

CHILD-STUDY IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

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NEITHER child-study nor Sunday-school work presents a field of accurate limitation and organization. Both, however, are branches of pedagogical science, modern in their origin, hopeful in their outlook, and attractive to those of an optimistic philosophy. To a multitude of lay teachers child-study has given a new point of view and a fresh inspiration, turning the dross of drudgery into the gold of idealism, and dressing the dry bones of pedagogical abstraction in radiant forms of youthful life.

Upon the Sunday school, meeting an hour a week, with no laws of compulsory attendance, there has been laid in our land the whole burden for religious instruction. Certainly it would seem that whatever has been found good for the day-school teacher should, under these circumstances, be appropriated for the Sunday-school teacher. The argument that the former is trained and the latter untrained, the former professional, the latter volunteer, has little force. The difference in training is not striking. The difference in capacity favors one side as often as the other. In large towns and cities having good public schools with good teachers there are generally good Sunday schools with good teachers. In the rural sections the Sunday-school teacher represents quite as cultivated a type as the day-school teacher. The real difficulty comes from the fact that a bungling workman can do the greater damage the more delicate the material. So an unskilled teacher works greater havoc when dealing with high and holy things than when working in geography and arithmetic.

The fundamental postulate of child-study is that the child has a life of its own, a life to be studied and understood, to be developed and encouraged, sometimes, it may be, repressed,

but not to be disregarded and habitually repressed. The child is not a little man or woman, as we so generally conceive it to be. It does not possess all of the adult mental attributes and inclinations, but it lives in a world of its own, a world into which it is exceedingly difficult for the adult to enter. Recollection of their own childish days is one of the keys by which adults seek to unlock the portals to this child-world, but it by no means always works in the lock. Frequently adult theological conceptions are forced upon children; that is to say, we seek to force them upon the children; but they have robust powers of self-protection. I take an illustration of this from England, showing what comes of the efforts to instil religious dogmas into the minds of children through teaching the catechism, there frequently taught in the common schools. The following is the written answer by a child of average intelligence to the question, "What is thy duty toward God?" "My duty toads God is to bleed in Him, to fering and to loaf withold your arts, withold my mine, withold my sold, and with my servth, to whirship and give thanks, to put my old trash in Him, to call upon Him, to onner his old name and His world, and to save Him truly all the days of my life's end." In answer to another question the duty toward one's neighbor is written out on the same lines of originality and obscurity. The child had been forced to commit to memory what was to him a perfectly meaningless jumble of words. In writing them out he reproduces the sound as well as he can, not having the sense to aid him. Stories of miracles present no difficulties to little children. Biographical stories from the Bible, especially of children, appeal to them. Above all, Jesus enters their understanding in the form of a little child.

Most of the methods of child-study seek simply, in one form or another, to find out what this child-world is, to penetrate the unknown country of child-psychology. In so far as these methods are not dependent on the use of scientific instruments and laboratory investigations, they lie as open to any intelligent Sunday-school teacher as to anyone else. This study should disclose the intellectual, the moral, and the physical life of the child. In some schools this information has been sought from three sources

—the parents, previous teachers, and from the children themselves. Of course the kinds of information sought from these different sources are essentially different; not the same questions are asked the parents that are asked the children or teachers, but light is thrown upon the problem from all three directions. Child-study of this kind has been carried out very successfully in the Hillhouse High School, New Haven, Conn., by Principal M. T. Scudder, and the results were published in the *School Review* for April, 1899. Three samples only can be given to show the character of the returns:

First, the returns from a grammar-school teacher: "A boy.—Home conditions: favorable; health: not good; traits: bright and quick, but indifferent and careless, uneven in his work; polite but sly; lacks application. General information: wide, reads extensively; poor in oral expression; particularly interested in history. Conduct: poor; whispers and acts out of impulses. Remarks: A boy that needs watching and following up, and the parents will gladly cooperate."

