

The Teacher as Director of Play.

BY MRS. CATHERINE M. CONDON.

The importance of play as a factor in education is now so generally admitted that the question naturally arises: Why have we not availed ourselves of it as a working force in our public schools? It will be said: We have done so, by providing spacious playgrounds, and, even in some favored localities, play-rooms under cover, for stormy days. But is this the only thing necessary to make a practical and efficient application of a well ascertained law of childhood? If play is so powerful a means of development, is it wise to simply send children into the playground at stated times, not only without direction, but even without any supervision?

The children are of different ages, and of very diverse physical conditions; some strong of body, often rough and overbearing, perhaps even disposed to cruelty; others, small and weak and so easily cowed that, although they may sometimes suffer severely from ill-treatment, they never dare utter a complaint, or bring an accusation against the offender. The teacher therefore remains ignorant of this state of affairs, which produces effects so demoralizing to character; the bully grows a still more insolent tyrant, while his victims, cringing and subservient, display all the mean vices of a nature warped by fear and the constant dread of ill-treatment. Nor is this all. The unbridled license of speech and manners, unchecked, because unobserved by the vigilance of those in authority, is such that parents have been heard to declare that they so dreaded the corrupting influence of the playground for their children that they had delayed sending them to school on that account. All these evils may be successfully dealt with by the simple expedient of the teacher going out on the playground with his scholars, not as a restraint on youthful fun and frolic, but as a genial guide in the art of bright and intelligent play.

The mere presence of such a one would protect the weak and timid and help them to bring out their value on the playground, by starting games, in which the weak and most timid would soon take an active part, and add to the interest of the play. By thus proving the usefulness of even the smallest child in adding to the interest of a game, a milder spirit and gentler manner would be induced towards the weak, for we are not apt to despise and injure those who add to our pleasures.

The petty tyrant would be taught that his method was not the best one to ensure compliance with his wishes, and that he who would rule others, must first learn to rule himself. He would also learn that to appeal to reason and self-interest, to the social instinct, and to the natural sense of pleasure that arises from well-concerted action *en masse*, throws mere brute force quite into the shade.

The aptitude for social games is not strong in children not yet well on in their teens, yet the social instinct is implicit in the youngest; but it needs cultivation or the child may grow up narrow and self-absorbed and incapable of harmonious action with his fellows.

Insight into character will be gained by the teacher far more surely on the playground than in the schoolroom alone, where the hand of discipline is, necessarily, somewhat repressive of natural impulses. But let no teacher flatter himself that he can be a power for good by simply sitting in a secluded corner, reading the morning paper, from the shadow of which he from time to time emerges to give a swift detective glance, or an admonitory shake of the head, or to point an uplifted warning finger at some mischievous urchin; for no mere spy will secure influence.

The teacher who would help his scholars to get the best results from play must be himself a real "Master of the Revels" and bring the joyous spirit of a true comrade. His advent should be the signal that something a little extra clever in the way of play is to be achieved.

Teacher and pupils would alike be refreshed and return to a room which, in their absence, has been wind-swept with fresh air through open doors and windows. No one should interfere with this health-giving process by remaining in the schoolroom during recess, except when the weather is inclement.

Too often the teacher is associated with the incidents of hard lessons, confinement in a room poorly lighted, insufficiently ventilated and warmed, and with rebukes, which, no matter how well deserved, are none the less unpleasant. Why not offset all this by establishing the sympathetic relations of happy play?

The great schoolmasters have been noted for their keen interest in their scholars' sports, and have won respect and influence from them by the traditions of their own skill and prowess on field and river, and in all manly exercises.

Children will not resent wise supervision on the playground, for they appreciate order and arrange-