THE POINT OF CONTACT IN TEACHING

DU BOIS

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IN TEACHING

BY

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DEDICATED
TO THE LITTLE CHILDREN OF THE
SUNDAY-SCHOOL

Preface

The child mind is a castle that can be taken neither by stealth nor by storm. But there is a natural way of approach and a gate of easy entry always open to him who knows how to find it.

The ideal point at which a child's intelligent attention is to be first engaged, or his instruction is to begin, is an experience or point of contact with life. One who understands this truth need seldom have any great difficulty in getting an entry into the child's mind.

This little manual is an expansion of a small monograph issued over two years ago under the title "Beginning at the Point of Contact." Being written originally in the interest of better educational standards in the Sunday-school it won its way into request by Sunday-school primary workers. But certain secular normal-

school teachers, discovering its general educational utility, quickly appropriated a large part of the edition.

With the demand for republication came the suggestion that amplification would increase its practical value. The new matter now forms so considerable a part of the whole as to render the present manual practically a new work. Numerous verbal illustrations have been included, showing how the principle has been applied in dealing with individual pupils, with classes, with schools, and even with peoples in more or less primitive stages of life.

The dissertation on the construction of primary Bible courses is reserved for the last chapter, as not being necessary to the mere exposition of the general principle, but as being a legitimate outcome and illustration of it.

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The General Principle

I

The General Principle

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,"—but for me he created them not until he created me. Heaven and earth had no beginning, so far as I am concerned, until my powers of perceiving them had their beginning. So, although as a new-born infant I am the latest act of God's work of creation, my experience, my contact with life, is my book of beginnings. Heaven and earth start into existence in my home, my parents, my baby-rattle. In my chronology, my father's gold watch precedes the sun, a silver dollar antedates the moon, and my mother's jewels anticipate the stars. My world is without form, and void. But by this I mean not what the Bible Book of Genesis means.

Things gradually assume shape as I perceive their relations, and come to know them through

my personal experience. The seasons, you say, have their beginning in the movement of the earth around the sun, but that movement has its beginning for me in the seasons. The light of day has its real beginning in the sun, but for me the sun has its beginning in the light of day. My infantile experience is my infantile book of beginnings,—my Genesis.

It is a recognized philosophical principle that what is historically first may be logically last, and what is logically first may be historically last; or, as Aristotle puts it, "that which is first as cause is last in discovery." The Creation as recorded in the Bible comes historically before my birth; but logically my knowledge of the sun must begin with the light in my room, my study of the rock strata must begin with the stones in the garden path; of the waters, with my morning bath; of the animals, with my pussy or the flies.

Not only do these illustrations represent a cardinal principle in approaching the little

child's mind, but to a large extent they indicate the only royal road to success, the "line of least resistance" in dealing with those who are infants in knowledge of any kind. They are, in truth, but another way of stating the oft-repeated pedagogical maxim, "Proceed from the known to the unknown."

Nothing is so truly known as that which is known through personal experience or self-activity in life. Therefore it is at a point in this experiential knowing that we can begin to instruct the child to the best advantage. This point I call the point of contact, because it is the point at which his own experience and the lesson he is to learn can be brought into contact with each other,—or, better, the one evolved from the other. Starting with something which the child knows through experience, and is therefore personally interested in, the subject is thenceforth to be progressively developed.

We must begin where we find the child,—as Colonel Parker puts it. The only place

where we can be sure we find him is at some point on the plane of a child's natural experiences or contact with life. His experience may be non-sensuous, internal,—emotional, or spiritual, it is true,—but with this we have comparatively little to do in our first approach to the child mind. It is at the point of the child's sense contact with the external world that the opportunity for our best appeal to him lies. All imagery must be made of the raw material furnished by the sense perception.[1]

[1] Pestalozzi says: "The starting-point of thought is sense impression,—the direct impression, that is, produced by the world on our internal and external senses. . . . It is life that educates." This is altogether a different thing from addressing our primary instruction to sense perception as such. As Dr. William T. Harris says: "Thought deals with the dynamic element of experience rather than with mere things, which are only static results." We are quite on the child's plane of experience when we address his sense of wonder, curiosity, love, or fear. But we know less of those points in his experience, and cannot often be so sure that we are making a close contact with his real experiential life as we can when we seek a point of departure in his obvious natural experience with the external world. Notwithstanding the great differences between Pestalozzi and Frœbel this principle is not essentially at variance with either. It is true that Miss Blow sharply contrasts these two greatest masters as to their pivotal

It is necessary here to differentiate certain phrases which educators have used. These phrases are the "point of interest," "point of sympathy," "point of departure." In the best teaching all these points are likely to coincide as one. Thus we should, in Dr. Trumbull's phrase, endeavor to touch the pupil, or any one whom we wish to influence, at the point of sympathy between him and us. But we shall do our best work if that point of sympathy is at his point of contact with his experiences, and this is pretty sure to be his point of interest. What Miss Blow calls the "point of departure" is simply the starting-point in the teaching pro-

ideas when she says: "Pestalozzi claims that the center from which education radiates is sense perception (*Anschauung*). Frœbel claims that this center is *Gemüth*, a word explained by Hegel to mean the 'undeveloped, indefinite totality of spiritual being.' We may approximately translate *Gemüth* by 'heart,' and affirm that with Frœbel the pivot upon which true education turns is the regeneration of the affections." But it is also true that she shows that in Frœbel's mother-play "the point of departure is usually some actual experience of the children." However, there is no intention of entering here upon a philosophical discussion, but merely to point out a practical way of approach to and procedure with the child mind.

cess; but this point of departure, like all these other points, ought to be at the child's point of contact with experiential life. In looking for this point let us not forget the words of Rousseau: "Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, peculiar to itself; nothing is more absurd than to wish to substitute ours in their place."

The idea of the relative value of possible starting-points, or germinal spots for the child's development as determined by their closeness or familiarity to the child through his own experience, is well illustrated in a discussion between Miss Youmans and Dr. Mary P. Jacobi in the matter of teaching botany to children. The noticeable thing is that the child is to approach the science in a direction opposite to, or at least different from, that from which the mature scientist approaches it. For the child, that point of the plant's life which is out of sight, underground, is logically, or pedagogically, late, although in the plant's history it is first.

An article on "The Scientific Method with

Children" in The Popular Science Monthly, by Henry Lincoln Clapp, says children "have their own starting-points, and these should be taken by the teacher. . . . Dr. Jacobi would use the flower, in beginning to teach children botany, because it is the most attractive, makes the largest impression upon the senses, is easy of apprehension, and leads to the appreciation of specific differences. . . . Miss Youmans would begin with the leaf, on the assumption that it is simpler than the flower, and, in tracing its scientific relations, deeper intellectual pleasure is received. . . . Beginning with roots, as so many systematic teachers have done, and following with stem, leaves, flowers, and ending with fruits as the ultimate work of the plant, although logical to adults, full of regular sequences, and scientific from one standpoint, is unscientific from another.

"Children do not start to work with plants in that way unless they are obliged to, but in a way diametrically opposite,—attractive flowers and

fruits first, and unattractive roots last. It is certainly natural, although it may be heathenish, and show their natural depravity, for them to do so. . . . An extensive use of imported material is directly opposed to Agassiz's injunction to use the material nearest at hand. Moreover, it is worth while to remember that materials and methods which are serviceable enough in teaching adults often become forced and mechanical in teaching children. It should not be taken for granted that the teacher's sequences, laboriously studied out, . . . are the pupil's sequences, or that he can assimilate them."

