

ARE SCHOOL CHILDREN OVERWORKED IN HAWAII?

A Parent Objects to Home Study and Suggests the Batavia System--A Complaint About Text Books Used in the Territory.

Editor Advertiser: The following article entitled "The Savior of the Public School Child," appeared in the Ladies Home Journal for September, 1903. I would like to have you publish it in your valuable paper so that our local teachers and those in authority over our educational institutions will know of the grand results that have been obtained in Batavia, New York, through the trial of a new plan to improve the system of teaching in the schools there and which plan I believe should be adopted in our schools here with as little delay as possible.

The same conditions that existed in Batavia are existing here today, with the result that children are compelled to spend the greater part of their time at home in doing school work which should be done during school hours. These conditions cause the greatest objection to our educational system at the present time.

I for one do not believe in having my children compelled to spend nearly all their time out of school doing school work, for in my opinion it is absolutely essential to good health that a child should have the benefit of that part of each day away from school, for recreation and rest from mental studies. Besides this, children often spend some of their home hours in learning music and other accomplishments and if this is the case and they are compelled to sit up late each night with their every day school work, the results can easily be foreseen.

Another matter which I think should be touched upon in this connection is the extremely unsatisfactory kind of text books now being used in some of our schools. Take for instance the text books of Arithmetic. In former days each different kind of example had a rule laid down in the school books for the guidance of the pupil and a "sample" example worked out so that each student could reason out the way in which similar examples or problems should be done. In the text books used today no such rules or examples are to be found and the result is that unless the teacher is extremely careful to fully explain to the pupils the method of working out the examples, the pupil is often puzzled and at a loss to understand the correct rule to apply. It is simply impossible for a teacher to instruct a class in this manner and it becomes absolutely necessary to adopt individual instruction such as has been adopted in Batavia if good results are to be obtained.

Sincerely hoping that the Home Journal article will be read by all those interested in the education of our children and trusting that it will lead to the adoption at an early date of the system of individual instruction in our schools, allow me to subscribe myself,

AN INTERESTED PARENT.

Honolulu, August 29, 1903.

A public-school teacher of experience and judgment admitted to me confidentially, not long ago, that the hope and the aim of his work had been "to kill as few of the children as possible." This appalling admission reflects not at all upon the teacher, but upon the public-school system in which he was doing his allotted part according to fixed and fatal laws.

In Batavia, New York, a town of ten thousand inhabitants, half-way between Rochester and Buffalo, a man has arisen bold enough and resourceful enough to declare that the fatal laws by which the modern juggernaut of the public-school system has been governed are not fixed. This man has even dared to say to his fellow-educators: "Come now; let us kill no children at all. I will show you a more excellent way." Furthermore, this man has made good his promise; he has shown the more excellent way, and the children of Batavia are no longer killed all the day long, nor accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

It happened in this wise. In the year 1898 John Kennedy, Superintendent of the Batavia public schools, came before the school board and offered a solution for a certain problem of a room containing too many scholars for its teacher, which had been laid on the table from time to time as a vexed question.

PERSONAL, INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION IS OFTEN NEEDED.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Kennedy, "the solution which I have to offer you for this overcrowded room is exceedingly simple, but it is perfectly adequate, as I know three minutes' consideration will show you. I propose that, instead of trying to build or hire or otherwise obtain extra space, we at once put an extra teacher into that room, not to hear classes, but to give personal, individual instruction to the pupils who are falling behind. This will not only provide for the excess of pupils, but it will at the same time bring up the grade of scholarship, and, most of all, it will meet the greatest need in the present system of massing and classing."

There was a pause, in which the gentlemen of the board pondered the suggestion seriously. Then the president said slowly: "Mr. Kennedy, this method of meeting our problem is of far more than local and passing importance. It is not only a revelation; it is a revolution."

And a revolution it has proved to be—a bloodless and joyous and beneficent revolution, as all Batavia citizens are willing to witness. For the experiment was immediately tried in the one room with startling and instantaneous success. The worn-out teacher, who had been on the verge of nervous prostration, suddenly found that all the weak spots in her classes were becoming the strong spots. There was nothing the matter now! She had no more nagging to do and the children no more dragging. She ceased corresponding with a sanatorium and forgot her nervous system entirely.

NO HOME STUDY FOR THESE CHILDREN.

Meanwhile the change was far greater in the children. Discouragement, the bane of public-school life, disappeared from all faces and tears from all eyes. A discouraged child is almost always a rebellious child. A beautiful spirit of order and harmony

now began to rule in that room. Best of all, perhaps, when school broke up the books were left in the desks and the little flock darted away into the outer world free from every care, as the young of all creation ought to be. No poring over partial payments and cudgeling weary little brains over cubic complexities around the evening lamp for them.

