

MISS MASONS PRINCIPLES: HOW THEY AFFECT SCHOOL DISCIPLINE.

By G. F. HUSBAND.

THERE is an Eastern fable of a frog who was born in a well and lived there the whole of his life. He was very active and industrious, very inquisitive and acquisitive. By the time he reached maturity, he knew all there was to be known about the well.

One day there came into the well a frog from the sea. Said the frog in the well:

“Hullo! Where did you come from?”

“The sea!”

“The sea? What is it? Where is it? How big is it? Is it as big as that leaf?” pointing to a huge water-lily leaf.

“Much bigger!”

“Is it as big as this board we’re on?”

“Many times bigger.”

“Hm” (sarcastically), “Perhaps it’s bigger than the whole well?”

“Millions of times bigger!”

“Millions of times bigger than the whole well? I don’t believe it! I can’t believe it!”

That frog in the well spoke a more profound truth than he knew. Plainly, he was not in a position to understand the other frog.

Each of us is a frog-in-the-well on many things. (Rousseau said, “Few of us know how much we must know in order to know how little we know.”) On the other hand, each of us may be, in a measure, a frog from the sea on some subject. If so, you will have realized how difficult it is to get a frog-in-the-well to see your point of view.

Many a critic of Education or some particular Education scheme is a frog in the well of his own limited education. Said a headmaster of a school, anent the P.N.E.U. programme,

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“Plutarch! What’s the good of Plutarch to these boys? Why! I can’t read the stuff myself.” About pictures he said very grandiloquently, “The only pictures I believe in are Nature’s pictures—the sky, the sea.” Narration was dismissed as “mere memorizing.”

What *could* I do, but remain dumb?

Miss Mason is still fifty years ahead of her time. Her principles cannot be expounded in a short period. The philosophy grows upon you as you read and practise it.

My task this evening is to point out how her principles affect school discipline.

Let us glance at some of the causes of misbehaviour in children, that is to say, what adults regard as misbehaviour.

Trouble frequently arises through a certain attitude of mind towards the child. The teacher regards the children as so many receptacles into which he has to thrust certain stipulated facts. Out of a class of forty or fifty children, there may be one or two who out of the very nature of things, cannot assimilate those facts. The teacher is on his mettle, his ability is at stake and there is friction.

Now, the Ambleside method is essentially an attitude towards the child in which friction from the causes just mentioned, cannot possibly arise. Narration reveals much to the teacher: it compels him to get at the back of the mind of the individual child, and as this knowledge grows, so does his ability to guide and help.

Lack of interest is a fruitful source of trouble. The P.U.S. programmes are so full and wide in their scope that interest is aroused in some direction or other in every child.

Thousands of children in our elementary schools rarely get a chance to express themselves orally except in answer, often one word, to a teacher's question. Is it any wonder that they are sometimes restless?

Some children are naughty to show off—an inferiority complex sometimes longs to feel [sic] superior. I think Narration, properly handled, tends to satisfy the desire of a child "to be in the picture."

Many misbehave because they literally don't know any better. Real discipline is a matter of steady growth from within (you were told this morning that training commenced at birth. I know an old family physician who says it commences before). *You cannot impose discipline on a child:* but [p 386]

you can help it to discipline itself. Discipline is strengthened by experience and knowledge—knowledge of ourselves and the impulses within us, and the knowledge of others and how they acted in special circumstances. The P.U.S. child is steadily getting that knowledge from *Ourselves*, Plutarch, Shakespeare, and other books.

The co-ordination of the subjects, the presentation of the same facts from different angles unconsciously develops the habit of looking all round a subject.

The power of attention developed by narrating after a single reading, and the application required to get through the programmes develop self-control. Self-control is the keystone of the arch of discipline.

Had I but one gift to bestow on my pupils, it would be self-control, that each may become:—

"A wise man, of himself commander high,
Whom want, nor death, nor bands can terrify,
Resolv'd t' affront desires, honours to scorn,
All in himself close, round, and neatly-borne."

"Such a man is five hundred degrees beyond kingdoms and principalities: himself is a kingdom unto himself."