



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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knows the sounds of the consonants. And so on, until we have quite a list of words—"bow-wow, now, sow, how," etc., and have a little talk about each one, introducing them into sentences and making them, so to speak, living things in his mind.

Then take another word "red" and treat it in the same way, and we get "bed, fed, ned, led"; and here a difficulty may arise—he may suggest "head," in which case he must simply be told that we cannot add that to our list, because it is made up of different letters, though it sounds the same. There is no need to dwell upon this little difficulty at present, for he will constantly meet with it, and get used to the idea, that the same sound is not always represented by the same letters. Then take "all," let him add on the consonants to make "ball, tall, call, hall," etc., and make another column of these. Perhaps these three words will be enough to take for his first spelling lesson. Let him read the columns up and down and any way; every word has a meaning and carries an idea.

Then, by way of recapitulation at the end of the lesson, let us make sentences, introducing the new words he has made and, if he can, he may print them in his note-book. We dictate—"How I love my ball," "I call the red cow," etc. and he arranges them. Now, for a new experience. We dictate—"Ned led the white sow to her bed." Consternation! He does not know "to" nor "her." "Never mind, put counters for the words you don't know, they may soon come in our lessons"; and the child has a desire and a need, that is, an appetite for learning. If there is time, and he is not tired, we deal with the remaining words in the same way—from "love," we get "glove, dove, shove"; from "white," "kite, bite." He will be able to make new words much more easily now, after the practice he has had. He may make a list of his words in his note-book, and will feel his possessions are indeed great, when he sees how long it is; it will be a delight to him to see his list grow from day to day.

The next day he learns the two following lines, and then another spelling lesson, introducing more new words. By the time he gets to the end of the rhyme, he has quite a large stock of words and, besides, can readily make new ones from the old. He has gained experience and courage,

and feels that learning is a delight, for in these lessons his imagination is constantly being appealed to and he gains a fresh idea with every new word he learns. They also afford some moral training. No stumbling and hesitation are allowed from the first, for the ideas connected with the written symbols are vivid, and flash into his mind the instant his eye lights upon the words. There must be no dawdling through a lesson; but clear, bright attention is to be maintained, without which it is impossible for ideas to be awakened in the mind. And, lastly, perfection and finish must be aimed at in style and enunciation. However simple the lines may be, they should be read in the best possible way. The idea of reverence for his language should be presented to a child; point out the beauty in certain words, and that it is quite distressing to spoil this by imperfect pronunciation.

In conclusion, let me quote some words from Ruskin which, though they do not quite bear on these very early reading lessons, they yet set before us the ideal at which we must aim from the first.

"You must get into the habit of looking intensely at words, and assuring yourself of their meaning, syllable by syllable, nay, letter by letter"; and again, "The entire difference between education and non-education (as regards the merely intellectual part of it) consists in this accuracy. A well-educated gentleman may not know many languages, may not be able to speak any but his own, may have read very few books. But whatever language he knows, he knows precisely; whatever word he pronounces, he pronounces rightly; above all, he is learned in the *peerage* of words; knows the words of true descent and ancient blood, at a glance, from words of modern canaille."

MISS K. R. HAMMOND then read a paper on

PICTURE TALKS.

My object to-day is to give some account of one particular branch of the teaching of the *Parents' Review School*—of our Picture Talks, as they are descriptively called. We are justified in according them a place in our school programme, by our definition of education as "the science of relations." In these lessons we aim at putting the children in touch with

the great artist-minds of all ages. We try to unlock for their delectation the wonderful garden of Art, in which grow most lovely flowers, most wholesome fruits. We want to open their eyes and minds to appreciate the masterpieces of pictorial art, to lead them from mere fondness for a pretty picture which pleases the senses up to honest love and discriminating admiration of what is truly beautiful—a love and admiration which are the response of heart and intellect to the appeal addressed to them through the senses by all great works of art.

Among the most prominent clauses of our educational creed are these:—

(1) Ideas are the food of the mind, or, rather, they are the vitalizing pollen which enables the dormant powers of the mind to develop into fruits which again are the seeds and pledges of a future higher and richer life.

(2) The true educational worth of any study is determined by the fundamental idea underlying it, which idea, fixing the end and aim of the study, determines also its method—*i.e.*, the path of our progress, step by step, towards the goal, each step being marked by the assimilation of one of the lesser ideas bound up in the great initial and final idea.

