

THE HOME SCHOOL.

BY THE EDITOR.

EVERY one knows that the organisation and government of a school is a nice task, calling for natural aptitude and special preparation, whether in the way of training or of experience. We should like, by the way, to take exception to experience as, necessarily, a qualification. One year of training is worth ten years' experience for the turning out of a good teacher; and that because experience means to most of us the habit of doing this or that *as we are accustomed to do it*: once set us going in a groove and there is no further question of right or wrong, of better or worse; we do the thing "in our own way," and years of experience make us "the same, only more so." This is why few people like to introduce middle-aged men and women to new work which requires either a docile temper or openness to new ideas and readiness to adopt improvements. We are all a little afraid of the "set ways" of experienced people. If we can transplant them from their own groove to a precisely similar groove, good and well; they will go. But how are we to know that our groove and their groove are identical, and who can be prepared for the hitches that will occur if ours be narrower or broader, deeper or shallower, than the one in which they have gained experience?

Popular proverbs are always right; it is quite true that experience makes fools wise; but we are not told that it makes them practical. The untidy woman is wise enough to know the minor miseries of an hour's hunt for a mislaid pair of scissors, a walk given up because every pair of gloves want mending, of a child kept in because three buttons are off his coat. Experience teaches, and the poor woman is no dull scholar; she could a tale unfold of the misery of disorder, the beauty of order, neatness, method, which should cure us all of transgressions in this kind. But she knows better than to say a word. For why? Experience does not help her in the very

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least to mend her ways. She is, and probably will be to the very end of her days, as she always has been; and this, because it is a physical law of our being that every act prepares the way for another act just like itself. A disorderly room to-day is the all but certain pledge and promise of a disorderly room tomorrow. "Sow an act, reap a habit," says Thackeray, and that is how experience teaches—teaches you to do things evermore as you have always done them. To find out whether the experience is valuable or otherwise, is to find out how it began; how did you do the thing the *first* time; that is, how were you *taught* to do it? How were you *trained*? Experience added to training has its advantages, supposing we are able to keep the fresh impulse of our training through the years.

Experience which implies the progressive effort and receptive attitude of a fine intelligence always putting itself to school, the experience of continual change and regular advance, is another matter altogether: here is no groove, no set way; such a character is all the time under training, and is always ready for any new post, and that is why our men of foremost intellect are equal to any position that offers; there is no question of previous training, they are always under training.

But this is a digression: to return to our point, which is, that the organisation and government of a school is a task requiring special aptitude. Now if this be true of the public (including what is commonly called private) school, how much more is it true of that which is truly private—the family school, whose schoolroom is the morning-room or the study—

for it is much easier to work a class of twenty, all doing the same thing, than a *school* of five children in three different classes.

Notwithstanding this difficulty, home teaching has its peculiar and very marked advantages—into which we will not enter here, except to say to those parents who regret deeply their inability to send their children to school, that our experience in connection with the *Parents' Review School* tends to show that the average home-taught child may keep well abreast of the average school-taught child. We should even say, may keep well ahead, were it not that the children in the *Parents' Review School* are in a sense picked—that is, they are the children of parents who take education seriously.

We have a few words to say to *our* parents which we believe may be of use to many other parents.

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In the first place, we are very grateful for the faithfulness with which parents carry out the instructions they receive. They entirely fulfil one intention of the school, which is to bring children under a rule outside the home, but which parents adopt and make their own. The danger of strong home training is that the children grow up to regard their parents as law *givers* only; but to see in their parents an example of law observing also is a very valuable bit of training for them.

And this faithfulness in parents brings its own reward. Bible-teaching, for example, is perhaps the most valuable instrument of education, not only moral and spiritual, but intellectual. The Bible is the “classics” of the children and the unlearned, the finest classic literature in the world. Some of our greatest orators and best writers owe their moving power to the fact that their minds are stored with the exquisite phraseology and imagery of the Scriptures. Now the *Parents' Review School* requires a good deal of Bible study. The suggestion as to method is, “Read aloud to the children a few verses, deliberately, carefully, and with just expression; require them to narrate what they have listened to as nearly as possible in the Bible words. Talk the narrative over with them, adding all possible light from modern research and criticism. Let the teachings, moral and spiritual, reach them without too much *personal* application.” Now this is a very different thing from reading to the children Bible narratives in somebody else’s words, or even telling them in one’s own (no doubt excellent) style. The children are getting actual familiarity with the text; they are so sympathetic that they catch the archaic simplicity of style and diction, and their little narratives are quite charming. Again, observe, they are to “narrate”; when, at the end of the term, examination questions reach them, it is “*tell* the story” of so and so. Another instruction runs, “Written composition is not to be begun until the children are in Class III. Concise orderly narrations in clear sentences must be exacted from the first.” Now children have a natural talent for language: by his fourth year many a child has collected an amazingly good vocabulary, and uses his new words with a fitness which amuses his elders; children are very well able to narrate and to narrate well; and to get into the habit of telling a story, giving all the circumstances in due order, adding nothing and omitting nothing,—why, this is a liberal education in itself, quite