Second, a reply from a parent: "The personal interest of the teacher is greatly to be desired. The mechanical recitations of the automaton are valueless. If an interest can be developed in the studies, something will be learned. All school children (their elders likewise) lead two lives; the school life is one, the home life the other, both under different influences; the teacher knows one, the parent the other. I thank you for your evident interest, and hope you will receive appreciative answers from all parents."

Third, a summary of the replies of the pupils themselves on "the favorite teachers' manner": "Are not cross" (this is said by many). "Do not make cutting remarks." "Do not call you down before the class." "Do not treat you like a mere child, as some teachers do." "Not too pedantic." "Even-tempered, self-controlled." "Appreciates a joke as well as other people." "Not so severe when lessons are incorrect." "Not cross when you do not know your lessons well." "She is pleasant and honest." "Patient when you get embarrassed." "If you are embarrassed, encourages you." "Not easy, but forbearing,

never allowing anger to rise over trifles." "Says, 'Please.'" "They do not fly at you when you make a mistake."

Information of this sort collected in regard to all the pupils of the Sunday school, if properly used, would be of the greatest value, and, furthermore, the collecting and studying of it would prove intensely interesting to the Sunday-school teachers.

One of the most effective features of child-study as applied in public schools is the attention it has drawn to hygienic conditions. There has been more cry and less wool about school hygiene than any other subject of school economy. Through the help of child-study some things have been accomplished in many schools. Such common matters as heating and ventilation are, for the most part, only guessed at. One of the best-known and most successful school architects in the country recently said that, after seventeen years of experience, and building hundreds of schoolhouses, he would not guarantee how any system of ventilation would work. Where children are kept only a single hour, as in the Sunday school, this is of less importance than where they are kept many hours, as in the public schools; but still it is of importance and should be looked after.

Then, too, defects in sight and in hearing have often caused great embarrassments in public schools, defects of which the children themselves were not conscious and of which the teachers never dreamed. So children get the reputation of being dull and inattentive, when they simply do not hear keenly or do not see clearly. Simple tests for hearing and seeing are now provided, which anyone can use, and which reveal any noticeable defects. These, too, are of less importance in the Sunday school than in the day school, because of the Sunday school's shorter session. Still there is no reason why they should be neglected.

A careful study of the child's nature, and especially of its attainments, is fundamental in good teaching. Apperception, to use the technical jargon, is the most important psychological principle in teaching. Put in other words, it is "beginning at the point of contact," upon which Dr. Patterson Du Bois has written an admirable little book that should be in the hands of all Sunday-school teachers. A favorite formula expressing this same

idea is: Proceed from the known to the unknown. Now, the teacher must know what is known. It is quite useless to present to the child matters that are totally outside of his previous range of experience. There must be a point of contact somewhere; that is, the new material must be so presented as to immediately form relationship with what is already in the child's mind. The Great Teacher formulated this psychological truth when he said: "To him that hath shall be given, from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." In other words, a new truth coming to the mind and finding there truths akin to it tarries and takes up its abode; but if the stranger truth finds no kindred, it goes on its way, so that the mind that had it for a little time loses it, may be forever. Dr. Du Bois develops this whole idea most interestingly, and gives many striking and amusing illustrations. As we hope all who read this article either have read or will read his book, no more space will be taken here in attempting to do what he has already so well accomplished.

"The child," says Girard, "has only a brief and sorrowful chapter in history." It must be admitted that the world, in its laws and regulations, was long cruel to childhood, and even since Christ set a little child in the midst of his disciples and told them to become like unto it if they would enter the kingdom of heaven, we have been fools and slow of heart to understand his meaning. The common practice has been just the reverse of Christ's example: a grown-up person has set himself in the midst of a lot of children and told them to marvel at his attainments and perfections, and to become like him. The church for many centuries, while concerning itself profoundly with children, did so, not to understand them, but to make them what it wished them to become; the church itself was the grown-up pattern. Now it may be that the time is coming when under the lead of educational reformers we shall come to appreciate Christ's attitude toward children, and, with Froebel, live with our children, that we may understand them as the first condition for all right education.