Let us then ask, What is the fundamental idea of our scheme of Picture Talks? It is, I take it, our conception of Art itself; not as the luxury of the rich, the plaything of the idle, the fetish of the would-be “cultured,” but as a means of expressing man’s noblest dreams, deepest thoughts and tenderest fancies. This conception has been variously expressed in various definitions. Thus:—

“Art is the incarnation of a soul of truth in a body of beauty.” “. . . the beautiful expression of thought tinged by emotion.” “. . . the second revelation of infinity . . . across the mind of man.” “. . . a second creation: man’s will calling a thought into material existence, and his judgment pronouncing it to be very good.”

Matter, form, emotion—these are the factors of a masterpiece of art, the latter being, as it were, the mark of the potter’s thumb, the impress of the artist’s personality—sometimes very prominent (as in lyric poetry, which is essentially subjective), sometimes hidden (as in dramatic poetry, which is essentially objective).

This is our conception of Art generally—of Art in the widest sense. The following words of Mr. Ruskin will show how it applies to the narrower field of pictorial art:—

“Painting, with all its technicalities, difficulties and particular ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing. To have learnt the art of painting—*i.e.*, of representing any natural object faithfully—is to have learnt to express one’s thoughts grammatically and melodiously. The great painter excels in precision and force in the language of lines; the great versifier excels in precision and force in the language of words. The term ‘great poet’ is strictly and precisely in the same sense applicable to both if warranted by the character of the images or thoughts which each conveys.”

“Thus in Landseer’s ‘Old Shepherd’s Chief Mourner’ we may note as *forceful precise language*:—(1) the exquisite rendering of the dog’s glossy, crisp hair; (2) the bright sharp touching of the green bough beside it; (3) the clear painting of coffin-wood and blanket-fold.

“On the other hand we may register as *poetical thoughts*:—(1) the close pressure of the dog’s breast against the wood; (2) the convulsive clinging of the paws that have dragged the blanket off the trestles; (3) the total powerlessness of the head; (4) the fixed and tearful fall of the hopeless eye; (5) the rigidity of repose, showing that no change has taken place since the coffin was closed.”

“The greatest picture is that which conveys to the mind the greatest number of the greatest ideas—and an idea is greater in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies, exercises and exalts the faculty by which it is received.”

To sum up, then:—In accordance with the root-idea of our Picture Talks, in these lessons we aim at giving ideas of three classes, concerning—(1) the meaning of the picture; (2) the beauty with which that meaning is expressed; (3) the personality of the artist—where this is clearly felt in his works, *e.g.*, in the paintings of Fra Angelico or of Michael Angelo.

I will now pass on to practical details. It is scarcely possible to begin these lessons too early. The first stage is attentive looking at pictures which have been carefully

chosen, not for mere bright colouring, but for real artistic merit. To withhold good pictures from children because we thoughtlessly conclude them to be incapable of noticing anything but gaudiness of colour, is to despise them, to value them too lightly.

The teacher will probably find she has a very small rôle to play, her part being merely to secure attention for some point that the child is inclined to overlook, and to explain in a very few simple words those problems that the child cannot solve for himself. Definite teaching is out of the question; suitable ideas are easily given, and a thoughtful love of Art inspired by simple natural talk over the picture at which the child is looking.

Here is a list of some suitable pictures. Sacred subjects, preferably by the ancient and modern pre-Raphaelites, whose simplicity appeals very strongly to children—*e.g.*, Rossetti's "Annunciation," one of Botticelli's "Holy Families," Burne Jones' "Days of Creation," some of Fra Angelico's "Angels," Holman Hunt's "Light of the World," in fact almost any favourite sacred pictures. Animal studies:—Landseer, Rosa Bonheur, Calderon's exquisite "Orphans." Richter's delightful series:—"Sunday," "The Lord's Prayer," "The Seasons." Heywood Sumner's "Seasons," "St. George and the Dragon"; Chavanne's "Doux Pays," "Pauvre Pêcheur"; Burne Jones' "Golden Stairs"; della Robbia's joyous "Singing and Dancing Children"; Murillo's "Spanish Peasant Boy," "Mme. le Brun and her Child," "La Femme au Manchon"; Faed's "Motherless Bairns"; Louis David's "Love rules his kingdom without a sword." A few very good landscapes. Walter Crane's "Illustrations to Grimm's Fairy Tales"; Caldecott's "John Gilpin," "House that Jack built," etc.; in fact, any good illustrations of tales familiar to the child.

