

Children as Teachers.

FROM olden times it has been thought that adults should be the teachers, and children simply learners; but in this nineteenth century of civilization the greatest find that they can learn from the little ones. The best educators are those who have learned most from little children, and the most successful primary teachers are those who can see and feel things as children see and feel them. Authors of literature and text-books for children must now know child-nature, or fail. Scientific philologists are beginning to recognize the fact that children just learning to talk can in a few months teach them more about how languages are formed than can be learned by years of study of dead and living languages. Even the philosopher and psychologist are turning to the child for the solution of some of the problems that have so long baffled them, and the practical moralist turns from theories to learn of children how moral ideas are formed and moral action called forth.

The development of the race is epitomized in the development of the child, and the observer may read it in the unfolding psychological activity of the innocent child with more pleasure and profit than in the learned histories of civilization.

Tiederman, Darwin, Taine, Alcott, Romanes, and other learned men have studied their own children scientifically, and taken notes on their development, while Perez Kussmaul and others have made observations on a number of children. Humphreys, Holden, and Noble have collected and examined the vocabularies of several children two years old, in order to discover the general laws of speech. Emily Talbot has collected observations of mothers on young babes. The most thorough and accurate study has, however, been made by Preyer, who carefully observed and experimented upon his boy during the first three years of his life, noting down each day every thing calculated to throw light upon the capacity of children and the order of the development of their powers. Much light has been thrown on many subjects by these investigations, but a sufficient number of carefully verified facts has not yet been collected to enable us with certainty to distinguish characteristics common to all from individual peculiarities. It has been made evident that not only must there be persevering exactness in observing and recording the facts, but that many of them can be accurately observed and correctly interpreted only by one versed in physiology and psychology.

Considerable interest has been aroused and many plans proposed designed to increase scientific knowledge on the subject, to bring parents into new and pleasanter relations with each other, and to preserve records of interest and value to the family. Probably no more acceptable or more valuable present could be given a child who has just attained his majority than a little book containing a record of his life from babyhood. The data contained in such a record would make it possible for him to obey the maxim "Know thyself," and to guide his life by that knowledge, while the little incidents of childish life that give so much pleasure when remembered and related by the parents would be preserved and enjoyed by himself and his descendants. Parents who have engaged in such observations have not only learned to understand their children better, and been drawn into closer relations with them, but have also found the task most interesting and delightful.

It will probably be years before the observations of many scientists on children can be collected, but in the mean time a father, mother, or older sister of ordinary intelligence can, by exercising patience and care, observe and record certain facts of child-development that will be as important and reliable as those furnished by the most learned scientist. These observations, also, are those made at the most interesting age of the child's life,—the period of the development of speech. With a little care, the mother can easily record the development of language in her cunning little prattler,—an evolution as remarkable and full of interest as that traced by the philologist in the languages of the various races in different ages, and throwing as much light on the origin of speech in man and the laws of its development. The mother who will make out a list of all the words now used by her little language-learner, and then carefully note down new words as they are learned, may contribute facts leading to results as important as have been discovered by scientists after years of investigation.

There are two principal things to notice in such a study: (1) the development of the power of articulating, and (2) the development of the intellect: hence it is necessary to keep two lists of words,—one containing all words articulated by the child, with indications as to how they are pronounced; and the other, all words used understandingly, those used only in direct imitation, only at sight of pictures in a book, or only from memory, as in nursery rhymes, being omitted from this list. The first list would indicate the common difficulties encountered in learning to articulate, and an examination of a sufficient number would make it possible to determine whether there really are any general laws of mispronunciation such as have been proposed. The second list would indicate the intellectual progress of the child as it learns new words, and learns to use old ones with increasing accuracy, and to put them together into phrases and sentences. Words that are invented by the child, and those used in a sense different from the ordinary meaning, are especially interesting, and throw considerable light on the subject of how children classify and generalize. A child who saw and heard a duck on the water called it "quack;" and, this word being thus associated with the bird and with the liquid upon which it rested, he thereafter called all birds and all liquids "quack," and later, seeing the eagle on a coin, he called that and other coins "quack." The observing mother will note many similar peculiar yet natural uses of words by her little one who is getting acquainted with this complex world of ours and learning the strange language of its inhabitants.

After the child's present vocabulary has been obtained as accurately as possible, its further progress can easily be recorded by noting down new words as they are heard (in alphabetical order). It will be found convenient to use separate sheets for each week, or perhaps for each month in the case of the articulating vocabulary. No confusion will then result, and on the back of the sheets may be given the peculiar meanings attached to words, the earlier attempts at putting words together, the later sentences of interest, especially those showing the characteristic grammatical errors, and other items of interest. Such lists of words, kept from the time a child begins to talk until he is three years of age, could not fail to give interesting and more or less important results; and a comparison of a number of vocabularies of children under three years of age, such as could be obtained by a few months of observation, would have a similar value. How much do the vocabularies of children in cities differ from those in the country or in villages? What is the effect on the vocabulary of associating with other children of nearly the same age? What influence does ease or difficulty of pronunciation have upon the adoption of words into the vocabulary, and what is the effect of special teaching by parents? These are a few of the many interesting questions that might be answered from such vocabularies, accompanied by the necessary information. Notwithstanding these various influences, many of the same words would probably be found in all of the vocabularies. I found sixty-four words used in common by four little girls two years of age.

It is to be hoped that such observations by parents of children who are just learning to talk will soon become common. If those who have begun, or will begin, such observations, will send me the record for several months before the middle of next May (1891), I shall be pleased to compare them, and report the result to the readers of this paper. If any thing of scientific value is obtained, it will be published, and along with it the names of those by whose patient observation it has been obtained. Besides the facts suggested above, the age and sex of the child, and the nationality of the parents, should be sent with the record.

Those who intelligently and sympathetically study the intellectual and emotional development of the child from day to day will find it more interesting than any continued story, and will gain more knowledge of human nature than by reading the most vivid character delineations.

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