Now the great fault in our religious teaching of, or Sunday-school work with, the child, has been that we have not sought this his most penetrable point. Our approach to him has been through adult ideas, upon an adult plane, and complicated with conventionality and abstractions. We have not sufficiently regarded the plane of his experience as the essential approach to him. Observe, I do not locate this

plane as either high or low; it is neither, and it is both, according to what your terms mean. It is in some ways higher than ours, in some ways lower. Let that pass.

We have stood upon our adult plane of complex thought and conventionality to manipulate the little child's current of thought running on a very different plane. True, we have spoken baby-talk to him, but in that baby-language we have spoken to him truths unsuited to babies, and because he was seemingly entertained with our antics we supposed that we succeeded in our effort to make an adult baby of him. Our Lord did not teach that way. See how he made the people think by finding their point of contact with common life, and proceeding from this starting-point to whatever truth he had in view for them. Like him, we must address pupils on the level of their experiential life.

We have made too much, for instance, of time sequences. The young child has a very inadequate conception of mere chronology. History

as history—a record of impersonal events, of remote causes and effects—is wholly out of his plane of comprehension. His sequences are of a different sort. So, too, we have made too much of formal doctrines and mere points of theological reasoning, and of an objective life utterly foreign and remote from the child's experience. A writer in The Church Standard, C. E. Hutchison, says: "We have lessons in the Catechism crammed with words over which grown people have been fighting for centuries, and about which they do not yet agree. And there are laborious series on the Bible, full of information about the structure of Jewish houses, the order of service in the synagogue, suggestions for special investigation, and the like." The child's plane is in the activities and appreciations of immediate life.

Leaders in educational and pedagogical thought have long seen the radical defect in our Sunday-school, as indeed in all our religious instruction of the little children. The Sunday-

school has prominently been severely criticised as an educational system. Whatever truth there may be in such criticisms we know the Sunday-school to be one of the grandest and most aggressive of Christian institutions, even if we do admit its shortcomings. But we ought not to be above learning from our critics. A recent article in The Westminster Review gives forth no uncertain sound, thus:

"Theology should not be forced upon the child's mind at a very early age. . . . A child's first idea of spiritual things, if these are presented to him in the phraseology usually employed for the purpose, is necessarily a false one, made so by his natural substitution of the concrete for the abstract. This fact often receives practical confirmation from the quaint notions children are found to have formed about religion; the absurdity of the questions to which these notions give rise is a frequent cause of amusement to their elders, but it none the less furnishes conclusive evidence of the confusion that prevails in

many little minds. Premature instruction relating to the spiritual side of religion thus leads the child into errors which have to be corrected by subsequent experience, and the false ideas resulting from it form an undesirable starting-point in religious instruction."

Where, then, will the desirable starting-point be found? In the general range or on the plane of childhood experiences, and especially those which arise from the child's immediate contact with the external world.

Here let it be said, once for all, that in this manual "the child" usually means a child under eight years of age. Years do not regulate everything, but they do regulate some things. Span of time is an essential to the reaching of a certain plane of experience, a certain sight-level, a grade of development. A forced cultivation of brain cells, natural precocity or intelligence, will never put a child just where an accumulation of conscious years will. A child or a man may be such a prodigy in arithmetic as to make

gigantic calculations in a moment of time. He may have such a phenomenal memory that he can repeat verbatim the contents of a newspaper after one reading. He may have powers like these, and yet be dependent on common experience for just that development which such experience alone can bring. He must have a sense of the process of time, or of conscious intervals, behind him, in order to have a definite historic consciousness. And the younger the child the more applicable is this truth of child nature.

In his outlook and in his general mental method a child of six is farther from a child of ten or twelve than a child of twelve is from a young man of twenty. One of the first signs of a real forward movement in the primary school will be the removal therefrom of all the children over eight years of age. Until the necessity of doing this is perceived and acted upon, Sunday-school "child-study" will have proved itself of little utility.

The general principle, then, is, that in the child's instruction we must begin at his point of contact with life. Life, it is true, includes the intuitional experiences as well as those which are sensory and peripheral. But it is in the region of the latter, it is upon the plane of those experiences which he gets in his sense contact with the external world, that we must usually start with him. That these experiences are concrete rather than abstract, simple rather than complex, immediate rather than remote, will be more fully illustrated in the next chapter.

II

The Plane of Experience

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As a practical matter, the point of entry to any child's mind depends upon the individuality of his life; but in dealing with classes we must make sacrifices of the individual for the many. We can appeal to childhood from the general plane or ordinary range of childhood experiences. Says H. Courthope Bowen, "What interests a child must be immediate and level to his thoughts. He cannot realize a far-off advantage; or, at any rate, he cannot feel it for long. Young and old, we all experience delight in discovering, or in being helped to see, connections between isolated facts,—especially such as we have ourselves picked up."

Manifestly the plane of experience, the germination of interest, the genesis of study, will be a simple, rather than a complex, concrete rather

than abstract. As Lange says, "the numerous concrete, fresh, and strong ideas gained in earliest youth are the best helps to apperception for all subsequent learning." But these germinal ideas have no affiliation with the "regular sequences" of theology, or with "imported material," to which Agassiz objected; they will not be found in the local, political, or religious issues, or the imagery of Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Nahum, Micah, or Habakkuk, or the complex rituals and regulations of the Mosaic era. Supposing "the elders of the Jews" did build and prosper "through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo,"—what is that to a babe who has no conception of space, time, organized society, or even of our commonest adult conventionalities? How near are the Ten Commandments to the plane of experience of a child who cannot count up to ten —nor above four?

Nor is there experimental contact in such a "golden text" as "The Lord thy God will turn

thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee;" nor in "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them." Even for such a text as "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God," one requires considerable prior knowledge before it can be assimilated into the life and become formative of character. To force these on the child is what that remarkable teacher Thring of Uppingham would call "an effort to pour into a reluctant mind some unintelligible bit of cipher knowledge and to cork it down by punishment. It disagrees, it ferments, the cork flies out, the noxious stuff is spilt; whilst the taskmaster believes it is all right because of the trouble he took to get it in."

Deliberately to select a Scripture portion so remote from the plane of experience of little children, and then suppose that, *because* it is God's Word, God will work a miracle in order that they may understand it, seems hardly less

than presumptuous mockery. The responsibility is upon us to see that truths are presented to the children in an order consistent with their capability to receive those truths through experiential beginnings. And this is not to be done by paraphernalia, or by parrot verbal memorizing, or by the awakening of a pseudo attention through mere spectacular exhibits of hearts, ladders, crosses, crowns, and blackboard intricacies which might make an adult dizzy if they do not bewilder children.

"The worthless and even injurious outcome of such teaching," in the language of Colonel Parker, "is the memorizing of meaningless words, and a permanent dislike for the subject so mistaught." Take this text: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." How absurd to attempt to force a conception here! Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that such memorizings have a future value. Says Frœbel: "At a later period of life,

when comprehension attaches a sense to the sound, the senseless word will be the more injurious. . . . Every word ought to offer to the child's mind a sound to which to attach some elements of thought."

To say that a child has enjoyed committing to memory proves little. Nothing is more seductive to the teacher than the child's enjoyment or delight in his task. Not that he should not delight in it, but the delight may entirely mislead us as to its cause. "It is possible," says President G. Stanley Hall, "that the present shall be so attractive and preoccupying that the child never once sends his thoughts to the remote in time and place." This "present" may be mere verbal jingle, it may be the artificial paraphernalia of the primary room, or anything but the concept which the adult observer is laboring to lodge in a mind impenetrable to it.

