

African American Presbyterian

"AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE."—John viii, 35.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

(Paper read at the Presbyterian Workers' Conference held at Haines Institute, Augusta, Ga., January 31st to February 3rd.)

By Mrs. Belle Melton Sanders.

The progress of Elementary Schools in the last few years has been highly encouraging. The real problems in a larger bearing have been considered and through our elementary schools the pupils are helped to bring their richest natural contribution and to live their own abundant lives.

Each child possesses distinct faculties and capacities. There is no type or pattern to which all children of a given age conform. Faculties do not grow imperceptibly. Therein lies the opportunity for the development of pupils into channels of living.

The pupil with wide awake senses and muscles, keen mental faculties and a tendency toward interest in future life needs his mind brought to things which will prove most helpful in later life. This begins in the elementary school. How many boys and girls of our own race lead a practically hum-drum life because they have had no other ideals brought to them.

One of our own girls, not more than 14 years of age, when asked why she stopped school, said, "I gone far as we school went and aint nobody axed me to go fudder and I tink say I been too old to gone to school now. But atta dem odder girls go school and say dey lak em fine, I comin Monda."

The dingy school room with more children than it can hold meant very little to her and she had known of nothing better. But now she has seen that life does hold more and that someone is interested enough to ask her to attend school.

Everyone who is not living aimlessly and blindly must have some pattern by which to square his life.

We must remember, however, that every child will not choose its own ideal or will not see the necessity of going further to be trained for a more useful life. This type goes plodding listlessly along. But if properly trained may render good service in their own range which to us may seem very narrow, but is decidedly better than no service at all.

It is, therefore, necessary that our elementary schools be well graded; that we enforce the strictest observance of all laws of deportment, punctuality and regular attendance. All these go to make up a good elementary school and must be enforced if we expect to measure up to the standards of county and State.

Certainly every practical elementary school subject is used, but the elementary school has more advantage than any other school to cultivate the mind and such training should constitute the highest aim.

Skillful teaching will not only find in the elementary subjects means of training and directing thoughts, but will so employ the pupils' minds in their study as to make them living matter, throbbing with life and interest, rather than dead, uninteresting words or just a printed page.

It is not enough to go through the daily routine of school work and expect our students to receive all that an elementary school has to offer. The progress of any school does not come by accident, but by creative planning. No pupil receives fully the benefits of school life unless the attention and interest are aroused.

While these two phases are partly a natural gift, there is probably no power of the mind so susceptible to training as concentration. It must be attained, however, by practice in the act-

ual process of giving attention. We cannot expect the best results from teaching when a class gives half attention; for then we must have half work.

One of the greatest hindrances in our elementary schools is the lack of attention on the part of the pupils. In some pupils this may be caused by ill health or mental deficiency. But so many of our boys and girls are given to day-dreaming. Do you know any pupils in our school who spend hour after hour day-dreaming? Have you noticed the difference in the habit of attention from different people?

We are engaged in work on a field where almost everybody, old and young, has no attention, no interest for anything. Announcements are made to a congregation. Every eye, ear and mouth opens apparently to hear, but nobody understands. We studied the situation and for a while thought this was true because our expressions are different. But after teaching the children we find that the habit of non-attention has captured the minds of almost everyone.

Left to themselves, then, the pupils follow along the line of least resistance. Then comes the opportunity to the teacher of the elementary school to cultivate attention and interest. The things that present themselves to the mind are the things which occupy it. The attention and character of thought are determined by the character of interest. It is this fact which makes it vitally necessary for us to present to our pupils thoughts that are broad and pure.

But however broad and pure may be our motives we must first be interested ourselves. We must be systematically heroic in problems of every day life and experience. We must not shrink from tasks because they are difficult. There will be lessons and text-books which are not intensely interesting, but we must resolve to do our best from a sense of duty, keeping constantly before us the fact that many of our boys and girls will get all of life's training, so far as school is concerned, in an elementary school.

