

LITTLE CHILDREN: HOW TO TEACH THEM.



"It is an easy matter to teach little children—any one can do that." Such is the prevalent idea, but as the various adjectives of dull, inert, volatile, apathetic, disorderly, slow, listless, mercurial, effervescent, describe the different dispositions possessed by little children, I am brought to the conclusion, from a wide experience, that only

those persons who possess that grand virtue, patience, in a large degree, and who have ready for constant use an unlimited and inexhaustible stock of it, are really capable of teaching little children properly and satisfactorily.

To awaken intelligence, to arouse and strengthen memories, to teach concentration of thought, to excite interest, to animate the mind and enchain the attention, this should be the aim of the teacher, while instructing the little children how to spell and read and recite, how to work out their small sums, and learn their short lessons in history and geography; and that this is a task which makes great demands upon the patience of the instructor, can readily be imagined.

It is really of immense importance that the rudiments should be thoroughly well taught, for these rudiments are the actual foundation-stones, which will always remain, perfect or imperfect, according to the care or carelessness with which they have been laid; they are the groundwork on which the other stones of learning will be placed year by year.

Incorrect spelling, indistinct pronunciation of words, monotony of tone, and wrong emphasis in reading, inaccuracy and inexactness of quotation, an insufficient knowledge of the multiplication table, together with a confused and vague idea of elementary geography—these educational defects, too often visible in men and women, are sure signs of an incapable or an impatient teacher in the earliest days of home or school teaching.

Many parents allow their children to run wild for the first six or seven years of their lives, but I do not advocate this plan, neither do I think that the children themselves are any the better for this length of entire freedom, either at the time they possess it, or

when the change comes and work begins. Children, however young, are all the happier for having an interest in life; and, besides, it is a great trial to a child to be suddenly put into harness, and to be kept at work for hours together, as is the case when the little things are sent to school, perfectly ignorant of any book-learning. Too often they are pushed and urged on, to make up for lost time, until their lives become almost a burthen to them.

On the other hand, although I do not approve of complete idleness, I am no advocate of much teaching in early days. Lesson-time should be of short duration. To keep a dull child at its book or an active child chained to its chair for any length of time is almost a cruel act, certainly it is an unwise one. At the outset—say when the little one is four years old—five minutes is quite long enough to keep its attention. When the child begins to read, then of course more time will be required to be spent on the daily lesson; but even then half-an-hour well spent—that is, with its mind concentrated upon its task—will do more towards its advancement than a couple of hours of dawdling, yawning inattention. A little done well is of much greater benefit to the child, now and always, than a great deal learned imperfectly. During the short half-hour something will have been learned, and at the same time the child is acquiring the habit gradually of fixing its attention upon, and conquering, any small difficulty with which it may have to contend.

It is a great temptation to make a show of the intellectual powers of a quick and clever child, more especially as the child itself generally learns with avidity; but if we attempt to make a prodigy, we shall do it great, it may be irreparable, harm, both mentally and physically. The child may enjoy and be none the worse for pursuing its studies at first, when its brain is active and healthy; but when a year or two has passed by, the pressure put upon it begins to tell the tale, the brain begins to lose its power, and it requires more and more effort on the part of the child to concentrate its thoughts and master its work. Gradually but surely this effort will begin to tell upon the health, and the child becomes seemingly stupid, languid, irritable, or hysterical. Directly signs such as these appear, all stress and coercion should at once cease; but sometimes, unfortunately, parents and teachers attribute this loss of power to idleness, and are inclined to punish and urge on the child to fresh efforts, instead of allowing the over-strained brain rest and repose. I have seen this grave error so often fallen into, that I am anxious to call attention to it.

And now to return to the question, how to teach the little ones, for I have not quite finished my remarks on that part of the subject. I was obliged to make a short *détour* in order to save some from being over-taught.