The points of contact of most children with the worlds of matter and of thought are at once numerous and few. Investigations conducted

under the direction of President Hall upon large numbers of Boston school-children, just after they had entered the lowest grade of the primary school, say six years old, revealed that 35 per cent had never seen the country, 20 per cent did not know where milk came from, 55 per cent did not know that wooden things were made from trees, 47 per cent never saw a pig, from 13 to 18 per cent did not know where their cheek, forehead, or throat was, and fewer yet knew elbow, wrist, ribs, etc. More than three-fourths of the children had never seen, to know them, any of the common cereals, trees, or vegetables, growing. These facts indicate how slenderly furnished the child's mind is for a discussion involving theologies, chronologies, successive wars, political complications, Judaizing tendencies, obscure imageries and prophetic references, ancient ritual usages, tribal dissensions, and the like.

President Hall well asks, "What idea can the 18 per cent of children who thought a cow no

larger than its picture, get from all instruction about hide, horns, milk?" This is a pertinent question, *mutatis mutandis*, for whoever is to make lesson-courses for our primary Sunday-schools, even more than for those who are to teach them. To tell the average six-year old that "the price of a virtuous woman is far above rubies," simple as it sounds to us, presupposes an experience in the matter of relative values, of precious stones, of marketable abstractions. Is this any better than teaching about the unknown cow by an account of unknown horns, hide, etc.?

In the same line of revelation as Dr. Hall's, Superintendent O. J. Laylander of Iowa obtained through certain teachers answers to such plain questions as "Why should we do good?" "What is Sunday for?" "Where is heaven?" "What do children do in heaven?" "What do the angels do?" "How does God look?" etc. The replies come from children varying from six to ten years. Here are a few specimen

answers. "Angels wear plain white clothes, and don't look stylish." "Have nice hair and wear nice gowns." "Angels come down and tell men when they burn sheep what to do."

Other answers, about the Divine appearance, etc., while they are not irreverent, seem almost shocking to us, and need not be repeated here; it is natural for the child to be concrete and positive. One does not have to look far to discover the sensuous origin of most, if not all, of these answers,—perhaps not outside of some of our homes and Sunday-schools. Some of them are at least a serious reflection on the advisability of displaying crude chromos as a portraiture of our Lord. It is indeed a question how far the picturing of spirit is advisable. The child's imagination hardly needs this kind of stimulus.

It is easy to see that the ideally exact point of departure or genesis of a child's education in any sphere is an experience, or contact with the world, peculiar to that child. For a certain little girl's recitation from Longfellow I chose

a part of the potter's song in "Kéramos"—with great success. But this was largely because she had visited a pottery, and had come into actual sense contact with, and so acquired an interest in, the processes of the potters' wheel.

The more closely anything lies to our personal experience, and the nearer it is to the level of our ordinary vision, the more easily do we become interested in it, and the better starting-point is it, therefore, from which to follow a line of thought. This is not peculiar to the child, but is common to all. The range of experience is much more extensive in the adult than in the child. Every one knows that when he has been through a particular form of experience, he has always a peculiar interest in others who are passing through that same experience. A person who has been rescued from a burning building in the middle of the night will run to the window to see the fire department go by, when, previously to his rescue, he would have paid very little attention to it. A person who has

contracted what he supposes to be an unusual disease is surprised to discover so many other persons who have been, or are, afflicted in the same way.

Let me illustrate now a little more particularly this matter of the plane of experience, or levels of sight, or points of view, in dealing with a child's mind.

An intelligent and studious child in her ninth year was, with her father's assistance, studying the Sunday-school lesson on "The Cities of Refuge." She had never heard the word "refuge," and her father explained, as well as he could, first what the idea of refuge is, and then what a city of refuge was. She went to Sunday-school, and the teacher, in order to vivify the lesson, told a dreadful story of the torture which some boys had inflicted upon a companion. The child was so shocked by the horror that it was some time before it lost its hold on her nerves. The idea of the city of refuge seemed to have made no impression on her at all,

although it was, of course, explained to her a second time in the class.

Six months later she visited an old fort. It was altogether a different sort of thing from what she supposed a fort to be. In discussing it with her father, the various wars in which it had played a part were spoken of, and then the father said that it had done great service as a place of refuge for the inhabitants of the adjacent town during an attack by the Indians. The child immediately asked, "What is a refuge?" The explanations of the term which she had received a half-year before had gone for nothing. The father tried to recall the Bible lesson of the previous term, but to little purpose. Refuges, as such, had not come within the plane of her experience until now, and hence the definition of them, and the lesson upon them, amounted to little. The explanation had to be made over again with the object in actual view, the father recalling the lesson on the cities of refuge and so establishing a logical connection.

Now let us look at the plane of experience in this case, and the relative degrees of immediateness to, or remoteness from, the child's circumstantial interest. Being herself a temporary inhabitant of the town as a visitor, the flight of the inhabitants to the fort for refuge came closely within the range of her imagination—or fancied experience. It is true she had never experienced such an event as a flight for life, but she was close enough to the conditions to be able—by raising herself, through her imagination, on her tiptoes, metaphorically—to come quite within sight of the experience of a refugee.

Again, suppose she had actually been herself a refugee from the Indians in a place of safety. The idea of the fort as a place of refuge would have been far more vivid, more intensely real. In either case there was an excellent point of contact with experience from which to teach the idea of refuge in time of danger. But in one case more than in the other the contact would have been closer. In one case, she had sufficient

sensory knowledge of the place to imagine the experience with fair correctness; in the other, she would have had an actual experience. But without some such basis any instruction would have conveyed little impression. In the Sunday-school class the city of refuge had no basis whatever in life experience, and what the imagination could do, therefore, was so weak that it soon dropped out of her mental furniture.

Let us now take another case showing a conscious resistance of the child to the attempt to force upon him truths of nature by bringing them wrong end foremost or foreign to his experiential plane. I condense and quote from an article by Mrs. Mary C. Cutler in The Sunday School Times. She tells of an enthusiastic high-school girl who, having become interested in geology, decided to use her knowledge as the basis of bed-time tales for her little brother.

"Wouldn't Robbie like to have each night a part of a great, long story, all about how the earth was made?" she asked one evening soon afterward.

"P'raps so," he answered, somewhat doubtfully. "Will you tell how the sidewalks were made?" he added, seeming a little more interested.

"Oh, yes!" replied his sister; "only we want to know first how the ground was made to lay the sidewalks on."

And so the story had gone on night after night, while Robbie had shown varying degrees of interest, but never quite so much as his sister had expected. She tried her best to adapt the story to his comprehension, and sometimes felt much encouraged; as when she was telling about the formation of the coal-beds, and showed him a piece of coal she had found, which seemed to have markings on it like the bark of a tree; or, at another time, when she showed him a picture of the huge bird-tracks that had been found in other formations.

But now and then Robbie would ask some question about the sidewalks, showing that his interest was centered on that with which he had first become acquainted in experience. The sidewalks were his "point of contact" with, and his first interest in, earth structure. It was because he hoped to learn some time how the sidewalks were made, that he was trying to listen patiently to all the rest of the story.

And so on this night Robbie settled himself down in his corner of the chair, and was very quiet. He asked his sister no more questions. For the first time his eyes began to droop before she had finished.

"I must try to make it more interesting," she said to herself as she kissed him good-night. . . .

Years afterward, when our school-girl had grown older and wiser, she learned how abnormal, as well as unsatisfying, had been her method,—that she ought to have begun with what the child already knew something about, and was interested in, and thence she could have led him whither she would. To the high-school girl the sidewalks were laid on the ground; to the child, the ground was hidden under the sidewalks. His first experience with earth was not the underlying ground, but the overlying sidewalks. She had vainly thought to begin at the beginning of God's works, instead of the real beginning of knowledge-getting,—the "point of contact" with the world.