What had happened? A quiet, gentle girl, with trained mind, tireless patience and sympathetic perception of child nature, was moving hour by hour through that room like a ministering angel. "Schools," says Superintendent Kennedy, "are administered to death; they are ministered into life."

This work of ministrations to the dim and puzzled little brains was a very breath of life, energizing them to a fresh grasp, illuminating them with the joy of clear intellectual perception. Suddenly it was found that the backward children were catching up with the bright ones. Ere long, in many cases they were outstripping them, and the leading lights of the classes soon had all they could do to keep up with the "dull" scholars.

THE EXPERIMENT HAS PROVED A GREAT SUCCESS.

So signal was the success of the experiment that it was manifestly the duty of the board to apply the new plan throughout the entire public-school system of the town, and this has been gradually done without additional expense. It costs less, Mr. Kennedy says, to educate children than to kill them. The experiment was, however, varied by having one teacher assume the double function of class and individual instruction in rooms which were not overflowing. The results were equally satisfactory. "The single teacher brought forward her own laggards, relieved her room and brought it into a condition comparing very favorably with that prevailing in the two-teacher room."

There are in all seven individual instructors employed in the Batavia schools at this time, one teacher in many cases going from room to room. They are not regarded as assistants or under-teachers in any sense, and their salaries are the same as those of the regular or class teachers of their grade. It should be stated that the Batavia school-houses were built upon a liberal, broad-gauged plan, with spacious, well-ventilated rooms; a fact which has contributed in an important degree to the success of Mr. Kennedy's experiment. For a success it is, substantial and unqualified. It is a reform which has come to stay.

ACTUAL, PRACTICAL RESULTS OF INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION.

I have been at pains to inquire regarding the actual, practical results of individual instruction, among teachers, parents and scholars of my acquaintance. The answers have been unanimous and hearty. The president of the school board tells me: "There is no 'out' about it. It solves the problem. It saves the teacher and it saves the child." The parents rejoice in the new era of peace and rest and release. The teachers bear enthusiastic testimony to the revolution it has wrought in their departments. The children tell me: "I don't know what I should have become of me without it. I should have had to drop out."

Not long since the chairman of the Committee on School Hygiene of the Homeopathic National Medical So-

ciety investigated the Batavia public schools. He found the ventilation and sanitation of the buildings unimpeachable; the lighting excellent as indicated by the fact that only one per cent, and a half of the children wore glasses; and he confessed himself amazed to find "mental pressure," the bugbear of his profession, entirely eliminated in these schools by the system of individual instruction. "We are left empty-handed," he said. "We have no criticism to register."

THE SYSTEM SHOULD BE ADOPTED EVERYWHERE.

Dr. Albert Leonard, publisher of the "Journal of Pedagogy" and late president of the Normal Schools of the State of Michigan, recently spent some time in Batavia, making a thorough study of the results of Mr. Kennedy's method. He expressed himself as deeply impressed with the wholesome, healthy aspect of the children, the absence of anaemia, the physical beauty which sound nerves bestow. "There cannot be found in America," he says, "a healthier, happier, busier lot of pupils than are today in the public schools of Batavia. Teachers are equally well and happy. The scheme of individual instruction is so simple and practicable that it could easily be followed in every city in the country. It would be worth while to bring the attention of the country to this rational method of dealing with our public-school children."

In the past, and indeed in the present, where the old Spartan conditions obtain, our public schools have produced such moral and mental and physical tragedies as no father nor mother can read of with undimmed eyes. They have been most movingly set forth in the pages of this magazine. Only too well can some of us recall the agonies of our own childhood; only too well can we still discern the scars.

HOW IT SAVED ONE BOY.

A sensitive, timid, highly-organized child entered a certain public school. His bent was imaginative, dreamy; he was deficient in logical power; mathematics were peculiarly difficult for him, and yet he was neither stupid nor stubborn. He received the ordinary class teaching in arithmetic, but it conveyed no clear impression to his mind. He attempted to recite, but his lack of comprehension at once appeared. The teacher, with the great class waiting, sighed gently at his dullness and gave a few rapid words of explanation. Intimidated by the sense of shame and exposure the child listened as to one speaking a language unmeaning to him, but feigned to understand in sheer self-defense. The weeks went by; the child, with brain confused, heart bleeding with mortification, knowing himself ridiculed by the scholars and looked upon as a drag and a trial by the teacher, became absolutely despairing. His self-respect was crushed. Each new recitation was a climax of anguish. The capacity of comprehension was lost. At thirteen he was a nervous wreck in reality, and was branded in his little world as hopelessly stubborn and stupid. In a certain way he ended by becoming both. It was a case of educational malpractice, and it is so familiar in our schools as they are today as to be looked upon with indifference as a matter of course.