If you want little children to make progress, you must endeavour to engage their attention, and to get

them to take an interest in their lessons. Of course it is much harder to induce some dispositions than others to do this, but it is possible to excite an interest in a measure in the mind of every little child. The great secret of this is for the teacher to be lively and demonstrative, and to appear to take a vivid interest in the lesson herself (I use the feminine pronoun, you perceive, for I think that there can be no doubt that women are endowed with more patience for this work of teaching young children than men). Well, be animated and talkative over the lesson, whatever it be, give praise when praise is due, and keep up the interest and attention of the young minds; but remember at the same time not to talk too much, for children soon grow weary of listening. It is an excellent plan to allow, or rather to encourage, the little folk to speak. I do not mean that they

should be permitted to chatter on irrelevant subjects, but that they should talk on the subject of the lesson, for this not only increases their interest and fastens it on their memories, but it also teaches them to think and to form ideas.

If you agree with me on that matter, you will also agree that it is a mistake, a grave mistake, to repel questions, and that it is a still graver one to laugh at the foolish and ignorant remarks made by little children. These small people are very sensitive to ridicule, and they will soon cease to ask for information if their questions are denominated as absurd or ignorant. I remember well how much I suffered in spirit from this ill-advised laughter, and how I often longed to ask questions, and thus gain information, but was deterred simply from the fear of being dubbed an ignoramus.

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PEOPLE'S CAFÉS.



try to provide a counter-attraction to gin-palaces and public-houses is a praiseworthy enterprise. These institutions have hitherto been far too much in favour with our labouring population. But formerly there was this to be said for them: they were almost the only places available for

working people to meet in for refreshment, conversation, amusement, and the carrying on of their benefit clubs.

During late years, however, many efforts have been made to establish in different directions institutions which should to a great extent obviate this necessity—institutions which, although founded with the main idea of their being self-supporting, should nevertheless, owing to the entire absence of the usual desire for large profits, supply working men and others with refreshment and amusement at a price but just above actual cost, with a mere margin for working expenses and interest on capital. Houses of this description have been started with fairly satisfactory results in many localities, notably at Norwood, Stepney, and Notting Hill.

About eight months ago a movement was begun, headed by the philanthropic Lord Shaftesbury, to establish a number of People's Cafés in suitable situations in the more densely crowded parts of London and elsewhere. These were to be places where the public, and especially the working classes, could obtain good wholesome food, and drinks of a non-intoxicating character; where they could spend their leisure in conversation or amusement, and where they could conduct benefit societies, and other mutual undertakings. And the two leading features of the cafés were to be comfort and moderate prices.

The first café, opened in Whitecross Street, St. Luke's, on the 19th of April, has settled down to do a steady business, and up to the present time the attendance has been remarkably good.

The second one was on a larger scale. It was opened in High Street, Whitechapel, on the 13th of

May. As in the former case, there was a rush to see what this new claimant for popular favour had to offer. The bills mentioned, among other things, "The cheapest and most wholesome dinners in London." No wonder, then, that from five to six hundred—far more than the place could accommodate—came for the first few days; for "a good dinner," as Dr. Kitchiner says, "is one of the greatest enjoyments of human life."

As this Whitechapel café is, and is likely to continue, a representative institution, we have visited it for the benefit of our readers, and, thanks to the kindness of Mr. Griffin, the manager, have become possessed of some particulars of a not uninteresting nature.

About the building itself there is little to say. There is a pleasant come-in-and-make-yourself-welcome air about the exterior; and on stepping in from the busy thoroughfare of High Street, we enter a large, light, and cheerful room, the ventilation of which is as it should be. This room is set out with tables with white marble tops. It contains three bars, one for dinners, another for tea, coffee, bread and butter, whilst the third is miscellaneous, being devoted to American drinks, cigars, and such-like articles. Downstairs is what is to be converted into a bowling-alley; up-stairs are billiard and bagatelle rooms, rooms for meetings, and a dining-room for women-folk.

The café opens at an early hour. Business is begun in the cold winter mornings at five o'clock, so that men going to their work can have a cup of tea or coffee more satisfactorily than at those street-stalls which form so characteristic a feature of the early morning life of the metropolis. A considerable number appear to breakfast, but the great strain on the resources of the establishment is felt at dinner-time.

The Whitechapel dinner-time begins at twelve o'clock. Between that hour and two, close upon three hundred people are served, a large proportion of them being working men. After two o'clock fifty or sixty people, chiefly clerks, find their way east-