

My best pupil, a girl of 15, told me the other day she had never had a headache, and was never ill. This girl can easily and correctly write a composition with her right hand and work out a given mathematical problem with her left, can draw different subjects with either hand, and has assured me that such exercises, which, of course, are exceptional, do not tire her in the least.

She is a leader among her class-mates, and has a strong perception of justice and a love of order. To these qualities she adds fearlessness and frankness and modesty, altogether a promising union of personal qualities.

All *normal* children can be trained to use both hands alternately for writing and drawing, but some abnormal children (and these are the exceptional few) cannot be trained, and in such cases the method must *not* be enforced.

The younger children are, the more easily are they taught the use of either hand impartially. The first steps of ambidextral teaching delay—and *should* delay—rapid mental education. But as rapid education is not desirable in any case, and “quick progress” does not result in final harmony, this is a decided advantage.

Once the balance found, development and mental growth are normal, and the bi-manual child, by the nature of its training, escapes many physical dangers that lie in wait for the lop-sided scholar. It is well-known that right-handed workers have their thought centres in the left side of the brain, and that as soon as the left hand is called upon to perform intellectual work, new thought centres are formed in the right hemisphere of the brain. An education that graduates the training of both hands for intellectual work will, therefore, be, at the same time, training both hemispheres of the brain to become thinking well-exercised organs.

Mr. John Jackson, in his interesting book on “Ambidexterity,” quotes numerous well-known medical men, who agree “in asserting that both in regard to speech and motor capabilities the right brain is in no whit inferior to the left, but that it has been, can, and may be cultivated or educated to exactly the same degree of activity or functional ability as its fellow, the left brain.”

“The nerve-force and nerve fibres which produce muscular action on one side of the body have their origin in the opposite hemisphere of the brain.” (Dr. W. Cahall, of New York.)

Out here in Chile I have personally consulted numerous medical authorities. All were in favour of ambidextral education, more especially those who had actual connection with educational work, either as professors of hygiene in fiscal schools or as medical superintendents.

Some readers of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING will not have forgotten Miss Eva Quezada Achanan, M.D., a lady whose charming personality is only equalled by her humanity and scientific training, and who became known to various members of the nursing profession during their visit to the Women's Congress in Berlin.

This lady is a warm supporter of ambidextral training, and has been inspired to champion bi-manual education by her mother, a highly-intellectual and harmonious woman, whose children have all been distinguished in one way or another by physical, mental, and moral superiority. Apart from dedicating herself to her more directly professional duties, Miss Quezada was for many years teacher of hygiene in a government school.

Those who have seen bi-manual children at work, in an upright natural position, their spines in no danger of deformity, their eyes unstrained by a false position (for bi-manual writing is upright) cannot question the advantages such training offers. As a fact, opposition does not, as a rule, come from medical quarters, but from teachers, to whom the system naturally offers difficulties.

I have personally been fortunate in the enthusiastic support of my staff, and recognise with gratitude that our own success in ambidextral education is due to their efforts.

As to the pupils, I have found them (with few exceptions) most willing to learn the use of both hands. As I said, there is no difficulty with the little ones, if taken gradually, without hurry. Older beginners have the same difficulty every beginner has in using any set of muscles and nerves unused to certain exercises. And—as in all exercises—so in these care is necessary to avoid exaggeration. Time must be allowed for development, rest pauses must be frequent; we do not want to *force*, but to *fortify* in school-training. The object is not the phenomenon but the strengthening of human mechanisms for future use, the storing of energies for good and *happy* work hereafter.

Personal experience is generally worth a good deal of theory: I myself began bi-manual work late in life, trained myself on a system of my own, and succeeded, without a headache, in ambidextral blackboard drawing and colouring in a very short time. Now I frequently work with the left hand in preference to the right, in all that relates to form demonstration, and find my left hand work “fresher.” I have never succeeded in writing “pleasurably” with my left hand, and find my own style stilted and unnatural when I do so.

But the restfulness of a change of hand is

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)