

A FEW PRACTICAL WORDS ON HOME TEACHING.



IN the present day, when education is making such rapid strides as to make it a task of no ordinary difficulty for even the professional teacher to keep up with her, it can hardly, I think, be expected that parents, immersed in business and trade cares as they for the most part are, should have that

knowledge of the education of the day and its requirements which, in order to do full justice to their children, they ought to have.

It is with the hope of affording some information, likely to prove useful to such parents, that the following lines are penned.

Many persons are worried with the question as to what their sons and daughters, who are of such-and-such an age, ought to know, and what subjects they ought to be doing. They hear that Tom This and Alice That, who are not a bit older than their children, are doing subjects far in advance. They would therefore like to know whether their young people are above or below the average.

In answer to such difficulties, I would say that there is no hard and fast standard for any particular age; and even if there were, and granting that the child came up to that standard at the proper age, it would be quite impossible to say whether he or she would reach the next standard at the proper time. The child's mind may brighten and enlarge during that interval, and cause it to overshoot the mark, or it may, on the other hand, develop more slowly, and make the child fall far behind.

Nor is this much to be wondered at. Childhood is essentially the age of growth—growth both in body and mind; and it is only natural to assume that, just as we see children stop growing in bodily stature for a considerable time, and then suddenly make a start forward, and, to use a common expression, "grow too fast," so the mind or mental powers may very often behave in a similar way, and be at a standstill, or nearly so; and since, unlike the former case, we cannot actually see this mental stoppage with our eyes, we are apt to impute the non-improvement of the child's mental culture to idleness, inattention, and in fact to anything rather than the true cause.

This error must, of course, be carefully guarded against, and great care taken not to form a hasty and one-sided view of the case.

We very often hear complaints made by schoolmasters of the ignorance of children who have been home-taught, and these complaints are so general and widespread, that in all probability they are well-grounded, and we may accept it as a fact that a very large number of children taught at home are, not-

withstanding the great care and diligence expended on them, not so well prepared for school as they might be. The reason of this, I take it, is not that the ability of the home teacher is so much at fault as that it is mis-directed. The child is very often primed with a great amount of useless knowledge—useless I mean, to it, at its tender age—and this priming is, too often, the fault of the parents, who like to know that their little Arthur or Alice, as the case may be, is doing Grecian History, or Zoology, or something of that sort, when, in reality, he or she ought to be learning to write, to spell, or to read.

Early youth is the time for acquiring the greater part of that mechanical parrot-like knowledge which forms such a basis for future progress, and which is so very difficult to acquire when one is older. I refer to the thorough mastery of the multiplication table, the weights and measures, the dates of the chief events in history, and other things of a kindred nature. The mind when young is far more ready to receive and retain such things than it is when older. In fact, as the mind reaches maturity its power of remembering isolated facts such as dates, &c., diminishes. This will account for the difficulty many very clever people, whose mental powers are of the very highest calibre, have in remembering such things. To give an example which has lately come under my own observation:—A gentleman, who has achieved a very wide and well-deserved celebrity in connection with the science of astronomy, is entirely at fault when any questions of definite numbers—such as the sizes and distances of the planets—are propounded; but, on the other hand, displays the very greatest knowledge and acumen in following up and thoroughly grasping intricate theories and investigations. Numerous other instances might be given, and possibly many will occur to the reader, all tending to show how difficult it is for the ordinary mature mind to burden itself with independent and disconnected facts, and thus proving how advisable, therefore, it is that such facts should, as far as possible, be learned when the mind is young and fresh. And this point is more important in the present day, under the existing aspect of education, than it was formerly, inasmuch as the amount of knowledge a child is supposed to possess now at a certain age is much greater than it was then: thus making it all the more necessary, not only for the child to begin learning in good time, but to learn the right subjects by the right method.

One cannot help being struck with the remarkable way in which most of the ordinary school subjects have expanded during the last few years, and still will expand as long as fresh heads are brought to bear on them, and new books embodying fresh views published.