Now to go farther. Whatever truth is common to Christianity and heathenism is the point of sympathy at which the missionary can most hopefully begin. This will be at a point of contact with the religious life of the heathen, an attitude, an act, a deed, a hope, or something which has become already a part of his religious experience. There will be different starting-points for the Brahman, the Mohammedan, the Confucian; the educational genesis for the Bushman will be different from that for the North American Indian.

A teacher at Hampton Institute told me that as a matter of fact the Indians can be more easily reached through the story of the early Hebrews than can the negro. The Indian feels a certain affiliation with Abraham which the negro does not. The life experience of the Indian is nomadic and closely akin to the Orientals. The "point of departure" or starting-point, in teaching the Indian, might therefore differ from that in teaching the negro, who touches life in experiences of quite a different nature.

One of the most beautifully apt and convincing illustrations of the necessity of addressing primitive minds from their own plane of experience is to be found in the following abstract from a private letter recently received from a missionary in Africa. He says: "I have sought in vain for a suitable abstract of Bible history which might be translated. 'Peep of Day' we have, and it answers a certain purpose. 'Line upon Line' has been tried, but neither appeals

to the native mind. There is something far too goody-goody in the phraseology to permit a *translation.* 'My dear children,' 'Poor Daniel,' 'How glad he must have been,' 'How beautiful it must have been to see the angels,' and so on, are not translatable. The scenes of civilization are too often brought in, and the illustrations fall flat. What is wanted is something vigorous, not requiring much imagination to understand, based on wild native life—very much like the life of the old Israelites."

The principal difficulty encountered in teaching these Africans is just the difficulty which we encounter, expressed in reverse terms. The Africans find no point of contact with our civilization and modes of thought. Our little children have few points of contact with ancient Oriental life and modes of thought.

It is even true of ourselves. How many can read through the Prophets with any clear apprehension of the significance of allusion, historical or poetical, made by those writers?

Certainly a large majority of fairly intelligent teachers on reading those books gain only a general sense of something poetic, something historical, something religious. The unsatisfaction which such readers feel under such circumstances is somewhat parallel with the unsatisfied child's mind after a lesson in the primary school of which the whole basis of thought or action is entirely abstract, or is external, remote from, and foreign to, his life experiences. But the child cannot help himself. Because we make the presentation entertaining with sentimental talk and ingenious appliances, we imagine that he is realizing the whole remote situation.

Mrs. Annie Trumbull Slosson's "Fishin' Jimmy" never got hold of Christ until his plane of experience was struck,—and that the fishing interest. Jimmy was practically insulated from salvation until one spot of contact was discovered, and forthwith the current flowed. But the Book of Romans would not have availed, nor would Genesis have proved a genesis for him.

The Salvation Army seeks and finds the degraded wretches of the slums, not through a map of Palestine, nor through appeal to the Catechism, but through that which is common to their experience,—noise and racket, the bass drum and the brass horn. The loud music and the bright colors are the "lines of least resistance" over which this species of human nature passes into the first contemplation of a cleaner, better, and nobler life. Similarly, a child is to be introduced to his studies at the point of experience,—to geography by starting at his sense perceptions of distance, direction, form, number, rain, snow, clouds, steam, vapor, heat, cold, etc. Then locations at home and vicinity, the yard, garden, farm, or landscape in view, etc.

A live teacher in the South wrote to me, "My mother most interestingly taught me botany from the 'point of contact' of the yellow pollen on my nose when I had smelled a fragrant flower too ardently."

In response to my first publication on this

subject of the point of contact, an able teacher in the Southwest wrote: "You are eminently right about your Sunday-school methods. It is God's way. Jesus went to the people at their point of contact, and, though a carpenter, he never drew a figure from his own calling, but always from theirs." He then goes on to give his experience in feeling for a point of contact from which to start an interest in ornithology in a country boy. He says:

"Recently I attempted to describe the oven-bird to a country boy who, I knew, had often seen it, but did not know it. I went through plumage, size, song, nest, etc., but the case looked hopeless. At last I mentioned the habit of alighting near the limb and running out toward its tip. His face brightened. 'Is he a kind of high stepper?' he asked, picking up his feet exactly as the bird does. In this way the boy has become a helpful observer—learning how to observe. His descriptions are so accurate that I often diagnose birds from them before he

is through. He has a new interest in his farm work. He could never have got it from systematic ornithology." No more can the child get his interest in religious truth through systematic theology, catechisms, or other forms of conventionalized and abstract thought, or images based on material things with which the child has never come into sense contact.

A little girl once asked me about the bones in her arm. I briefly explained, but the off-hand explanation was not likely to remain with her. Soon after came a day when I carved a chicken for dinner. Giving her a wing, I said, "You see this part has one bone and this part two. It is like our arms." I subsequently showed her a human skeleton. The next time she was given a chicken wing at dinner I said, "You know there are two bones here, as in our forearms. Chicken's wings take the place of our arms." "Or," she responded, "wouldn't the chickens say, if they could talk about us, 'Their arms take the place of our wings'?"

Suppose I had answered, "Ah, my child, we must begin at the beginning! Anatomy is 'that branch of morphology which treats of the structure of organisms.' There are various divisions of the subject, as comparative anatomy, pathological anatomy, practical, surgical, topographical, transcendental anatomies, etc. Let us take nature in an orderly way. You must first commit to memory the definition of anatomy and the technology of the bones themselves. In after years it will serve you when you come to study the arm of man and the wing of bird."

Is this a travesty? Call it rather a parallel. Has it not been practically the procedure in many Sunday-schools?

Any one who does not realize how widely the adult and the childhood planes are separated will do well to discover, after a ten minutes' conversation with a child, precisely how the child understood him, and how far he understood the child. Let him take Longfellow or Bryant, for instance, and discover, if he can,

how much there is on most of the pages of these poets quite out of the range of the child's vision and on another plane altogether.

Again, let any one take a child of from five to eight into a legislative assembly for the first time and attempt to explain the proceedings. Every time he attempts to put his foot down in order to take a step forward in his explanation to the child, he will find that he has stepped into a quicksand. The very idea of representation in government, of passing bills, making motions, and controlling distant sections of country by these processes, is something entirely outside of the child's life-plane. It is not merely a question of the meaning of words, but it is one of complex, unseen, and unsuspected relations, one of motives affecting the social organism of which the child has little consciousness. It is one of generalizations, for the construction of which the child is unfurnished with particulars.

During the great railway strike in Philadelphia, I closely watched some little boys who,

having caught the destructive spirit of the mob, came in and played their part in the demonstration of vengeance against the railway company. What degree of consciousness had these juvenile offenders of what they were doing? The sociological and economic question between the labor unions and the railway corporation was doubtless entirely foreign to the plane of their thought. But the self-activity, the impulse to change conditions, was quite within their range of consciousness.

It ought to be evident, then, that the same set of facts or phenomena may be viewed on entirely different planes. A child may seem attentive, interested, and even zealous, and yet be entirely blind to those facts and factors which are absorbing the chief attention of his elders.

The guests of a summer hotel were one evening entertained with recitations by an expert of the platform. The children on the front row exhibited varying degrees of interest, rising at times to extreme demonstrations of delight.

Subsequently I found that the poem which drew from them the loudest plaudits was not only beyond their comprehension, but was entirely beyond their recall, while that which excited and absorbed them less was remembered. In the first case the only thing on their plane was the dramatic personal action, while the latter touched them at a point of contact with their own lives.