So many parents are not willing to sacrifice that their children may receive a high school or college training and even more have not had the means at any rate. This does not include the vast number of boys and girls who have had no encouragement, whom no one has taken the first step to interest in going further into the preparation for life's great work. And, more than all, many parents of our boys and girls will actually have to be begged to allow their children to receive even an elementary school training. One mother said: "Deys no use to send dese gal chillun to school. Deys got fuh work. It most time for dem to hunt hushan aint much better. Dey too had fuh run rou'. Yassum, dey can read, mum, most any dem book. Dat's nuff. Den't need too much book learnin' to wuk wid hoe."

This mother expressed her own and the sentiments of many others who are just too timid to put their thoughts into words.

Somewhere there must begin the creation of a desire in the hearts of a people to get up out of their narrow sphere and learn more of life. They may spend only a few years in school themselves, but how very unselfish it seems when a mother says: "I did not have the opportunity of going to school, but I want my

children to go. They must know more than I know and I will sacrifice everything I can that they may remain in school."

She had not even an elementary training, but what she had learned was taught in such a way as to keep alive the interest and desires implanted in her breast and she was willing to carry it out in her children. No doubt she put many hours into thoughts of the glories further up where she was never able to climb.

To my mind there is a vast difference between one who is a mere book-worm and one who thinks. There is little place in the world for one who looks, listens, reads and is so fully occupied in absorbing the immediate present that he has no time to see the wider significance of the things with which he deals. One who is so taken up with receiving that he never feels the necessity of sharing with the world that which has enlightened his life.

The teacher must put himself into the place of the pupils and think and feel as they think and feel. To be able to put one's self into any one of these thousand possible positions is to have that invaluable human sympathy without which no real service is rendered.

There must also be self-sacrifice. We must be willing to serve without pay. Schiller says, "Ingratitude is the world's pain," and that is very true in the kind of service a teacher must give.

The emphasis must be upon service. If something needs to be done, do it, and do it somewhere may be better.

However honest and self-sacrificing a teacher may be, if he does not thoroughly believe in humanity and in himself, if he has no enthusiasm, then he should have no part in directing children. The school room is no place for the man or woman who is forever chanting tales of woe; who is never willing to cooperate cheerfully. But we do need men and women who are looking up, not down; who have a sense of humor and can smile at difficulties.

It is the duty of every elementary teacher to make school life so happy that any child would want to attend. I remember distinctly the dread and fear of my early school days. How thankful I was when Friday evening came, and how sorry to see another Monday morning dawn. It seems to me we were taught nothing, but whipped for everything we did not know. We couldn't learn. It took all of our time to dodge the switch. I was fortunate in that my parents compelled me to go to school, but, looking back at the boys and girls who started out in that class, many stopped by the way. The work of a teacher should be a happy, holy task. Nothing can be accomplished by dwelling moodily on obstructing ideas. What we need is to get away from the thought that caused the obstruction and approach the matter in a different direction. The stubborn child does not need to be whipped, but to have his will strengthened that he may control himself. A teacher can be firm yet quite patient yet not indulging and surely sympathetic. Expect each child to do his best, keeping before him the possibilities of what he can be rather than what he is not. Watch them closely in their work and play. Understand each need and capacity and help them center their interest around the right things. Then we may be able to visualize each character now and what they hope to be. We must know the ideals, possibilities and pur-

poses of school and its methods.

We have been slow in discovering that a most essential factor in God's plan of making men and women out of boys and girls is play. We have sometimes thought of play as a mere pastime for children when they had no work to do or as a necessary evil to be tolerated. There is scarcely a virtue that is not born and reared to sturdy strength through suitable and timely play. Self-control, self-direction, ability to lead and will, ingenuity to follow are necessary virtues learned nowhere else so readily and so surely as in play. The child who does not learn to play misses something of very great importance in his life. It is true that in many communities the parents must be converted to the idea that play is necessary to the child's present well being and future life.

