

PICTURE STUDY.

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I will refer you to the Parents' Union Motto, "Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

There is an atmosphere or want of atmosphere about all our surroundings, just as atmosphere is brought to us through coming into contact with original and illuminating minds, so may it be brought to us through art in its widest sense. We cannot define what we mean by this subtle emanation, but we are conscious when it is present and we feel starved without it, just as our bodies would feel starved without food. We help to create it ourselves by our actions and our thoughts and if we are educationists in the true sense of the word, we are *unconsciously* helping others to create it; it is indefinable, but if it is lacking we are at once conscious of the fact.

A person who looks upon the knowledge of one of the liberal arts only from a utilitarian point of view, has surely lived without this atmosphere and is himself unable to create it. If you wish to show pictures to children so that they may *fully* appreciate them, you must *feel the atmosphere* of the picture even if it is an atmosphere which is antagonistic to you. A musician is able to interpret a great master's work and I suppose we teachers may also be allowed to try and interpret the mind of a great painter by studying his pictures.

A knowledge of the technique is vastly interesting, but it is possible to love to study pictures without having any particular artistic talent. I say *love* to study them because studying them from a utilitarian point of view is more the work of the specialist than of the amateur. Why should our pupils be immediately attracted by the work of a great master? It is not logical, and the average child will always be attracted first by colour and detail. You might have a reproduction of some famous picture hung up in your nursery for months, but you cannot *necessarily* expect your little child to take any *special interest* in it until you have drawn his attention to it.

By carefully training the child's observation he will learn much about the value of colour and the beauty of composition

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at an early age which will be of infinite help to him later on. May I make a humble suggestion which I have culled from my experience as a teacher? Do not snub a child for liking a picture you think with your wider experience and fuller knowledge totally uninteresting; a child would resent such a snub and it would be apt to make him insincere and on another occasion he might not like to be natural.

Find out by tactful questions why such a picture appeals to him, and you will generally find that it is because with his limited experience he is able to *understand* it. Picture study is so important in the school curriculum because it is just another window opened on to life, look upon it as an added *interest* in the child's life. H. J. Wells says in one of his books, "Literature, the drama, art, that is the sort of food upon which the young imagination grows stout and tall."

Picture Study can be taught in many different ways, I hardly know how I teach it myself, it is a matter of spontaneity and it comes with the inspiration; but of one thing I am certain, it

cannot be of any real value to the child if the teacher is indifferent. If you are able to rouse interest, the trick is done so to speak, all else will follow smoothly.

It no doubt seems remarkable, but it is nevertheless quite true, that small children of six and seven are thrilled with interest by such a picture as Van Eyck's "Adoration of the Lamb," or Rembrandt's "Syndics," and they are certainly more enquiring than the older pupils, because they are utterly devoid of self-consciousness, and I have found from *experience* as a teacher that those pupils who have begun the study at an early age, become the most interested and satisfactory pupils later on; they have a certain foundation of knowledge from which they unconsciously draw conclusions. We have a pupil at our school who is now twelve years old, and working well in Class III., and who came to us at six years' old; she is the most satisfactory pupil I have in my picture talk lesson; she is in no way talented, but she knows something about the subject and she has already studied six or seven pictures by such masters as Botticelli, Giotto, Raphael, Ghirlandajo, Perugino, Turner, Corot, Millet, Bellini, Van Eyck, Rembrandt, Velasquez, and many others, and next term we hope to study together some of the works of Carpaccio. These are not merely

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names to her, she would be able to describe fairly minutely some of their most famous pictures, she will take a real interest in their works when she meets them in the galleries and in private houses, she will know a little about their "school," and will have a slight insight into the master's personality as expressed through his pictures; she would be able to draw from memory, very roughly no doubt, her impression of the picture. Can you doubt for a moment that such a child will be a more interesting companion, will take a wider view of life, will have more insight into character and all the things *that matter in life*, than the individual with the *same capabilities*. I lay stress on this point, because it has nothing whatsoever to do with talent, who has not had this "window opened." I do not doubt for a moment that the child with *decided* artistic talent would find an outlet for his interest under whatever system of education.

Imagine a class of small boys and girls, their ages ranging from six to eight years of age; they are going to be introduced to the study of some of Velasquez' masterpieces; they will have about eleven weeks in which to learn to know six pictures such as the following: "The Maids of Honour," "The Spinners," "The Forge of Vulcan," "Don Balthazar on Horseback," "Infanta Margarita," "The Surrender of Breda." Unless we take them to the National Gallery or the Wallace Collection, there is no colour to attract their attention, only a small reproduction such as *this* (show picture).

Only one picture must be shown at a time, do not be too generous with your pearls. Keep back your knowledge and be careful to draw from your pupil all he has noticed, before you volunteer your own observations. I would introduce Velasquez to my class through that great masterpiece "The Surrender of Breda." It is a picture which cannot fail to attract interest. They at once want to know who painted the picture, it is not Rembrandt the Dutchman, whose works they studied last term, but a Spaniard. Where is Spain? Someone hunts it up on the atlas. He was born at Seville. What is the capital of Spain? That is where the King lived (show Philip IV.'s portrait, show Velasquez' portrait in the corner of the picture). Tell briefly how Velasquez became the court painter; a little historical knowledge of this description is given at each lesson.

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The pupil will then continue to take an interest in the master all through the term, but be careful that the *picture*, apart from the *painter*, is the main study.

Each pupil in the class will find something of special interest to tell you about the picture, someone will be sure to want to count the lances in the background, it is not exactly an important item, but do remember that *children* appreciate detail. The questions about the picture will be endless, and be careful only to answer the *thoughtful* questions, haphazard questions must be tactfully overlooked; don't explain too much—"the most tiresome thing in the world is explanation." The teacher has a delicate position, she must show enthusiasm and yet keep herself in the background; you may carry your class away with you at the time, but it ought to be the picture which influences the class, not yourself.

After the picture has been discussed for about ten minutes, one or two pupils are asked to describe it from memory; it is a remarkably difficult thing to adequately describe a picture, as a rule they like to give you a list of detail, but encourage them to come to the point at once and to find out the *principal* feature of the picture. At the end of the lesson the children love to draw some detail of the picture from memory in charcoal, in pencil or even sepia. It is a great encouragement if the teacher is able to draw some rough representation of the same on the blackboard, and it shows them how to get some effect with a few important strokes. However, they must not look upon the lesson as a *drawing* lesson. Though they *are* drawing from the flat, I cannot myself see any harm in such drawing if it helps the children to appreciate and remember the *picture*.

The older pupils rather appreciate copying the picture more carefully. I have here some very careful copies of some of Van Eyck's pictures, and as I know how much time and trouble the girl took, I can only conclude that the work must have been beneficial, as concentration and the capacity for taking pains are qualities which are often lacking in the modern child. A lesson to an older class is given on very much the same lines as the sketch I have just given. However, more historical information can be given; encourage the pupils to find information for themselves. The technique may be more carefully studied, and the different schools of painting may be compared. In leaving the new, do not allow them to forget the old,

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constantly refer them to the painters they have already studied, so that they may realize the value their former knowledge is to them. It is nice for them to keep a book in which they can place all the reproductions of works they have studied. The master to be studied next term is Carpaccio, and I have reproductions of the six pictures to be studied here, which some of you may care to see, they are "St. Jerome in his Study," "St. Jerome with his Lion," "St. George slaying the Dragon," "The Dream of St. Ursula," "The Arrival of St. Ursula at Cologne," and "The Presentation in the Temple."