

A STIMULUS TO TEACHING.

A Lecture to the British College of Nurses.

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ABRIDGED.

William James has told us that teaching is an Art, and not a Science. It is certainly one of the most interesting and inspiring of all the Arts, *in spite of*, or perhaps it may be in some cases, *because of*, its difficulties. The teacher undertakes the responsibility of consciously handing on something of the heritage of knowledge which the generations have built up to those, who, in their turn, will become the teachers of the future. Social progress is a long and arduous climb and teachers must see to it that their pupils go beyond them, reaching a stage just a little higher—so only will there be progress.

The teacher's difficulties all centre round one essential fact; the material with which she has to deal is alive, and the extent to which it remains alive and grows in vitality is the test of the success of the teacher. She is not dealing with a number of machines, or inanimate material which she can move about and place at will. Her pupils will not stay put through any force from outside, the living forces within must be appealed to: interest will bring attention, but so, unfortunately, will fear. The good teacher can foretell to a large extent the reactions of her pupils to the different kinds of stimulus that she may give them, but she can never be quite sure. Misconstructions and misinterpretations confront her frequently; she may be surprised again and again, fortunately, into remembering that her students are independent centres of living activity—fortunately, because routine creeps in so readily to educational organisation.

Purpose is a factor which plays a fundamental part in all higher mental activity. During the course of our mental development our actions progress from blind responses to instinctive impulses to forms of co-ordinated activity in pursuit of definite ends, which may be comparatively remote. The means of achieving these ends may require years—but it is the ultimate end which is the attractive power, giving direction and focus throughout the process. It is well for teachers, therefore, to give a little thought to the purpose they have in view, because, whether they wish it or not, it will inevitably affect their work.

There have been many aims put forward at one time and another for teaching and education. Is it mainly in order to enable them to earn a living that we have our children and youth educated? Or is it that we want to cram into them, while their minds are receptive, as much knowledge as we can and to this end send them in for as many examinations as possible? Or is it that we who are adults have very definite views as to what we want our children to be and so we educate them to fulfil our ideas? Or shall we go back to the Greeks and say with Plato, that the aim of education is "to develop in the body and in the soul all the perfection of which they are capable"? Here the emphasis is rather on the capacities of the learner and harmonious development *for him*, for harmony and balance are surely essential factors in that perfection of which Plato speaks. The compelling force of such a purpose, though necessarily remote and ultimate, will operate behind all the minor aims and shorter views which come to the top from time to time, and help to ensure that whatever work is done it shall be *related to life*.

To turn to the more particular question of the teacher in relation to her class, there is one point which will repay some thought and attention. It relates to her attitude

to her pupils. Given the right attitude and a genuine interest in the subject success is assured—but how often unfortunately that attitude is not all that it might be.

In relation to her class the teacher is necessarily in a positive position; discipline and control rest with her, she can dictate as she pleases. Many dangers accompany such a position: she may develop a taste for power, a love of asserting her own personality and imposing it upon her class with the result that she begins to see herself on a very much higher level than they, and teaches "down" to them. Such an attitude is the most effective barrier to successful teaching. Rather must the teacher remember that she is a learner too, seeking, in partnership with her class, to achieve some aim. She has explored the ways and means of this achievement already and is therefore able to act as guide and point out landmarks to those who are following her—but she is not for that reason any better than they. The enterprise must be undertaken jointly and the class take an active share in the process.

In working out any particular lesson she will therefore do well to share with her class at the outset, the purpose which she has in mind—how otherwise can they help to achieve it?—and it will then exert its compelling force upon them as well as upon the teacher. Then should follow a clear presentation of the main subject of the lesson, related by means of illustrations, whenever possible, to the lives and interests of the students; with a final glance back over the ground covered to emphasize yet again the essential landmarks. No elaborate scheme of drawing-up lessons is either necessary or desirable—given the right attitude three headings should be enough for any lesson, and these can be summed up under an old saying: "Say what you are going to say, say it, and say you have said it"—but say it always in relation to life.

WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE DOING.

Miss A. G. Maclagan writes from the Victoria Hospital, Damascus, Syria:—

"As Conferences seem to be the order of the day you may be interested to hear about one I attended along with one of my colleagues, about two weeks ago. It was the 2nd Annual Conference of the Christian Medical Association of Syria and Palestine. The Association as such has only been in existence two years. This year the Conference was in Tiberias for the sake of those working in Palestine, and it was disappointing that not more attended. Syria was well represented.

The Association includes in its membership not only doctors, but also dispensers and nurses. We hope the day is not far distant when the nurses will have an association of their own.

Reports were given by representatives from the various hospitals, on the work done by them during the past year, and four papers were presented which were followed by discussion. The subjects of the papers were Philosophy of Treatment (Dr. Ernest Altounyan), Malaria in Deir ez Zor (Dr. Ellis Hudson), *Ecchinococcus* Cysts (Dr. Herbert Torrance), and Vesico-Vaginal Fistulæ (Dr. Roswell Brown).

Interesting though the papers were, they left no time for the nurses present to discuss any nursing problems, so at the business meeting at the close of the Conference it was proposed and carried that the Nursing Profession be represented on the Committee by one of their number, and that one of her duties be to secure for the next Conference, either a paper on some nursing point, *e.g.*, Dietetics in this country, or opportunity for a Round Table discussion of nursing problems in this part of the world. Miss Lauritsen (Danish) Matron of the Danish Mission Hospital in Nebk, Syria, was elected. She has been in the country many years and is a most capable woman. Finding how difficult

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