Of course these pictures would be given to the child singly, the introduction of each new friend making a red-letter day. This introduction gives the opportunity for the talk. The child will look long at the picture, then describe it carefully, with a little help where he seems to miss the meaning—a little dwelling on the beauty of colour and expression, and perhaps a few words about the artist's life. Henceforth the picture will be hung on his nursery walls or inserted in

the book which it is his joy and privilege on wet afternoons, or when he is not well, to show to his mother, explaining the meaning of each picture as he comes to it, and probably giving the quaintest possible histories of such people as Murillo's "Spanish Peasant Boy," or "The Lady with the Muff."

Later on it is well to remember our principle of linking together different branches of study and to give the child pictures illustrating his period of history, or portraits of the great men he is learning about. When the child lives in or near London, or any town with a good collection of pictures, one could easily arrange a fairly complete scheme of lessons on the most suitable of those available. In many cases it would be possible to talk over the picture at the gallery; but if not, the teacher should fix on the picture beforehand, let the child study it exhaustively at the gallery—take a mental picture of it, in fact—and then give the lesson at home with the aid of a small reproduction. Thoughtful people will see at once that it is worse than useless to expect a child to make the acquaintance of more than one or two pictures at one time: "surfeiting, the appetite may sicken and so die."

I will now describe two "Picture Talk" lessons given at the House of Education, the first being for children of about seven years of age. The picture in this instance was by Margaret Dicksee, and represents the Vicar of Wakefield's daughters cutting up the trains of their grand dresses to make waistcoats for their little brothers.

Part I.—The children looked attentively at the picture and remarked on the quaint pretty dresses of the girls. Comparing this costume with that of the present day, the teacher impressed on the children that the picture represents a scene of long ago—perhaps when their grandmother's grandmother was a little girl, when there were no railways or steamboats or gas, etc. The children noticed that the girls were making waistcoats for two little boys, and remarked on the old-fashioned furniture, etc.

Then the picture was taken away and the children described it very accurately and fully from memory.

Part II.—The teacher told the story of the good Dr. Primrose's loss of fortune, of his simplicity and cheerful acquiescence in his lot; then read, with a few verbal alterations, the story of that Sunday morning when the Vicar's

daughters came down to breakfast as in their prosperous days, with powdered hair, high heeled shoes, and satin dresses with long trains, in which they meant to go to church, although they had no carriage.

The children greatly appreciated Dr. Primrose's good sense, and his good-humoured way of rebuking his daughters, and were delighted when they came to the account of the next morning's scene, illustrated by the picture. In conclusion, the children narrated the story.

The second lesson was given to girls of sixteen years of age. The picture was Fra Lippo Lippi's "Coronation of the Virgin," and this was connected with Browning's poem named after the painter. The lesson falls under three heads according to the general scheme worked out a few minutes ago.

- (1) General meaning or underlying thought.
- (2) Teaching about "form"; the idea of pictorial composition being given in this particular lesson.
- (3) Fra Lippo Lippi's personality.

Part I.—The girls studied the picture and made out all that they could of its meaning, aided where necessary by questions.

Thus: the central panel represents the First Person of the Holy Trinity crowning the Virgin Mary, who is kneeling before the throne. That this coronation is only symbolical of the great honour conferred on Mary when she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah is shown by the two little medallions (one on each side of this central panel) in which the annunciation is represented, in one being the figure of the angel with a lily, in the other that of the Virgin, in an attitude of humility, receiving the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit. To right and left in lower rounded panels are a crowd of angels bearing tall lilies; in the foreground at each side a saint; in front, a crowd of saints, among whom we can distinguish a bishop, Job, a lovely female saint with two kneeling children, and an angel bearing a scroll with the words, *Iste perfecit opus*—referring to the dark humble figure of a man rising up with folded hands at the side and looking among the saints, with a half-frown of dazzled surprise.

The girls remarked with pleasure the extreme beauty of the whole picture, and the perfection of every detail—the

face of Him on the throne, the attitude of the Virgin, the grace of the angels, the loveliness and fitness of the lilies as emblems of purity associated with the Virgin.

Part II.—The composition.

Which is the most important part of the picture?

Evidently that which represents the coronation.

How is the eye led to that part?

- (1) It is in the central highest panel.
- (2) The lines of the marble work all lead to it.
- (3) The peculiar stripes of the background of the side panels lead to it.
- (4) The figures are larger, the drawing and lighting simpler and broader.

