whatever nature, peanut shells, bits of paper, cigarette ends, old shoes, hats, etc., on roads, lanes, sidewalks, public stairways, etc. Our indifference to this practice, which is the result of long familiarity, is incomprehensible to foreigners. \* \* No child should leave the Public schools without having a dread of refuse ground into him. He should be taught to hate the sight of unswept streets or sidewalks, or saliva-stained marble or granite, of ashes, or refuse of every description, and especially of bits of newspapers and ends of cigars, as signs of gross selfishness and a low social tone."

It certainly is a good plan to instil such principles into children at school, but the home is the place where the surest seeds of this good fruit can be sown. Too many children are allowed to leave all their clutter to be cleared up by others, thus being in effect, systematically taught that they have no responsibility in the matter. They learn to toss apple-cores into the street, or strew nutshells on the sidewalk, long before they have seen the inside of any school, and it is only by watchful and careful training at home that this much needed reform can rest on a sure basis. Each mother who instils into her child a love of cleanliness and order is benefiting the world at large almost as much as her own family.—*Babyhood.*