BRUSH DRAWING[1]

By Miss K. Loveday.

In the Fésole Club Papers Mr. Collingwood speaks of Art as one of the means of educating the human spirit, the object of which is not to be attained, he says, by "hastily piling up a Babel of far-fetched graces and futile accomplishments, but by developing the resources and confirming the powers given." Then he goes on to say that "Art as a means of education has not fulfilled its mission. It has been too often employed in the service of vanity, to teach a mere 'accomplishment,' an idle trick, by which the amusement of an odd half-hour shall be passed off as a colourable imitation of the work of genius and labour. There is no education in that, any more than in teaching dogs to dance and parrots to talk. And yet Art, when rightly directed, is educational, for it trains not only one faculty, but all the faculties together; it trains the hand and the eye, and it trains the head and the heart; it teaches us to see and to see truly; it teaches us to think—that science can do; but it teaches us also to admire and to love; it disciplines the emotions."

With these views before us how are we to begin to develop the powers we all have in our possession and continue in solid straightforward progress? The means we employ in the Parents' Union School are Picture Talks and Brush Drawing. Our picture talks if rightly given will help to develop a real appreciation of beauty in art, a love and admiration of what is good and beautiful, and as for brush drawing, which is the subject upon which I am going to speak particularly, we find in Mr. Collingwood's remarks our first object, an object that we must try not to lose sight of throughout our whole course of instruction, namely, "to train the hand and eye"; to teach observation, "to see truly"; to observe shape and form, light and shade and colour, each in their due proportion, and then to be able to express what we have seen, with the brush, in a good, free, clear, easy style.

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But why with the brush only. Why should we select brush drawing as our means? Do we think it better than any other way? for instance, drawing the outline in pencil first and then colouring, which would probably produce a more exact perfect drawing in the end. Well, in the first place we don't want to aim merely at an exact drawing; we must remember that the value of brush drawing is educational, it is a means, not an end in itself, but by this method we can teach what no other can do so well and that is *touch*. Keep this well in mind if you don't want your brush-drawing lessons to be a mere waste of time. Think of the time it takes drawing a pencil outline first, nearly the whole lesson is taken up with this before the painting can begin and in the meanwhile probably the flower has faded, or if in water has opened out more; whereas in brush-work you must do the thing quickly and as it is done thus it remains. There is little chance in brush drawing of altering a thing once it is on paper, every stroke must be clean and correct the first time, there must be no going over the same thing again and again, no finicky work and patching up; and that is why brush drawing is such an excellent training in style from the very first. Then again you have to try and look at things in a simple way, to grasp the general effect of the whole thing and subordinate detail to composition.

The tendency among painters of the present day is to obliterate detail and record impressions. Without going too far, I think we may learn much from them in this respect and

encourage our pupils to look at things in a large way. It is much better to teach children to see things in their right proportion from the beginning and this can only be done by letting them paint things in mass; the effects will seem more real to them and the proportions are more easily seen and balanced than by an outline drawing.

Now, let us suppose we are to begin teaching a child of six (Class Ia in the P.U.S.), who has never done any brush work before, how are we to start? We immediately think of "blobs," and possibly don't feel in the least inspired. But still the first lessons in brush drawing must begin with stroke practice, and I daresay it need not really be so tiresome and messy as we expect. We must show the children how to hold their brushes and how to use them; they must use

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the whole, not only the tip. A good deal of practice is necessary to make them work freely and easily, and control the movements of their fingers; the direction of the strokes must be varied and the brush used in many ways. They can learn to make quite nice patterns and designs. Some children are rather clumsy to start with and will want more practice than others; the great thing is to keep up the interest and make them do really good clean work, not pages full of "blobs," the last as smudgy and bad as the first. The right amount of paint and water, the hand held high and the fingers well away from the tip of the brush, and the stick of the brush always leading the stroke, never pushing it—these are the main points to be remembered. I should not spend too much time over blobs; a few minutes practice at the beginning of each lesson and then let them attempt some natural object that they can have before them. I should begin with some simple sprays of leaves that have the shape, or nearly so, of the brush, and flowers such as snowdrops or buds of daffodils, but I should not let them do these in colour quite at first, it does no good to let them misrepresent things, make them work in monochrome, and as soon as they have sufficiently mastered the strokes of the brush make them distinguish between light and shade. (They can always do their blobs and patterns in any colour they fancy.) Then they will gradually be able to attempt more difficult subjects, animals amongst other things. There is always a certain joy in painting life and I think children feel this and are more easily interested in painting things from Nature and especially animals. I know there are certain difficulties about doing animals; there is not always one at hand at the right moment, and then they are constantly moving just when you least want them to. It will really be nearly all memory work, and, if, for that reason only, splendid training for the eye. You could get the children to paint any animals they have seen during their walks; sheep, lambs, cows, birds, etc., or perhaps they can watch some from the window, or they probably possess pets of some sort, a dog, a cat, rabbits, a parrot, or some bird, that they might paint in various positions.

This kind of work affords excellent practice, because it has to be done quickly and boldly; there is no time for minute

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details; the attitude and most salient features must be grasped and expressed simply; broad effects must be aimed at. A boy of nine that I was teaching did some quite good studies of his dog, a rough-haired terrier, that was always with us in the schoolroom; and besides doing various insects in his Nature Note Book that we had temporarily secured under a glass, he one

day painted a mouse that was caught in a wooden trap, (and which he afterwards secretly let go, to the great annoyance of the housemaid).

