

Sympathy for Children.

"I wish I had felt toward humanity in my early life as I do now," said a thoughtful, middle-aged lady. "Particularly do I feel this concerning the years I was a teacher. I should have looked upon my work and the children from a different point of view."

Two or three primary teachers were near by and heard this very unusual remark.

"Do tell us just what you mean?" said a merry looking girl, evidently puzzled at the thought that pity for humanity had anything to do with teaching.

"Why, I mean just this," was the reply. "Here we are, a world of human beings, here from no wish or will of our own, compelled to bear all the ills of heredity, circumstances, and temperament, for which we are in no way responsible, in the beginning. I think a child burdened with the mistakes and shortcomings of his ancestry, handicapped at every point by conditions for which he is no way responsible, is a pitiable object—enough to make the angels weep. Little children are not conscious of this, I know, but we who know life find this to be true, and it should stir all the compassion in our hearts. We have lived long enough to know what it means to long for things that are just and right in themselves, and be denied them at every step by circumstances made for us before we existed. To look upon a school-room of poor children, or even middle class children, and know the life struggle that is before them, is enough to stir our profoundest pity. But why do I except the rich children? Opportunity stands at their door beckoning them on to the best things, but because necessity is absent they are blind to the beckoning hand, and settle into an inertness that is worse for character than the hardest struggle. So here they are on every hand. Add to this the common lot of sorrow and disappointment, and mankind deserves and calls for the tenderest sympathy from each other."

"But what about the application of this to the teacher's work? That part of it appeals to me. We can't spend all our time with individual cases, and since we must consider them in a lot, so to speak, how can we do differently from what we do? I'm sure I try to be conscientious and make them do right as well as I can."

"Make them do right?" "Yes, that is just the trouble. What is 'right?' We set up a standard of right for these little mortals in our care, and try to bend every one to it according to our idea—

and we never doubt we are right. How I used to rebel and feel injured when I was a teacher because these poor little ignorant beings didn't recognize and act up to my standards of duty and right! Bless their hearts, they didn't know what I was talking about. We were in different worlds. And I dared to call their indifference to what I was saying, stolidity or depravity. What self-righteous people teachers are in their condemnation of their children! Why, as I look back, I think many of my children were too "born-tired," too half-sick, and perhaps too hungry to be able to understand my fine ethical distinctions. How many of them had come from homes where they had heard only cross words and fault-finding from the moment they opened their eyes in the morning? How many of their parents had married wrong and saturated the home atmosphere with discomfort. Many of those poor little sensitive, defrauded tots may have known nothing in their home life but discord. Why should I have expected them to be keyed up to understand the moral harmonies I prescribed for them? We grown people would not stand the jangle one hour that hosts of children are obliged to live in all the while; and then we wonder that they come to school "out of tune." And we proceed to put them in tune by giving them talks on morals, bunching them all up in a lot, when no two of them need the same treatment. We may call this doing our "duty"—what a stumbling block that word duty may be!"

"But there is a general code of morals accepted by everybody that must be taught, no matter what sort of children we have. You wouldn't condone a lie because a child came from a bad home, would you?"

"Condone it? Oh, no! But such a child is not to be weighed in the same balance as the well-born, well-trained child. The conditions back of the lie of the unfortunate child are to be considered before he is accused of committing an unpardonable sin. The sidelights need to be thrown on every case before a teacher can decide justly or punish justly. But how can she get at the sidelights? you are going to ask. Yes, there is the difficulty we must all acknowledge. But a great deal can be known from daily association with each child, if we looked closer, thought more about it, and pitied more. But at the best, teachers must grope in the darkness as regards the inner life of their children. But does not everybody move slowly and cautiously in the dark? And does not 'everybody' include teachers in the school-room?"—*Primary Education.*