Once more : A speaker having been invited to make an address, he had designed to give to parents some advice about the misjudging of their children. He gave numerous incidents illustrating the injustice of parental treatment. But before him sat many little children! It would not do to have them hear him arraign their parents. He therefore moved on two distinct planes of motive,—one for the children, one for the adults. The former roared with laughter at his characterizations of the little folks in difficulty ; the latter were less amused, but were more busy drawing the inferences which came

to them, more or less, as self-accusations. On interrogating certain of the children some time after, it was evident that they had not seen the real point of the address, for its implications had been out of their plane, while the adults gave overt evidence of their appreciation of the real motive of the speaker.

These illustrations ought to show clearly that children of the primary class may have Scripture lessons brought before them, the treatment of which entertains and makes them seem to be taking in the whole historical and spiritual situation, while, in fact, they and the teacher are all the time viewing the demonstration upon planes quite remote from each other.

The child's plane of life is one of simples and of concretes, one of directness and immediateness. Any attempt to force upon him the complex, the abstract, the circuitous, the remote, the unconnected, will be sure to end unhappily.

III

Applying the Principle

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Applying the Principle

Although the general principle of appealing to the youthful mind through the already familiar fact in experience has been freely illustrated in the foregoing chapter, it may be helpful to show more specifically just how the principle can be applied in practice with persons of varying ages.

It is not always possible, in dealing either with an individual or with aggregations, to strike the point of closest contact with life or with the most familiar interests or activities, but it is possible to address children on the general plane of child sight. The point of contact may even be one of mere mental habit or function. Thus a child may be reached from his curiosity or his spirit of investigation. But this will always have to be found within the child-life plane. In

"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," the line "How I wonder what you are," represents in the adult a very different mental attitude toward the twinkling star from what it represents in the child.

Again, a "golden text," such as some of those which have already been cited, would not be likely to arouse the curiosity or tempt the inquiring spirit, while a little bit of nature or manufacture entirely unfamiliar would at once incite inquiry and hold attention.

Take an instance: I was once called, as a substitute, to teach a class of very frisky boys of perhaps nine to eleven years of age. The lesson was on the Golden Rule. The boys were in a state of ceaseless activity and mischief-making. It was plain that they would be utterly beyond my control if I persisted either in mere Scripture readings or with ethical abstractions. In less time than it takes to tell it, I said to myself, "Get your point of contact; address them through their senses; get on to the plane of their common activity." I immediately drew

an ivory foot-rule out of my pocket and asked what it was. Silence and attention were immediate. Some called it a "ruler," some a "measure," and one finally said it was a "rule."

My next inquiry was to ascertain what it was made of. Some said ivory, some said bone. The class was in full control. It was easy then to lead them on to an imaginary rule, through keeping them in a certain suspense of meaning, until we had reached the Golden Rule. Questioning then drew from them the relative value of ivory and gold, and of rules made from them —real or figurative. It is unnecessary to follow the process more in detail, but the class was conquered, for that day at least, and their disgraceful hubbub was turned into an exemplary discussion of eternal truth.

Golden texts, theological doctrines, ethical abstractions from the Catechism or the Epistles, taken in themselves, would have been hurled at these bright minds in vain; but the contact with a single tangible object such as a boy would use,

or, at all events, enjoys handling, was the successful point of departure for his spiritual instruction.

Take another case: A visitor was called on to address a school made up largely of children more or less familiar with country life, and of various ages. The lesson of the day had been on the entry of the Israelites into the promised land. He wanted to give the school, in less than ten minutes, a general grasp of the history of the Hebrews around the full circuit from the promise to Abraham to the realization of the promise, centuries later. The details of many Bible lessons necessarily must have obstructed the broader view or general trend of the history. He must proceed upon the plan of a circuit or circularity. From what point in ordinary life could they best be led into the conception of the circuit from Canaan through Egypt and the Wilderness back into Canaan?

The first interest was awakened by drawing out, through questioning, their knowledge of the

oak and the acorn, and, again, by the complete circuit made by a drop of water from ocean to cloud, to rain, to spring, to river, and to sea again. From contact with this object illustration of the idea of circularity it was easy to lead the school on to the circuit that covered centuries in the life of the Hebrews. This was successfully accomplished in eight minutes.

On another occasion, when the golden text was Luke 2 : 52,—"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man,"—a speaker wanted to press the thought of growth. A class of little girls sat just in front of the platform. He asked whether any of them had a doll, and received a prompt answer. Did that doll grow any bigger? Why not? It was not alive. Can you make yourself bigger? It was easy to follow then into the part that we have in our own physical growth, and, finally, in increasing "in favor with God and man."

Another illustration I extract from a remarkably graphic and suggestive article by Elizabeth

Harrison in The Sunday School Times. It shows also that the application of the principle is not limited to little children.

A kindergartner, visiting a mission school, was asked by the superintendent to take a class of "toughs" which had already been given up in despair by four teachers. The threat of the superintendent to eject them from the room if they did not behave was received with derisive laughter. This was followed, during the opening exercises, by various outrageous antics, and then came the time for the lesson teaching. Miss Harrison continues:

As soon as they were settled, one boy raised his blacking-box, which up to this time had been hidden under his chair; with a flourish almost too quick to be seen, he scraped it across the nose of another boy. This was an affront not to be tolerated. Instantly, the insulted boy raised his clenched fist. In a moment more the blow would have descended, and the usual street row would have taken place in the Sunday-school room.

This was our kindergartner's opportunity. "From the Known to the Unknown" had been her motto for years. Through curiosity, reverence was to be awakened. Quick as a flash, she reached out her hand, and seizing

the blacking-box exclaimed, in a tone of animation: "I can tell you something about this box that you do not know."

The boys were amazed, as they expected a reprimand. The clenched fists slowly descended; all eyes were fastened upon her.

"Bah!" said one of the boys, in a tone of contempt; "you're trying to guy us now."

"Indeed, I am not," replied the kindergartner. "I know something very wonderful about this box, and I do not believe any of you ever heard it."

"Give us a rest!" tauntingly said another skeptic. But all the others cried out: "What is it? Go ahead!"

"Of what is this box made?" said the teacher, in a slow and mysterious tone of voice.

"Wood, of course," said two or three of the disappointed group, the look of contempt returning to their faces.

"Oh, yes! of course," responded the teacher; "but where did the wood come from?"

"Out of the carpenter-shop," again answered two or three.

"But where did the carpenter get it?" said the kindergartner, still keeping up her tone of mystery.

"From the lumber-yard," answered one boy, more knowing than the rest.

"Yes," said the teacher, encouragingly; "but where did the lumber-yard man get it?"

This brought the wisest among them to the end of his knowledge.

She then began, and described to them the long, slow growth, through centuries of time, of the forest trees. The long, long years of silent waiting, until the ax of the woodman did his work; the busy, picturesque life of the logging-camp; the dangerous voyage of the logs, tied together in a raft, as they floated down the majestic river; the wonderful invention by which machinery was made to transform these round logs into flat boards ready for the lumber-yard.

The boys listened in intense interest. When she had finished, there was a deep-drawn sigh, and all eyes turned instinctively to the blacking-box, the mystery of whose former life had been unfolded to them.

The teacher saw that she had gained a point. Reverence must come from idle curiosity. Curiosity had been gradually transformed into interest already. She continued:

"I think I know something else about this box which you do not know."

She then drew out their knowledge about the nails that held it together, tracing the process of their manufacture back to the solitary bits of iron ore in the mountain range, so old that the life of man had no record of their beginning. She graphically pictured the life of a miner. By this time every boy was leaning forward in breathless interest, fascinated by the new world

into which she had led him. Again taking up the box, she asked what color it was, and pursued the same method on that point.

Gradually the ringleader among the boys, leaning forward until his head reached far beyond his body, exclaimed in tones of deepest reverence:

"I know what you are. You're a fortune-teller; that's what you are!"