If we take, as an example, the subject Geography: I think most of my readers, who were educated, say, some twenty-five or thirty years ago, will agree with me that it then embraced at most only the topo-

graphical and commercial view of the world, with perhaps a little map-drawing. In the present day, Geology, Astronomy, Mathematics, Meteorology, Botany, and very likely some other sciences, are brought to bear on the subject, and it would be difficult to find any modern examination paper on Geography which did not contain some allusions to "doabs," "cyclones," "moraines," "water-sheds," "climatic variations," "heights of snow-line," "rain-fall," and hundreds of similar things, which were not mentioned or dreamed of in the ordinary school-books of twenty or thirty years ago. With Grammar, too, it is the same. To most of us the grammar we learnt at school consisted of a knowledge of parsing and the main rules of syntax, and if one were well up in these two branches he was considered a very fair grammarian, and quite *comme il faut*; but now-a-days one must know, in addition to these, the analysis of sentences, the history and derivation of peculiar words, the history of the English language and its connection with others, with perhaps Grimm's Law and a knowledge of Anglo-Saxon into the bargain.

I do not, of course, mention this widening of the area covered by these subjects as a cause for complaint, for it is, on the other hand, rather a fact to be proud of, and regarded as a sign of the increase of knowledge in the present day. I simply have drawn attention to it in order to impress upon any of my readers, who may be interested in home teaching, the importance of seeing that those young people with whom they have to deal should, in the first place, waste

no time in learning things useless to them at their ages; in the second place, learn thoroughly all the mechanical and parrot-like acquisitions, such as tables and dates; and in the third place, learn carefully and well all that they do learn.

Before concluding, I have just a few words to say about a subject which, though not a school one, is still very important in its bearing on the happiness and welfare of a child in after-life, when it is sent away from home to school. I refer to the *early* inculcation of obedience. It is, I think, mistaken kindness to allow a child to constantly have its own way in opposition to its elders, to let it grow up wilful and disobedient, when we know that such habits, though comparatively easy to check in a very young child, require far more stringent remedies for their eradication as the child grows older, and therefore entail a correspondingly greater amount of severity.

There is one more difficulty, too, which besets the generality of parents—the choice of a school for their children. There are, of course, particular schools, situate in various parts of the country, which are peculiarly suitable, and offer special inducements to certain classes of parents.

The difficulty is, however, for parents to find out these schools, and to know whether they come under the category of those benefited. In solving this problem they will receive very substantial help from the perusal of "The Educational Year Book,"* which is filled with all sorts of information relating to our schools, colleges, and universities.

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CLEVELAND, PAST AND PRESENT.



ILBERFORCE spoke once of the change which the introduction of the iron manufacture into a district produced in it, and of that change there has been in this century no fuller proof than that furnished by Cleveland and the district to which

this name is applied by the iron-masters. Before the utilisation of the vast iron deposits of the north-east of Yorkshire, the district of Cleveland was one of the least known in the country; it was unpierced by railways; there were no great industries carried on in it; its population was sparse, and its agricultural products limited in proportion to its great extent. There were parts of it which were known for their beauty, or made

memorable by association; but the inner portion was isolated, and long rolling moors and high hills, interspersed with fair little valleys, occupied no small portion of its space. The valley of the little river Esk had been long one of the haunts of artists, and its pleasant woods like Mulgrave, waterfalls such as Thomasin "foss," the bold bluffs that shut off the purple and green of the moors from the well-cultivated little dales, as well as the one or two castles or mansions in the district, had formed the subject of many a sketch; whilst the picturesqueness of Whitby, with its grand old abbey placed high above the narrow streets of the old town, the little harbour, and the white timbers of the vessels building, "spectral in the moon's pale light," had formed the suggestive points of many a painting. Far to the north-east, near the little straggling village of Old Saltburn, was the mansion known now as the Old Hall at Marske—the tall trees framing which, the dim grey stones, and the antique windows and massive doors tell of the troublous times before the Civil War, when it was built. South from this was the hall where Sterne visited, and from which the great family of De Brus sprang, to give kings, bishops, barons, queens, princesses, duchesses, and dignitaries innumerable.

Not far away was the pleasant town of Guisborough

* London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co.