The studies of manual training and home economics should have an important place in our elementary school curriculum. The world is now conscious of the need of young men and women who are trained to do specific work. Education for the home has always been important factor in the development of civilization. Much of the work in these studies is on the elementary school level.

The demands of the future are constantly rising. It is, therefore, important that we as teachers adopt some plan of self-education and keep it up. There must be some preparation of methods of work, if we would set a standard and live up to the possibilities which may be ours.

There are many difficulties in elementary schools among our own people. Conditions are almost distressing in the rural districts in the matter of regular attendance. Because of pressing work on the farms and the lack of proper clothing many children attend not more than half of the time school is in session. Then many are forced to stop school when they reach the 4th or 5th grade while hundreds of them finish no grade at all. It is true that in spite of all that has been done the education of the Negro is only well underway. But in the building of and maintaining Christian ideas the church elementary school has made an imperishable name for itself in the hearts of our people. More than half a century ago when four million Negroes faced the world with no opportunities for an education, the Church came forward and took unto itself the task which it might have avoided—education in the Negro. Into these schools have gone, as do today, the uncouth, untutored, neglected youths of our country.

Sometimes the school houses have been crowded or equipment poor and very often teachers have been less effective than they ought to have been; sometimes urgent, necessary work has not been done. These only serve to make brighter the glories of the things achieved. Out of these schools have grown the boarding school, academies, normal and professional schools. Through our church elementary schools boys and girls have been inspired to go forward and upward. There is a steady stream of trained men and women, going back to the places from whence they came or to some field of service, carrying with them the things they have gained with that spirit of love for humanity which was first rooted in the church elementary school.

Five years ago, after accepting work on a field that is almost primitive, we found no one who had all of an elementary school's training; not one boy or girl who had been persuaded to attend school for any purpose. The county schools were packed to the utmost capacity with two

sessions per day. Two years later our church school was opened by the Board of National Missions. Of the 457 pupils enrolled the first term I venture to say that only one-third had ever seen the city of Charleston, six miles away, and not one had been beyond that city.

We are trying to use our opportunities to guide and impress, and though it seems to be such a little among so many, we are happy to say that we have three pupils at Haines Institute and one girl at Scotia Seminary.

These young people have left home to continue their studies not with the best wishes from friends and relatives. Sneers and jeers have followed them all the way. Not even the parents of two were willing. But they have a vision of higher life, and, I believe, lives of service. One of our girls, on returning to Haines after the holidays, wrote, "I cannot forget what you said to me. When you kneel in prayer please remember me. I hope that before I leave Haines I will be a Christian. I am trying all I know to get my heart right with God. I want to be one of His children. Pray for me."

We must realize clearly that school not only trains for life, but is life itself. If Christian principles are inoculated into pupils during early life there is more hope of their taking deep root in the future and for the service that is to be rendered.

The world moves forward on the feet of its young people, and the Church elementary school has a place in its curriculum whereby the child is helped to grow, to develop, to experience, to live.

The elementary church school offers a program which means the training of our boys and girls into lives of Christian character crowned with abundant life, bringing forth fruits the Spirit, kindness, gentleness, joy, peace, truth, faith, hope, love, reverence for God and one another.

CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PITTSBURG, VA.

A very appreciative audience assembled in Central Presbyterian church, Rev. J. E. Tice, pastor, March 11, though the weather was very dreary, to hear a real gospel message delivered by the Rev. Dr. Keeler, chairman of the Church Erection Board of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., whose headquarters are in New York City.

Dr. Keeler is an able, fluent, forceful and enlightening speaker, and has a reputation of delivering a strong practical message to all of his audiences. We were all thrilled at his utterances.

Dr. Keeler and wife motored from New York City here March 9 and held a conference with a committee of fourteen representatives of colored and white Presbyterians in the Tabernacle Presbyterian church (white). Dr. J. E. Hemphill, pastor, where plans were formulated for the erection of a new church for the Central Presbyterian church on its site, on Halifax St. The work is scheduled to begin in the month of May.