This was the highest tribute which he could pay her. In the back alley in which he lived, a mysterious fortune-teller played the part of Delphic oracle. To him she was the personification of wisdom. And there sat a woman before him who apparently knew everything,—who could tell him of that great mysterious world which lay outside of his district.

She had gained her point. She had raised within each of them a feeling of reverence. . . . Slowly but surely she built up an altar in them to the unknown God, which altar was necessary before the God of righteousness and of mercy and of love could be preached unto them.

To come back more particularly to little children the principle of the point of contact and the way of leading the child easily from this point in his experience to spiritual truth without leaving the natural level of a child's sight

cannot be better illustrated than from Frœbel's "Mother Play."[1]

"From so simple a point in the child's activities as the pat-a-cake play Frœbel carries the little learner along step by step thus: "The bread, or, better still, the little cake which the child likes so much, he receives from his mother; the mother, in turn, receives it from the baker. So far so good. We have found two links in the great chain of life and service. Let us beware, however, of making the child feel that these links complete the chain. The baker can bake no cake if the miller grinds no meal; the miller can grind no meal if the farmer brings him no grain; the farmer can bring no grain if his field yields no crop; the field can yield no crop if the forces of nature fail to work together to produce it; the forces of nature could not conspire together were it not for the all-wise and

[1] The reader is referred particularly to Susan E. Blow's translation of "The Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Frœbel's Mother Play," one of the volumes of Appleton's International Education Series.

beneficent Power who incites and guides them to their predetermined ends."

Observe how different is this process from the common one of forcing the child on to an adult plane through the adult abstractions of theologies.

Again, note the suggestion in the play of "The Two Gates:" "The idea suggested in the farmyard gate is that the child should be taught to prize and protect what he has acquired. The thought illustrated in the garden gate is that he should be led to recognize and name the different objects in his environment. In your attempt to carry out the latter idea, be careful to begin with the things which the child sees around him in the house, the yard, the garden, and the meadow. From these advance to the naming of objects in the pasture and the wood. Teach your child not only to recognize and name objects, but also to recognize and name qualities."

The weather-vane is another familiar object in the child's life. Frœbel here admirably illus-

trates the difference between conducting the child always on the plane of his own natural powers or appreciations, and confusing him by thrusting him out of it. "I might as well talk to you in a foreign tongue as to tell you that 'the pressure of air, or its altered density, or a change in its temperature, causes wind!' You would not understand a single word of this explanation. But one thing you can understand even now: A single mighty power like the wind can do many things great and small. You see the things it does, though you cannot see the wind itself. There are many things, my child, which we can be sure of though we cannot see them."

Enough has been said to demonstrate the very important double principle of beginning at the point of contact with experience and of reaching high spiritual truths by keeping always upon the child's plane or level of mental and spiritual sight. Or, in more popular phrase, we must hold ourselves firmly at the child's point of view.

IV

Missing the Point

IV

Missing the Point

There are those who have a certain intuitive sense that the point of interest to a child and the point of departure, or starting, in his instruction, should be something which to them seems childish and simple. Consequently they often succeed in gaining entry to the child mind. But, having no formulated guiding principle, they also often fail.

To illustrate: I remember hearing an address to children based upon the text, "The little foxes that spoil the vines." These little foxes were our small vices or weaknesses. Why did the speaker choose such a point of departure? I suppose "the little foxes" had a simple, childlike sound about it to him, and seemed as though it would be easily a point of interest to little children. Perhaps it was, in so far as it roused their

curiosity. Whatever the children got out of the address, they got in spite of, rather than because of, the point of departure, which was not a point of contact with common experience. To very few children does a fox exist in more than name, if that; and the propensity of foxes for spoiling vines is one which they could not appreciate unless they had lived in a country where they had actually seen this kind of destruction wrought, or heard it talked about until it became a familiar fact.

In the same way, writers for children often seem to suppose that they are placing themselves on the child's plane by the use of certain kinds of youthful expressions and by a kind of forced intimacy of manner, while the situations, the motives and raw material out of which the story or article is made, are foreign to the child's perception, thought, or feeling.

Certain "appliances" now frequently used in the primary school as a part of the process of "adapting" the lesson matter sometimes fail

because, forming no links with the child's own experience, they merely center the interest on themselves as objects.

Says Miss Julia E. Peck: "In our attempts to meet the child on his own level we have fallen very far below his level, failing to note from week to week that the dignity of his simplicity is a lasting rebuke to our fussy sentimentality."

Again, history as such is a concept practically out of the primary child's power of acquirement. He has too few years behind him in his own experience, and has had too little dealing with that impersonal thing—organized society. History as personal biography, Bible stories as such, have a very large educational function for the little child, but not as history. No matter what delight the children show in paraphernalia, no matter what pat answers they give, we must be suspicious of the delight and the answers, and we must look for another cause than historical consciousness.

An illustration is to be found in the following,

which was sent to me by an experienced secular as well as Sunday-school teacher. She says: "I shall not soon forget my own struggles with the International lessons. I had small boys from six to eight years old. The lesson was Nehemiah's prayer. I had tried very hard to make the lesson practical, and entertaining as well, but I am afraid I must have succeeded too well, for when I asked one small boy how many years ago he thought all these things had happened, he opened his eyes very wide, and ventured, 'I guess about a week.' I think he thought that he had been rash in suggesting such a remote period." We remember certain events of our childhood only as incidents in that life. They seldom have any historicity about them. Their chronological order we are seldom conscious of unless we have worked it out in later life by reasoning upon it.

The effort to force a child on to a plane not naturally his own is thus referred to in an editorial utterance of The School Journal:

The mistake is frequently made of assigning subjects for compositions that lie outside of the pupil's range of experience and vision. A premium is thereby put upon shallowness in thought and superficiality of judgment. It is a way of making the children hypocrites by having them talk or write of things they know nothing about. Every great educator from Comenius down to our day has raised his voice against what Basedow terms "pernicious word culture."

Another frequent way of missing the point and compelling children to express adult sentiments and feelings entirely foreign to the plane of child life is found in some of the hymns they are asked to sing. I quote here from an article, published in The Sunday School Times, by Mrs. George Archibald:

There is good sense, as well as fervent joy and full assurance, in the verse which says:

> "Come, sing to me of heaven,
> When I'm about to die;
> Sing songs of holy ecstasy
> To waft my soul on high.
> There'll be no sorrow there," etc.

But, as children are not, ordinarily, about to die, shall their spiritual songs be principally about heaven, and expressive of an intense longing to go there? Yet, when

we take pains to notice, we find in Sunday-school hymns a vast amount of rime, time, tune, and measure devoted to chanting the desolation of life, the longing for death, and a submissive waiting for release and glory. What could be more unnatural?

The child's first effort is toward the continuance of its earthly existence. The mother's first care has the same object. The first warnings of the infant are those against dangers that might imperil its life,—the flame, the edge-tool, the flight of stairs. Its first work at school is as a foundation for the needs of the terrestrial sojourn. And its first spiritual teaching should be that of active goodness, and cheerful, kindly Christian endeavor in the sphere to which it is born.

"The home of the soul" may often fitly be the goal of adult longing. But the first home of the soul is the natural body. Let the children learn to magnify the offices of this body. Let their songs be those which will inspire their souls to use the lips, the hands and feet, in the service of man, as the children of God. . . .

One of God's best gifts to the little child is its joyful anticipation of the life that now is. We have no right to put into its mouth the song of lamentation.

This child's plane may be spiritually quite as elevated as that of the adult, but the mode of the child's spiritual self-expression will be quite different.