We must be very sure that the children paint what they really see and not what they imagine they see; a great deal depends on making them look properly and carefully before beginning to paint, especially when it comes to considering lights and shades in colours. I believe it is easier to study lights and shades in monochrome first. I always find it a good plan in whatever they may be painting to draw my pupils' attention to the strongest lights and shades by making them look at the object with half-closed eyes and say what they see; this shuts out the details and brings out the most salient lights and shades. (Looking through a piece of coloured glass has the same effect, and may be of use to some.) Now, when it comes to representing colours I believe difficulties sometimes arise. Personally, I don't see why there should be any if the previous teaching has been careful and graduated. But I am told that some children "persist in seeing *flat colour* instead of light and shade, and in seeing things (not from perversity) quite differently from the teacher." Of course, no two people see things exactly alike, but seeing colour quite flat in a rounded object and with a good light falling on it seems almost incredible. Unless those unfortunate children have something physically wrong with their eyes, it must be that they have never learnt to look and observe, that their previous drawing lessons have been pure waste of time. Have you ever tried letting them paint reels of coloured silks, placed in a good position with the light falling on them sideways. It helps them to find the different colours of each when in the shade, they know that the silk is really all the same colour, whereas in flowers it often varies even in one petal. Now, they have to realize that colours appear different according to light and form. Some people see or imagine the most wonderful varieties

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of colours in their shadows. The old painters used to pain [sic] their shadows black. I don't think it is absolutely necessary to form any fixed rules about obtaining the right colours for the shadows, but there is one that may be useful especially for children who have any difficulty in this respect. Mix blue-grey with whatever colour you have used for the lighter part. This generally produces a good effect. Thus, for instance, pink and blue-grey will become mauve; yellow and blue-grey, green; red and blue-grey, purple; green and blue-grey, a bluer, greyer green.

All the colours required should be mixed on the palette before beginning to put them on the paper and then the work should go straight on when once begun, using the colours in turns and washing one into the other where a graduated effect is wanted. Aim at getting the shades deep enough at once, for there must be no going over it again.

As a rule brush drawing seems to be applied chiefly to representing flowers and plant forms and making patterns. All the books I know of deal chiefly with these particulars. If you want a book to help you I don't think you could find anything better than May Mallam's *Work with the Brush*.[2]

Some persons of a utilitarian turn of mind hold that the main use of brush work is merely in the nature of decorative design and pattern making, and in consequence they trust very little to brush-work in any other respect.

I don't think brush-drawing should be looked upon only from that point of view; designing is, of course, very useful and delightful, but I consider the main object of teaching

brush drawing to be educational and its greatest charm the good touch it helps to develop. It is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and one of many, but we cannot expect it to stand alone and do everything.

As the children get more advanced their lessons in brush-work should be backed up by accurate studies in charcoal, chalk, or pencil. We hear sometimes that when children get to a certain point, generally in Class III., they seem to stick there. I think they probably want more variety. Let them work in charcoal for a change. I did that one winter term
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with my pupils (Class II. and III.), and found afterwards that they looked out more for lights and shades and that their drawings were more careful and accurate.

I have said nothing as yet about teaching perspective. It is an important item that cannot be neglected, even in brush drawing. If they are taught to observe and to see truly, from the first, the children will probably learn about it unconsciously, though they may never have heard the word.

Whenever in their brush drawing any difficulty as to perspective arises, I should then and there give them some hints that will help them to find out more for themselves. It is not necessary to overwhelm them with bewildering directions and explanations. But besides this I think it would be good at sometime or other, possibly when they get to the "sticking point," to devote a few lessons specially to this subject and give them some more definite instruction in perspective. It would be quite simple, for instance, to begin with drawing two tall vases or candlesticks of exactly the same size, placed on a table so that one is a good distance further away than the other, but so that the front one does not cover the back one. Let your pupils first compare their height with one eye shut and with a long pencil held vertically at arm's length; and then let them draw them carefully and shade them in charcoal. Draw their attention to many examples that they may observe for themselves how things decrease in size the further away they are, for instance, looking down an avenue of trees—show them Hobbema's picture—people in the distance, etc. The next lesson I would suggest letting them draw a large, fat book, or a box, and help them to notice how the lines converge. Put a few questions to them before beginning. "Which point is nearest to you?" "Which furthest away?" and always make them sit well back and straight on their chairs and with their pencil at arm's length and one eye closed compare the lengths of the vertical lines—observe that these always remain vertical and only decrease in height in the distance—and then holding the pencil horizontally, notice the direction of the other lines by getting the angle they make with the pencil, and the amount of foreshortening. For measuring and comparing the pencil must never be held in any other way than absolutely vertical or horizontal.
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In the summer encourage your pupils to sketch, and sketch with them yourself. Choose some fairly distant view with not too much foreground and detail. All that they have learnt in brush drawing will be of use to them and help them in composition—they will be accustomed to looking at their subject with a view to simplifying it and laying hold of the general effect; they will know how much to put in and what to leave out; and they will work boldly and freely and with a good touch.

The "A.L." Artistic Brush Drawing, ten 8vo. books of graduated examples. all with paper to draw on and instructions for drawing and designing, 16pp, printed in tints, each *2d*. net.

Books I. and Ia, graduated examples for very young children (or beginners).

Books II. to IV., for Junior Classes.

Books V. to VIII., for Upper Classes, the work may be begun in any part of the school.

Book O (Preparatory), introduction book for Lower Classes, first beginners, *2d*. net. E. J. Arnold & Son, Ltd., Educational Publishers, Leeds (and Glasgow, 37, Jamaica Street).

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[1] Paper read at the Students' Conference, Easter, 1909.

[2] *Work with the Brush*, by May Mallam. 5*s*. Fully illustrated with 10 plates in colour and 23 plates in monochrome. At the end of the book are a few hints for the working of the "A.L." Artistic Brush Drawing Books.