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invaluable in these days when that of speaking well, and to the point, is of far more use to both men and women than the power of writing equally well. There is a time for all things; there is a season of natural readiness of speech in children which teachers would do well to take at the flood, and not “get them on” to *write* miserably ill-spelt, ill-written, ill-expressed “compositions.” As a matter of fact, it would be well that a child should not know how to

express himself in writing until he is fully ten years old. The real difficulty is, set a child to write a narrative and he is out of your way, you are free to attend to other matters; set him to *speak* his narrative, and he claims your whole attention—now is your time to get clear enunciation, exact statements, orderly arrangement. Most of the parents and teachers in the *Parents' Review* School have been very faithful in letting the children in Classes I. and II. narrate stories from Bible history, English history, and Greek history. The narratives are usually charming, affording much insight into the workings of the children's minds. If we read that Rebekah "saw a *young gentleman* coming across the fields to meet her and got down off her camel," &c.—why that's no matter. In one or two cases the parents have asked questions which the children have answered, and this is a capital exercise, but not to be confounded with "narrating." Two or three children in Class II. have been allowed to write their answers, and that is a pity.

The educational value of Bible teaching from the literary point of view is by no means to be overlooked, but it is the last and the least of the claims the Bible has upon us. Here, and here only, have we a complete code of ethics, enforced by maxim and illustrated by example. There is probably no conceivable moral excellence which is not brought before us both by example and precept. Generosity and meanness, sincerity and guile, simplicity and subtilty, graciousness and churlishness, the love of friend, of kin, of parent, of child, of brother; the relations between master and servant, disciple and teacher, buyer and seller, king and subject,—there is absolutely no point of morals or manners upon which in this library of sacred books we do not find infallible teaching and luminous example. The child who told the following tale has learnt more than the tale. He has received a moral lesson which should last him his lifetime, and doubtless will do so: "Abram said to Lot, 'We had better part, you choose a piece

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of land first and then I will choose one after.' So Lot looked around him and he saw a nice fruitful piece of land, and he said, 'I will have that piece.' So Abram took the piece which was left, which was not so nice. But the land that Lot chose was full of wicked people."

This is a subject too profound for the present paper, but let us say that the theology of the children derived, straight from the Bible story, is refreshing in these days of many questionings. Knowing how the mind reverts to early impressions, one feels that there cannot be too much pains taken with the Bible teaching, which should be as the warp in and out of which the child weaves other knowledge and other thought. It is pleasant to be able to say that the Bible teaching our "scholars" receive from their parents and governesses is particularly good.

Next after the Bible narratives in ethical value ranks history; and because Britain has had no Plutarch amongst its chroniclers, we must give the place of honour to Greek (or Roman) history as told in Plutarch's *Lives*, "to help the children to realise how personal and intimate is the relation of the individual to the State." The stories from Plutarch are extremely well told, and show that children are able to follow the old-time moralist as he traces conduct to character and character again to conduct.

Perhaps natural history is the least successfully done of the studies set in our school, so very rarely are we told anything which the children have seen with their own eyes. Do children keep tadpoles, and silkworms, and caterpillars in these days? Very few have given us the results of their own observations. We have many capital descriptions from books, and that is better than nothing, but the very essence of natural history is that it should, so far as possible, be drawn direct from Nature. In some cases—the poverty of the teaching in this

subject is very marked; a boy who tells much and well about Aristides the Just can only say of a horse that it has four legs and one head! That boy deserves never to sit astride a horse! Flowers fare much better than animals. Wild flowers are, on the whole, well mounted and described. Surely it is not too much to expect that every boy and girl should, before the age of twelve, have formed a little herbarium of the wild flowers in their own neighbourhood, nicely pressed and mounted, and carefully described.

Of Swedish drill and calisthenics we get fairly good reports

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from parents; they say the children know the exercises perfectly, and do them promptly, but they do not say whether each exercise is done with due muscular effort; this is an important point; mere movement without effort will not afford the carefully graduated muscular training at which Swedish Drill aims.

In French, we have invited parents to take a bold plunge, and they have responded delightfully. "But they have never learned *any* French," says the surprised mother of children of eight and nine, when she is asked to have her children taught, orally, say forty lines of a French tale during a term. However, she tries, and is surprised to find at the end of the term that the children *know* these forty lines quite well, and not only so, but they know the words and phrases so well that they can construct other sentences with them. It is a delightful surprise to the parents to find that the children possess quite a considerable French vocabulary, and have none of the miserable insular *mauvaise honte* in saying foreign words upon which the French of many of us makes shipwreck; and this, because they do not learn to *read* French, but learn it from the lips of one who can speak it.

We have spoken of the junior classes in the *Parents' Review* School, because a little notice of the work in these classes may afford useful hints to parents who do not join the school. We have not space to say much of the work of the senior classes, but just one word about the work of Class IV. may be helpful to girls studying at home; in this class, equal work is taken in French, German, and English history and literature, and the papers in each language are worked out in that language.

Lest any mother should think on reading this paper, that it is safe to give children long hours of work, let us add a rule of the *Parents' Review* School which should be the rule of every home school:

"Five of the thirteen waking hours should be at the disposal of the children; three, at least, of these, from two o'clock till five, for example, should be spent out-of-doors in all but *very* bad weather. Brisk work and ample leisure and freedom should be the rule of the Home School. The work not done in its own time must be left undone. Children should not be embarrassed with arrears, and they should have a due sense of the importance of time, and that there is no other time for the work not done in its own time."