There is another way of forcing an entrance

to the child's mind at an unnatural and dangerous point. Doubters, agnostics, skeptics, or infidels, are not found in early childhood. When children inquire, they do it because they want to know more, not because they doubt. It is therefore a fatal mistake to address the child as if he were a skeptic.

A discerning student of the child, a primary worker, Miss Lida B. Robertson, says: "Jesus is 'the way, the truth, and the life,' and our teachings of him should be positive, and not negative. We do him and the pupils irremediable harm to fill their embryo minds with the accursed doubts of scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, in order that we may try to prove the truth to them."

Even if a child has unfortunately been in an unbelieving environment, and so may be said to have had some experience with that phase of life, points of contact with it are not to be taken merely because they seem to touch his experience. Observe, this ruling is not arbitrary, but

is based largely on the fact that unbelief is not on a plane natural to the condition of childhood. Skepticism, if it can be found in a little child, has been received through suggestion from without, and is therefore abnormal and premature. Any suggestion of unbelief is liable to beget unbelief. It is time enough to deal with it later, when it is begotten.

It is not merely the starting-points, then, that must be within the child's range of experience, but it is the whole teaching which proceeds step by step from it. This means not only that we must find the proper points of contact, but that the body of lesson material itself be appropriately selected for its simplicity, positiveness, immediateness, concreteness, and connectedness.

V

The Lesson Material

V

The Lesson Material

It is now a much heralded idea that it makes little or no difference what the subject-matter of the Bible-study lesson is, provided the teacher "adapt" it to the children. It is contended that the selection of uniform lessons for pupils of all ages is quite consistent with the demand for graded instruction; and that the grading should be, not in the subject-matter, but in the method of its impartation. At the International Sunday-school Convention of 1893, the primary workers themselves formally made the declaration that "experience has proven that the International lessons are susceptible of being adapted to young children by suitable methods of teaching."

I do not intend here to debate the question as to whether experience has proved this or not. It is, indeed, rather a question of what the child's

experience is with us, than ours with him, and the trend of evidences in the foregoing chapters must suffice. The issue which I make is, that choice of material is the first essential to be considered, and the method of presenting the material comes second.

Some Scripture passages are certainly better for some purposes than others. If this is not so, why have certain passages always studiously been omitted from the International courses? Now the little child is a purpose, and a very different sort of purpose from the man or woman or the youth. It is therefore quite reasonable to suppose that some Scripture lessons would be better than others for the child.

But apart from this, if we recognize the right of each child to his individuality, we should recognize the right of childhood to its individuality. It seems almost humiliating to plead for a truth so well understood in every other sphere except that of Sunday-school instruction. Does the secular school take trigonometry, or Greek

grammar, or constitutional law, into the primary school? Would any sensible parent consent to send his children to a secular primary school where there was no choice of lesson material, but where any and every subject, however abstruse and remote from the child's plane of thought, was ordered to be "adapted" by the teacher? Such "adaptation" as one often sees is a misnomer. It results in a nominal but not real teaching of the assigned text.

If it be claimed that any and every text in the Bible is suitable for the children provided it be suitably adapted by the teacher, let the words of Pestalozzi answer: "The reform needed is not that the school coach should be better horsed, but that it should be turned right around and started on a new track."

The turning around will be the adoption of a lesson course selected especially from the child's point of view, as well as the ordering of the services and the mode of address to the child upon his own plane of sense, thought, and feeling.

Until this is accomplished a high grade of teaching will be impossible.

Miss Blow, speaking deprecatingly of the lack of clear insight in the choice of themes, says: "It would seem that the selection of suitable themes is a matter of prime import." And a writer in The Westminster Review says: "What is true of bodily food is true also of spiritual food. Children's intellects cannot digest that which is suited to adults; and however sincerely religious beliefs may be held by parents, this does not prevent them from assuming a different complexion in the mind of a child. At second hand they are not merely useless, but pernicious."

And Herbert Spencer: "Good exposition implies much constructive imagination. A prerequisite is the forming of true ideas of the mental states of those who are to be taught; and a further prerequisite is the imagining of methods by which, beginning with conceptions which they possess, there may be built up in their

minds the conceptions they do not possess. Of constructive imagination, as displayed in this sphere, men at large appear to be almost devoid; as witness the absurd systems of teaching which in past times, and in large measure at present, have stupefied, and still stupefy, children."

Says Louis Heilprin: "We teach a child to bound every state in the world, and make him learn all the capitals, before he has the slightest interest in land that he has not seen. We teach him to locate a long array of capes and promontories without his having any conception of their significance as landmarks. . . . We drag him from one corner to another of the great tableau of history, and compel him to take in its insignificant details before he has been given a chance to acquire any interest in any age but his own."

This fairly pictures our tendency, in all dealings with the child, to keep him in the remote instead of the near, and in minor details to him disconnected and unrelated, instead of large simple generals or wholes.

It will not do, however, to show the weakness and harmfulness of our present system without indicating in what direction reform must lie. It is not my part or purpose to work out the details of a primary Bible course. Nor is it essential that every instructor, in order to be familiar with the principle of the point of contact and the plane of experience, should be expert in the construction of lesson courses. But some basal suggestions, some foundation principles, may be here laid down for completeness' sake.

The Bible is a complex of abstracts and concretes, of history, nature, ethics, prophecy, doctrine, etc., embracing also many bloody and, to us, revolting historical pictures, altogether unsuitable for a child's reading. It is therefore, as a text book, unique, and accordingly difficult of presentation. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct Bible lesson courses from the child's point of view.

Beginning where we "find the pupil," then, we must take a few near-at-hand points in the

child's experience,—objects in the home, in nature, parental relations, etc. These must be combined or thought into a simple, easily-conceived whole. We must observe *peoples* before we talk about "a peculiar people," "the chosen people." "The simplest general whole," says Parker, is the "first objective point." And "the plain rule of procedure, in going from the part to the whole, is to form a real whole that can be most easily imagined or appreciated. . . . The anatomy of a finger or a muscle is more difficult than the anatomy of the entire framework of the body." A child understands sentences and phrases of which he does not understand the isolated words. He can swing his arms mightily, albeit he cannot control his fingers precisely.

Pursuing the germinal idea of relations we approach the idea of Creator and Father of all. Next we might aim for the concept of *communication* through the simple percepts of speech, books, etc.; then a great simple, general whole again, a concept of revelation,—the Bible. The

way is thus naturally and logically opened for the revelation of God in human form,—the Word "made flesh," the Saviour Jesus. (All the steps that this paragraph implies cannot, of course, be detailed here. Nor is it meant to say that this is the only right beginning, but rather that it is the only right principle of beginning and of proceeding,—from the known to the unknown.)

Recalling again that young children have very little conception of time or space, we must consequently avoid much dependence upon concepts rooted in them. It is useless to take primaries step by step from Egypt to the Promised Land until they have a comprehensive view, a simple idea of Israel (whether we call it "Israelites," "Hebrews," "Jews," "peculiar people," or any other name) from Abraham to the modern Jew. The complex of historical details within that view cannot be appreciated. "The fatal mistake," says Colonel Parker, "of many teachers . . . is that of leading pupils into the

search for (to the teachers) alluring details, instead of teaching just enough of facts to subserve the purposes of clear and simple generalizations." Creeping week by week from the Creation to Joshua or David or Zerubbabel is utterly futile if the intention is to convey the history or chronology idea. Herbart observes that the impression of the present moment throws the one previously apprehended too quickly below the threshold of consciousness.

Moreover, the distracting details are a serious interference with the child's generalizing powers. There is no implication here that children do not apprehend great religious truths. They do. But I mean to emphasize the difference between the simple and the complex, the high and the intricate. Hawthorne clearly saw that "children possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling, so long as it is simple likewise. It is only the artificial and the complex that bewilder them."