Under the method of individual instruction these tragedies of childhood, which have left many an intellect and spirit marred and maimed for life, have become impossible. The child in question—and this is a real flesh-and-blood child, not merely a type or an imaginary picture—was placed by his mother later in a school in Batavia, where the new method was followed. The mother regretted that there was no private school for her boy, for, although all the processes of his period of torture were not clear to her, she saw him now, as a product of the Western public school hitherto attended, utterly broken down, discouraged, and incapable, apparently, of coherent thought on certain lines. In a month, under the sane and rational new order, the poor little victim was transformed. He had become clear-headed, happy, independent, self-respecting, steady in brain and nerve.

THE CHILD ALWAYS SHOULD DO THE WORK HIMSELF.

Just here it should be distinctly noted that the individual instructor, if she rightly understands her function, does not under any circumstances do the work for the child, but shows him how to do it himself. The great achievement of learning how to study, how to concentrate the mind, often left unlearned until college is reached, is gained in the very beginning of school life.

A very marked effect of the introduction of individual instruction in the Batavia schools has been to increase the number who enter and who remain to graduate from the High School, the rate of increase being six times as great as the rate in the first grade.

For a year and a half "the Batavia experiment," as it has come to be called, was tested and tried in every possible way, quietly and without observation. "We did not rush out with our discovery," says Mr. Kennedy. "We claim some credit for self-control. We wanted to study our method undisturbed; we wanted to test it fully; we did not want to make sure of it. When we did speak it was in response to an official inquiry from the State Superintendent as to what new departure had been undertaken."

WHAT THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS SAYS.

It is in his report of 1902 that the State Superintendent, Mr. Charles R. Skinner, gives the following official endorsement of Mr. Kennedy's system: "I have been watching with deep interest the experiment in individual instruction carried on under the direction and supervision of Superintendent John Kennedy in the schools of Ba-



A DRAWBACK TO MOTORING.

He: "Emma, you do not love me any longer; you are so distant."
She: "Yes, I do; but I can't stand the smell of the benzine."

tavia, New York, during the past four years, and am persuaded that the combination of class and individual instruction is the solution of the graded school problem. This combination seems to secure every economy and stimulus contemplated in class education, while avoiding its harshness and inflexibility. . . . It is pleasant to think that about all worry, discouragement, overstrain and breakdown may be banished from the graded schools. It has been well said that the children get through the graded school under unrelieved mass instruction in spite of it rather than by means of it. . . . We owe to the children, the teachers and the community protection against pressure, over-work, worry and failure, and I believe that we may and should save to health and education many who will otherwise succumb to physical overstrain or fall by the wayside through discouragement. That this can be done by making individual instruction as regular a feature in school work as class drill is, I think, no longer open to doubt."

RECOMMENDED BY MANY WELL-KNOWN EDUCATORS.

After two days spent with a committee in thorough examination of the Batavia method in its practical everyday working, Superintendent Whitney, of Ogdensburg, gave it his unqualified approval and recommended that it be introduced into all the public schools of his city. Similar action has been taken by many other educators, notably in Greater New York.

P. Thistleton Mark, Professor of Pedagogy, Birmingham, England, after thorough investigation on the spot, declared emphatically: "These methods will revolutionize the schools of England."

G. Stanley Hall, President of Clark University, says: "Individual instruction sounds the key note of education for the next decade."

So let anxious mothers and confused,

discouraged little children through all our towns and cities look up and take courage. The day of their deliverance is drawing nigh.

WHAT IS PAIN BALM?

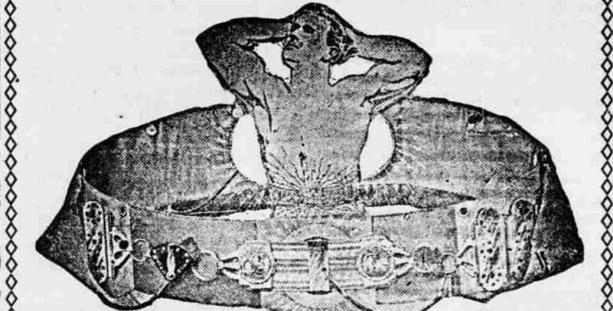
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