

Primary Department.

VARIETY AND REST.

RHODA LEE.

GREAT is the excitement in many homes at the beginning of a new term as the little sister or brother sets out with the older ones for his first day at school—a memorable day in the lives of most children and not uninteresting to the teacher. There is something really touching in the wide-open, wondering eyes of the little newcomers, and the timid side glances of awe and curiosity. But these soon disappear and the little folks, having become accustomed to the strange surroundings and peculiar doings of school-life, are ready for work. Just here let me say a word to all primary teachers on the subject of order. If you have as your ideal of good order, a vision of a room full of little children, perfectly still, never restless and fidgety, but always quiet and subdued, you are straining after an ideal that is false and utterly unattainable. The perfect order of a primary class does not answer to that description. Activity is a law of childhood and is a requisite to development, not a result therefrom. The question is how best to direct this activity. It certainly cannot be done with a series of "don'ts." There is no direction there, but merely repression, a species of child-torture common enough. Proper employment of mind and hand is the only solution.

Looking over the work of the past session two thoughts impressed me most forcibly. First, the necessity for frequent change of employment. Children are not interested in doing the same work again and again. They cannot force their attention to what is distasteful. That accounts for the dull, listless and discontented faces we sometimes see. Alas! that they should be so.

The other thought was of the incalculable value of physical exercises and gymnastics, necessitating change of position, proper breathing, and a general relaxation of mind and body. There is no better tonic for a child in school than a brisk march in a well-ventilated room. A run on tip-toes is a pleasant variation and particularly strengthening for the spine. The stretching exercises are also beneficial in this way. In one of these the children stand on tip-toe and with arms upraised stretch as though pressing some heavy weight towards the ceiling.

Other exercises can be taken that do not necessitate standing. Clapping hands to indicate the hours, or ages of different pupils; class recitations with motions whenever possible; kindergarten and other songs. These are only a very few of the ways in which we can rest the tired hands and minds and invigorate them for the next twenty minute's work, and that should be the outside limit for a lesson in a first-book class. A brisk, bright, definite lesson of twenty minutes will be much more effective than a dull and aimless one drawn out to the length of three-quarters of an hour. At times we are tempted to keep a class at the board longer than we should. "They

are interested," we say, "it seems a pity to dismiss them." But how about those at their seats during the thirty-five or forty minutes lesson at the board. How is the time passing for them? Slowly I fear. Mischief will be in the minds of some, discontent seize others and laziness lay claim to the remainder. No, no, the whole class must receive your attention every twenty minutes if you would preserve good order and avoid bad habits. The vigilance required in a primary room to prevent the formation of bad habits is almost superhuman. May the time soon come when, with smaller classes, we may be able to watch and guide the first steps rather better than we have been able to in the past.

SCHOOL-ROOM DRILL.

RHODA LEE.

AT the beginning of a session it is well to devote a certain amount of time to teaching the mechanics of school routine. It is quite certain that with little children we cannot avoid confusion and disorder if these matters are not well attended to. It should not be necessary to add two or three times a day, when giving commands, "Quietly children, "Stand away from the desk," "Keep in step," etc. If time be taken at the first of the session to practice your system of slate-taking, returning, standing, coming to and going from class, raising hands, lining and other such matters, it will be a very great saving in the end. All these movements should become automatic. It is not necessary to add that they should be as quiet and orderly as possible, the word of warning always preceding that of the action. For instance, at the word "slates," hands go to the slates. At the word "return," "raise" or "over," the action, whatever it may be, is carried out. The effects of these quiet, steady, orderly habits are known to all. Every teacher knows that they are productive of the orderly, attentive, tranquil, clear mind that is requisite to genuine progress. How teachers lived in the days when books and slates were slammed into desks and bags and a wild rush made for the door at closing time, we know not. Fortunately times have changed.

The drill at the commencement of the term will be a great help, but it will not always suffice. It will perhaps be necessary to have an extra practice now and then during the term. Five minutes occasionally to "help the poor soldiers to perfect their drill" will be an inspiration to every one.

FEW THINGS AT ONCE.

OUR anxiety to vary, to diversify instruction, need not cause us to fall into confusion. A multiplicity of subjects disconcerts the attention, rather than aids it.

"He would be a foolish teacher," says Mr. Sully, "who gave a child a number of disconnected things to do at a time, or who insisted on keeping his mind bent on the same subject for an indefinite period."

We do not hold the attention, or at least we weary and overdrive it in a way to make

its efforts useless, when we present to it too many subjects at once. We distrust verbose teachers whose thought overflows its limits and whose words exceed one another with an extreme volubility. No durable effect nor profound impression is to be expected from their lectures. The pupil, like the teacher, reaches the end of such an oratorical race, out of breath. The state of mind into which the erudition and precipitate delivery of the teacher plunge the pupil, recalls the consternation of those Esquimaux whose history is given by Miss Edgeworth.

Newly arrived in London, they had visited in one day all the monuments of the capital, under the conduct of a guide who was in too much of a hurry. On their return, when they were asked what they had seen, they did not know what to say. It was with difficulty that one of them, repeatedly urged to speak, and finally rousing himself from his torpor, could say, while shaking his head, "Too much smoke—too much noise—too much houses—too much men—too much everything!"—*Gabriel Compayre*.

SOUND COMBINING.

RHODA LEE.

IT seems to me there is but one difficulty in beginning the teaching of reading and that is the coalescence of sounds. The preceding steps are perfectly simple. Let us suppose the class to be familiar with four or five simple sounds. We first of all make him feel the need of the new one. He gets the sound, then the symbol, and, of course, we speak of it by name incidentally. Then comes the work of combining the new letter with the old ones and we experience a little difficulty. We want to make the combining of sounds so easy and so automatic that he will recognize instantaneously new words when he sees them. We frequently come across children who will give the separate sounds correctly but have no idea of the word. To overcome this difficulty we give daily and two or three times a day if possible, exercises that we might term *ear-work-recognition*, the recognition being made through the medium of sound, not sight. For example the teacher sounds the first word—*past*. She brings the sounds quite close to each other. The sounds in the next few words are farther apart, the next still farther, making the recognition each time more difficult. We do not in this exercise confine ourselves to the use of letters the children can make and are familiar with. We use any and every sound. Fifteen or twenty of these words can be given in a minute, the children giving the whole word individually or in concert as the teacher wills. Occasionally allow one of the children to give the sounds, the others the word as a whole.

Let me mention briefly some plans I have found useful with the beginners. Write on each slate a large letter in colored chalk. Let each child hold his slate up before him. He is now a sound. Bring out certain ones to form a word, and let the others find it out. Or to reverse the exercise, give the word and ask a pupil to bring out the letters necessary to its formation. Large letters on pasteboard may be used instead of the slate.