

On Teaching Children.

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III.—EFFORT AND INCLINATION.

IN recent discussions on educational aims and methods, no word has occurred more frequently than the term "Interest." As part of everyday speech, it often means no more than amusement, an agreeable pastime from which all semblance of labour has been removed. In common with much of the philosophical vocabulary, Interest, as a "term of art," suffers from the divergent interpretation belonging to the more widely current sense of the word; the feeling of gratification or pleasure customarily implied is often supposed to exhaust its meaning.

But the mental state, for which the term stands, is not so simple. Interest may be painful as well as pleasurable; the returned truant is in most instances greatly interested in the schoolmaster's movements. But interest is much more than feeling; its essential constituent and root-principle is the recognition of the interesting object as a means through which some cherished, or even necessary, purpose can be attained. An interested person is a person bent on self-realization by the help of certain definite objects, or in certain unequivocal ways.

The self which is being realized may, of course, be noble or the reverse; in either case, and in the intermediate instances, the recognition is intellectual, not emotional. So understood, it will be generally conceded that interest may carry with it a readiness to put forth strenuous effort, and even to undergo pain in reaching the desired end. The merely amused person frequently acquiesces in the situation, and no more; that state of things is not unknown to school-rooms where the teacher has failed to consider the idea of interest on all sides. But the really interested boy or girl, man or woman, is too earnestly

active to occupy a position so semi-detached; the greater the interest, the more evident the attention which expresses it, and, within limits, the more acute the feeling which accompanies it. The clearer the recognition of the value, *for the self*, of the object, circumstance, or person which interests, the greater the feeling and the attention. It is to the German philosopher, Herbart, that the position of interest in modern educational theory is primarily due, and for him the word was scarcely less than a synonym for mental activity generally. In Herbart's opinion, children were instructed, and were made to acquire knowledge, in order that they might be interested about many things.

Interest in this sense means more than "inclination," and it has nothing to do with, or, rather, is the very opposite of, purposeless caprice. Modern America appears to be the author of the expressive, if unhandsome, phrase, "soft pedagogy," and many writers of the present day deprecate the requirement of effort from children at school. But the wish to make childish inclination the guiding principle of curriculum and method is in origin neither modern nor American. The neglect of the history of education deprives us of many valuable lessons bequeathed by the past, and in this connection none is more convincing than that associated with the name of Basedow, who opened an "educational institute" at Dessau, Anhalt, in 1774. When the opposition between effort and inclination as principles of education is under review, the doings of Basedow should be recalled.

In scholastic method, Basedow was the disciple of Locke. Since the master laid great emphasis upon utility as a criterion of a study's educational value, and also upon inclination as a condition of learning, Basedow adopted these two maxims as his own. But, lacking the illogical common sense of Locke, he made them the foundations of his system. The consequences were grotesque and disastrous. Only a pedant would regard utility as disqualifying a study to become an instrument of education; but when utility is allowed to be the prime principle

underlying a course of studies, educational considerations lose their importance, and superficiality usurps the place of knowledge. So it was in Basedow's institution. There are very many things of which it can be said that they are "useful," and as long as that quality is all-sufficing, there is no limit to the number of things that can be brought to the notice of children. The point is illustrated by Basedow's "Elementarwerk," recently reprinted with the original hundred or so of entertaining copper-plates. Although issued in 1774 as a combination of school-book and "book of directions" for the teacher, it is in effect an "encyclopædia of useful information," which could only be profitably used as supplementary to a more systematic course of study. The dissipation of interest and the encouragement of bird-wittedness in the pupils, consequent upon the use of a collection so multifarious, is well illustrated by the position ultimately assigned to manual work in Basedow's scheme. Hand-work is unquestionably useful; but, also unquestionably, it involves serious effort, and is therefore opposed to the principle of "recreative instruction." Successful manual work demands interest; mere inclination will sooner or later be crossed by it. Manual work, therefore, maintained its place in the Dessau scheme only by becoming a mode of punishment!

Basedow's conceptions and principles were not all of this kind; if they had been, he would not have remained the esteemed correspondent of men so different as Kant and von Zedlitz, Frederick the Great's Minister of Education. But the notion of "recreative instruction" and a thorough-going adherence to utility conspired with his own defects of character to ruin his institution. Meaner men made even a greater failure, and so brought discredit upon Basedow's whole system and upon educational experiment generally.

