

limit to such increase. Because they further find, in all varieties of building construction, that a knowledge only sufficient to enable them to interpret the working drawing placed in their hands, (and nearly everything is now made from a drawing,) will add one-third to their daily wages."

### Curiosity in children.

"You are too inquisitive!" "Don't bother me!" "Little boys must not ask so many questions!" and numerous other like expressions of impatience at the curiosity of children, are continually heard in every household. The little ones are from day to day—in fact, from hour to hour—admonished that an awful, indescribable something called propriety—in simplicity they suppose it to be some terrible creature not of human form, probably a wild beast—was against their expression of a very natural and essential feeling. Parents, have you ever considered what it is you are thus repressing? Has it ever occurred to you that, in rooting out curiosity from your children's minds, you are plucking up by the roots the tree that is eventually to bear the beautiful flowers and sweet fruits of knowledge? Your child's mind is in that elastic condition which makes it spring forward to catch the smallest fact. The storehouse of knowledge is empty, and those busy little harvesters, the perceptions, are running wild over the fields of his observation in search of grain that may be gathered in. He finds a new object unlike any thing he has ever seen or felt before. He can learn nothing of it except from you, and with touching, confiding faith in you comes running up for information. You have some more important matter in mind; you are busy, and not to be bothered, and so, crestfallen, he goes away with wounded ambition, and perhaps a whit less affection for you. One of the little harvesters returns home empty-handed. One sheaf has been lost to the granary. Worse than all, your child has lost an opportunity—a precious thing in the brief session of life—and has received a check which may operate to restrain him from seizing future opportunities. Think of it! You may have forged the first link in a chain of circumstances that will make him a failure in life.

This may appear to be an exaggerated statement of the case. It may be contended, for instance, that parents generally show a reasonable disposition to satisfy the curiosity of their children; that to the question, "What is this, papa?" an explanatory answer is, in the great majority of cases, promptly and cheerfully given; and that it is only when the questions are multiplied to an unreasonable extent that impatience and refusal to answer follow. But this raises the question, "Can there be a limit to inquiry?" and the answer is, "None!" The desire to know as much as can be known of any thing is a perfectly rational and praiseworthy one. In fact, it is a highly important one—I had almost said the most important one. It is the entering wedge that has split the rocky wall of ignorance, and enabled the axe of observation to hew open the broad avenues of science into the very heart of the mysteries of Nature.

But this objection rests on the supposition that it is all-sufficient to answer the first few questions, the remainder being considered as relating to unimportant details. Now, the fact of the case is just the reverse. The rejected portion of the questions are, as a rule, the most important. To perceive this fact, observe the nature of the questions the child invariably asks, and the order in which he puts them. He begins by asking of a thing, "What is

it?" Then, "Is it good to eat?" If not, "Is it poisonous?" If it is, "What does it taste like?" If it is a fruit, "Where" (that is, how), "does it grow?" If another object, "How is it made?" and so on indefinitely. Here we discern a progression—rough and irregular at intervals, it may be, but still a progression—from the more general to the less general. If you answer the first two or three, and throw out the balance, you acquaint him with the general facts, and leave him ignorant of the particular facts. Now, consider that throughout the domain of knowledge, be it of literature, science, or art, the particular facts are the most important to be known. In science, he who knows only the most general facts is a mere tyro. In truth, science is the organization of particular facts, and we cannot acquire a respectable knowledge of it without engraving these upon our minds. And so it is with all other subjects, any knowledge becomes profound in proportion as we extend our acquisition of particular facts. See, then, the great error involved in your course; you are giving the child chaff while you throw away the wheat.

But at this early stage the process demands more consideration than the product. The knowledge gained by this rough, unsystematic questioning may be small—at most, it is usually vague and indefinite—nevertheless, it is unquestionably of some value. The process, however, is the earliest expression of the spirit of scientific investigation, which was once as feeble and erratic in the race as it now is in your child, but which, by gradual development in the slow lapse of centuries, at length became strong enough to rear the magnificent structure of exact science. The curiosity which induces these questions will develop or dwindle according as circumstances favor the one tendency or the other. Encouraged and intelligently directed, it will develop into a systematic inquiry after truth, ending perhaps in making its possessor a compeer of Newton or Kant. But, under habitual repression, it degenerates into mere impertinent inquisitiveness, the qualification of an idle tale-bearer. The *desideratum* is to make the child form a habit of penetrating to the root of all things.

But, it may be further contended, there are some questions which it would be manifestly improper to answer for children; for instance, such as bear upon the relations of the sexes, and kindred subjects. This is equivalent to saying that knowledge promotes immorality. The business of education is to acquaint the child with the facts of life. The facts of the class referred to constitute the most vital part of knowledge—that affecting the daily existence of each and every individual. Ignorance or misconception of these facts is productive of the gravest consequences—consequences injuring mental or bodily health, or both, as well as business prospects. It is a serious, a criminal blunder to withhold such facts from a child, or to give him wrong notions concerning them. It will not do to say that the required information will be gained, or the wrong notions corrected, later, when he is able to understand the subject. The fact that he is prompted to question on such subjects is abundant evidence that his mind is in a condition to grasp appropriate ideas, and it is the only safe indication of the proper time to communicate those ideas. It may seem a trivial thing to some parents that a child is made to believe grossly absurd and untruthful statements at the awakening of his perceptions, because he will eventually discover the facts for himself; but, to all who have observed the firm hold which early impressions take upon the mind, and the influence they wield over it, the danger of the practice is apparent. It throws away precious time, and necessitates unlearning that which has been learned, in order to acquire that which should have been