There are ten persons in the church who have pledged to raise \$100.00 each, toward the building fund, to be reported on the 25th of the present month. We are looking forward for a great time and great rejoicing. Rev. Tice, our pastor, has done wonderful work since he came to us and everybody is striving and doing their best in holding him up, for he is an untiring worker.

A MEMBER.

Learn to laugh; a good laugh is better than medicine.

MICHIGAN AVENUE BRANCH Y. M. C. A. BUFFALO, N. Y.

The Committee of Management of the Michigan Avenue Branch "Y" wishes to announce the opening of the New Building Sunday afternoon, April 15, at 3 o'clock. The Dedication Address is to be delivered by Dr. James E. Shepard, President of the North Carolina State College, Durham, N. C. Mr. C. H. Tobias, Senior Secretary of the Colored Department, National Council, New York City, will give a review of the "Y" work throughout the country and also introduce the speaker.

Among the guests of honor will be Mr. and Mrs. George B. Matthews, Buffalo; Mr. Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, State Secretary of the Y. M. C. A., Mr. Fred Eldredge, of New York, Mrs. Charles MacLean, New York, and Mrs. Sidney McDougall, of Buffalo.

Sunday at 7:30 P. M., at the Secretaries' Supper Conference Thos. E. Taylor, of New York, will preside and the address is to be delivered by Secretary R. B. DeFrantz. Among the Secretaries who will be present are: George Arthur, Chicago; S. R. Morsell, Pittsburgh; A. L. Comither, Brooklyn; Campbell Johnson, Washington; Chas. E. Frye, Cleveland; Thos. A. Bolling, Rochester; H. S. Dunbar, Detroit; J. A. Greene, Dayton; R. W. Overton, Cincinnati; H. W. Porter, Philadelphia; C. H. Bullock, Montclair; and C. M. Cain, Atlantic City.

Program continues throughout the week as follows:

Monday—Church Night—with program under auspices of the Ministers' Council, Rev. J. Edward Nash, President, presiding.

Tuesday, 8 P. M.—Fraternal Night, Mr. Robert Buckner, presiding.

Wednesday, 8 P. M.—Citizens' Night—Mr. H. H. Lewis, Sr., presiding.

Thursday, 8 P. M.—National Health Week Program, under the auspices of the local Medical Association, Dr. J. L. Waters, presiding.

Friday, 8 P. M.—Ladies' Night—under the auspices of Ladies' Auxiliary, Mrs. Otis D. Jackson, President, presiding. Mrs. Addie W. Hunton, Brooklyn, N. Y., speaker.

Saturday, 8 P. M.—Y. M. C. A. Night—Interbranch Demonstration Program, Mr. Charles Herrick, Physical Director, Central Branch, presiding. Music by Genesee Street Branch Orchestra.

Sunday, 4 P. M.—Vesper Services—Mr. W. C. A. Sims, chairman, Religious Work Committee, presiding. Music by St. Phillip's Church Choir; Speaker, Mr. Don D. Tullis, Secretary Buffalo Council of Churches.

All meetings are open to the public.

Notice should be taken of the following:

Thursday, April 19, 2:30 to 5 o'clock, inspection of Building and Reception to High School Boys and Girls, the Hi Y Club, hosts.

Friday, April 20, 2:30 to 5 P. M.—Inspection of Building and reception to women, Ladies' Auxiliary, hostesses.

Saturday, April 21, 9:30 to 11:30 P. M. Inspection of Building and Reception to Boys and Girls, 10 to 15 years of age.

Wm. H. JACKSON, Executive Secretary.

Normal childhood should be as far as possible carefree. Responsibility, care and work have no place during these early years, except as a conscious part of the educative process. What ever deprives children of this joyous outlook is wrong.