Again, we must have always in mind a simple

idea of relations, centering in the God-ward. Here the value of Bible stories is very positive. They lead pupils to put themselves in the place of others, and to look for relations and consequences. If they touch the child's experience, and arouse his curiosity, they educate memory, enforce moral, become a basis of action, and so develop character.

The stories must, however, be wisely selected. The continuous depicting of bloodshed and horrors in the illustrations given in certain Bible story-books for children, is simply barbarous. A child should not get as a dominant thought of God the idea of retribution, of killing, warring, etc. Nor ought his early impressions of God's Book to consist mainly of such things as are repellent to a sensitive nature, especially in its most impressible period. The child cannot have sufficient knowledge of situations to justify a repeated exhibit of vengeance and horror. For the same reason the physical sufferings of our Lord on the cross must not be too minutely pic-

tured, and his death ought seldom to be mentioned apart from his rising again. Then, too, the stories must have a certain simple completeness of their own, and not be too dependent on remote causes and complications, or on local conditions.

There can be no ideal course of lessons for all alike. Differences of condition among schools, and among the pupils in the same school, forbid it. The great variance in the qualifications of teachers, and the power of old associations, predilections, and prejudices, forbid it. And yet there is a sense in which there can be a course ideal in its recognition of these difficulties, and ideal in its concessions to them. But such a course must regard those fundamental principles without which the primary teaching of the future must be pitiably in arrears to a progressive age.

Recapitulating, we find that, in teaching the child, child nature is the first consideration; that the child is capable of perceiving certain pro-

found spiritual truths, although he be incapable of receiving them through a conventional adult phraseology; that we must take the child where we find him; that the mind grows only upon that which it assimilates; that we cannot force this assimilation beyond a more or less well-defined power of the child's nature; that we must proceed from known to unknown, and from concrete to abstract; that we must teach by wholes rather than in complications of detail; that the child mind has little power of perceiving matters of time or space, and consequently can assimilate but little of history or geography; that the connection of one lesson with another must be a connection of thought rather than of mere chronology; that the narration of things painful and horrible must be as far as possible avoided; that Bible stories have an important pedagogical value, and that instruction must be positive rather than negative or apologetic.

Any one who has attempted to build up a primary course in which the foregoing principles

have been fairly respected, will have discovered that, if he can construct one such course, he can about as satisfactorily construct more. He will have found himself, at times, in a strait betwixt two paths through Primary Land. He comes now and again to a parting of ways, both or all equally primary, equally promising, all trending toward the same goal. The resources are great and varied.

For the first time in twenty-three years, the International lessons in 1896 began to acknowledge the rights and claims of the child as a personality peculiar and distinct from that of the youth or the adult, in a special "optional" primary course. So far, so good. The Journal of Education recently said, editorially: "The first great modern movement in Sunday-school work was the organization of the International Sunday-school Committee, and the adoption of the idea of uniformity. Too much praise cannot be given the wisdom and devotion of those who made the perfection of the idea possible. But,

with all its virtues, uniformity is a very small idea in and of itself around which to weave a perpetual system. The educational world has waited patiently these many years for the International to add to that incidental virtue some pedagogical principle, and the first real movement in that direction is in the issuance of the International Optional Primary Lessons for 1896."

The fact that this course, to many, seems unsystematic, planless, unbookish, would suggest the possibility that there might be plan under it, and system in it. It might even be unchronological, and yet truly logical.

The Book of Genesis is not genesis to the child. Daylight comes before the sun. If we think we can teach the child the Bible best in what, to an adult, is consecutive order, because it is literary order or historical order, we deceive ourselves. We are not bringing the child the truth in *his* orderly way, even if it is ours. Connection and order to us are not necessarily order or connection to him.

On looking at the International primary lessons, one of the first things that strikes the eye is the absence of any visible line dividing book from book, or Testament from Testament. The procedure is chiefly by interdependent themes or a series of connected topics. So far, this is as it should be. The fourth quarter, however, retreats from this principle to become chronological, albeit laudably simple.

It must once more be noted that, so far, the International primary course contemplates progressive teaching by topics, logically,—not by book, chronologically. The need of the child determines what the topics shall be, whether they cover the whole Bible or not; and "Testaments," as Testaments, are not, as they need not be, in the case.

The Sunday-school can as little afford to ignore or to repudiate those fundamental pedagogical laws upon which all great educators are now practically agreed, as the secular school. Education is education, no matter what name

the school goes by. The Sunday-school suffers from a hallucination that, because it is a religious institution, it must educate by some method peculiar to itself,—a method which too easily presumes on God's willingness to make good our shortcomings.

It will be a long time yet before we fully realize that the child under eight is not a mere diminutive adult; that he has strictly no historic consciousness, very little appreciation of the remote in cause or effect, in time or in space; and that he has no business with any series of facts which, because of the half-wrong impression which he must needs get of them, make "utter nonsense or mere verbal cram of the most careful instruction."

The truth is that the child is robbed of his right as a child by our everlastingly thinking of him only as the coming man. We think too much of what he may be, and not enough of what he is. At best, the ideal man must first have had an ideal childhood. We shall not

make a perfect child of him by forcing him into an adult mold. Even Jesus had to be a baby before he could become a man. "It is dangerous," says the immortal Frœbel, "to interfere in any way with a ripening process."

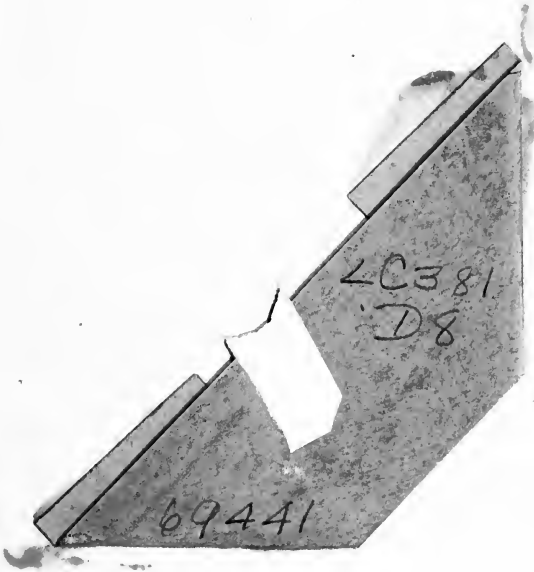
Apart from this, any child may finish his mission in childhood. Out of every thousand children, over two hundred die before they reach nine years of age. Are we going to let these short lives be a failure just because it is easier and more sentimental to have all grades using the same lesson? Who can measure the influence which children have had upon history? I refer not merely to their attractions and sweetening influence upon us—that were adult egotism. I refer to their direct powers,—powers which we have lost, powers which convention and artifice have pressed and dried out of us.

> "Our simple childhood sits upon a throne
> That hath more power than all the elements."

It is idle, if not immoral, to suppose that because we are trying to teach God's word to chil-

dren we can therefore ignore the demands and defy the laws of child nature. God never works a miracle to relieve us from our obligation to use common sense. Our Lord respected the child's point of view, and gave it a foremost place. He never told the child to be as a man, although he did tell the man to be as a child. A child is entitled to all that goes with childhood, no matter whether we are dealing with him in secular or in religious matters.

The remedy for our evils lies in commanding child nature by obeying child nature; in inducting a child into a subject through his natural point of contact with life, his experience, his activities, his appreciations, his sense perceptions and his conceptions. In short, the child's Genesis is not the man's Genesis. The story of the beginnings of things is by no means the beginning of the story of things. The child was not made for lessons, but lessons must be made for the child.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