How is the holiness of this part indicated?

- (1) By the height of panel.
- (2) By the noble simplicity of the figures.
- (3) By the raised platform on which they are placed.
- (4) By the wreaths of laurel cutting off approach.
- (5) By the reverent posture of the angels standing round the throne.

(6) The arch over the throne is too high to be entirely contained in the panel. Does not this hint at the impossibility of even approaching a fitting representation of the Divine Majesty?

It was noticed how the stems of the lilies (parallel to each other and to the frame) and the lines in the sky behind the angel groups draw the three parts of the picture together into one.

The girls then drew on the blackboard a skeleton of the picture, or plan of the main lines of the composition—a good test of their comprehension of this part of the lesson.

Part III.—Fra Lippo Lippi himself. Some details of his life were given. Probably born in 1400, he was contemporary with Henry V. and VI. and Joan of Arc. Florence, his birth-place (map and photographs here introduced), was an independent city—nominally a republic—but practically ruled by the great house of Medici. The head of this house during Lippo's life was Cosimo, a patron of art. Florence was then at the height of her splendour, and produced many great artists who adorned the walls of her churches and palaces with wonderful paintings. Among these was the sometime monk

Filippo Lippi, painter of this picture, who was employed by Cosimo, and even locked up in the palace so that he should work hard.

After this brief introduction, Browning's humorous and forceful character-sketch, with the exception of some difficult or unsuitable passages, was read aloud by the teacher. It was pleasant to see the girls' faces lighting up when they came to the lines describing and explaining the picture.

" I shall paint
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe
 Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
 As puff on puff of grated orris-root
 When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
 And then in the front, of course, a saint or two—
 St. John, because he saves the Florentines ;
 St. Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day ;
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
 The man of Uz (and Us without the z—
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
 Secured at their devotion, up shall come
 Out of a corner when you least expect,
 As one by a dark stair into a great light,
 Music and talking—who but Lippo ! I—
 Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I'm the man !
 Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear ?
 I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round—
 I, in this presence, this pure company !
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape ?
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
 Forward, puts out a soft palm—' Not so fast '—
 Addresses the celestial presence ; ' nay,
 He made you and devised you, after all,
 Though he's none of you ! Could St. John there draw,
 His camel-hair make up a painting brush ?
 We come to brother Lippo for all that
 ' *Iste perfecit opus* ! "

The teacher supplemented Browning's account of the painter's life by telling the story of the apostate monk's marriage with the sometime novice, the beautiful saint of the picture, one of the children kneeling there being their son the painter, Filippino Lippi.

In conclusion, the girls described the picture in detail from memory.

Some of us well remember the joy that filled us when—perhaps through the writings of Mr. Ruskin—perhaps by a few illuminating words spoken before a picture that we liked vaguely, but with no notion of its deep meaning—we felt, as it were, a new sense given to us, a magic book unsealed, a wonder-world discovered. Shall we not hasten to share this joy with the children entrusted to us ? And does not our knowledge of the life and potency of ideas teach us how to impart the secret spell, the "Open Sesame" which each individual soul must pronounce before it is permitted to taste this joy ?

MISS L. M. GORE read a paper on

EARLY BIBLE LESSONS.

In dealing with my present subject, Bible Lessons, my first thought is that every lesson must have its motive—its object. Before giving the lesson, we think, why are we doing so ? what is our object ? what effect is it to have ? and having first decided this point we turn our attention to the means by which we are going to bring about this effect.

Most lessons are given with a desire to impart knowledge, and this, not merely because it is wise and prudent to furnish a child with a store of facts which may be useful to him when he comes to take his part in the world, but because knowledge in itself is education, and the various subjects to be studied have their effect not only on the intellect but on character.

The task of imparting a string of facts for their own sake is a thankless one, not easy, and not likely to leave a lasting impression. We take it for granted that facts learnt at school are often forgotten afterwards ; what then is the use of a school life spent in learning things to be soon forgotten ? But there are things which we never forget, and often we account for our memory by saying, "it made an impression on me at the time," "I was struck by it," *i.e.*, I stopped to think, the fact interested me, in short, an idea had been presented to me so forcibly as to take root. It is ideas, then, that we remember, and for this reason—an idea is living, and whatever lives grows. An idea might be compared to the nucleus in one of the cells in the growing point of a young shoot. The nucleus is the centre and life of the cell, the essence of