The doctrine of interest, sanely interpreted, seems to furnish a mode of reconciliation between the opposite methods of those who advocate "recreative instruction," and those who insist on the paramount need for discipline of mind and conduct. It is not the office of interest to banish drudgery and hard work

from the business of learning, from which they are, in truth, inseparable. Interest is, rather, a spur which compels the learner to face the arduous and disagreeable with endurance, and perhaps with pleasure. On the other hand, it is a mistaken asceticism which needlessly places these retarding forces in the learner's path; the nature of the case usually insures a sufficiency of these for wholesome discipline, apart from the educator's interference. But the doctrine of interest is based upon the assumption that it is possible to excite the desire for knowledge—that that desire is natural to all rational minds, or to minds that are becoming rational. The incitement may be of many kinds, direct or indirect, but all kinds issue in the same desire to know, and, therefore, in a willingness to learn. In favourable cases, it is sufficient to indicate that there is a problem to be solved; in others, it may be necessary to show that there is primarily a pleasure to be gained, or a pain to be avoided. But in the less favourable circumstances, it is the educator's duty to be assured that what is proposed for learning is suitable to the powers of the learner, and the general immaturity of his mind. In the last resort, it may be necessary to insist upon obedience to authority pure and simple; the pupil *ought* to learn, and, therefore, he must. But in this case, the educator's attitude is justified by moral, rather than by intellectual, considerations. Appetite may come by eating, but on the whole, only a meagre repast can fairly be expected from eaters who have little taste for the fare.

Treating the child as a rational creature means more than just accepting his level of mental life and intellectual incapacities. These are the starting-points from which he is to be brought in due course to higher levels and his incapacities removed, so far as that is possible. To revert to a former illustration, the textbook presents a body of knowledge logically articulated and complete, and it is the teacher's object to assist the pupil to construct for himself such a body of knowledge; the purpose which the teacher has in view, when he re-casts the order and treatment of the textbook, is to bring about in the pupil's mind

a more living understanding of the book itself, or rather of the branch of knowledge with which the book deals. While beginning with the concrete and with things seen or handled, the goal is the abstract and general, conceived apart from the things of sense.

The movement is in accordance with the nature of the child's intelligence which spontaneously generalizes and unifies, weaving the different threads of knowledge into a texture which is much more than the sum of the threads. In spite of vague, ill-defined beginnings, the mind moves onward to system; new ideas are understood only on condition that there is a previously established combination of ideas into which the new-comer can be fitted. Basedow's scheme was destined to failure because this systematizing of the intelligence was regarded as of no account; so long as the pile was increased it was thought that all went well. Ideas and the groups of ideas, or systems, which the language of the school-room calls "subjects," can only become integral parts of a child's mind by incorporation. A subject which is detachable, so to say, to that extent is not educative. Hence the valid plea that, if religious instruction is necessary to education, it cannot be so taught as to be taken or left at discretion. There is no escape from the dilemma; either instruction given in such circumstances is no real part of the education which the school gives, or the pupil is being imperfectly educated. The point has not escaped the attention of those who organized German education; religious instruction of a denominational character, Protestant, Catholic or Jewish, is as much part of the curriculum as is the mother-tongue in German schools of all grades.

The systematizing spontaneously undertaken, or attempted, by all learners gives the key to the position which should be accorded in a child's education to authoritative statement, or dogma. In the first place, as already hinted, education has to do with other matters as well as with the child's intelligence, or understanding; notably, education is concerned with conduct. Remembering the power for good and evil which habit exercises

upon all, and the ease with which habits may be established whose full moral significance is not recognized till much later, it is clear that circumstances may require the educator to place actual behaviour above knowledge in his scale of values. In consequence, his teaching becomes dogmatic, and his pupil is required to defer to authority. But these conditions are not always absent from teaching and learning of the purely intellectual kind. For the time being, at least, *Ipse dixit* must be conclusive.

Those who deny any place in a child's education to dogma, assert, in effect, that children should have no teachers; *discentem oportet credere*. So soon as we come down from platforms, or drop our pens, and bear a hand in the management of children who are not the mere phantoms of our brains, we discover many occasions when it is fitting, nay necessary, that the child shall accept some propositions purely on authority, even though they be little understood. Nevertheless, the child's point of view is still to be respected. Whence it follows that the teacher must be tolerant of vague and ill-defined beginnings, satisfied that all is well if progress is being made. He will not, in the supposed interest of precision, force upon his pupil an accuracy of expression which only conceals a poverty of understanding. As educator, he will at first tolerate interpretations which may shock the theologian or philosopher. With liberty to picture, illustrate, and otherwise realize statements in his own anthropomorphic fashion, the child is capable of *an* understanding of many abstruse doctrines. But these will be withheld so long as the pupil is incapable of investing them with the minimum of meaning.

