

opportunities of children. He says, "The issue is perfectly clear. There is no way to reduce costs so as to make the trend parallel the population trend except by lopping off the school enterprises above and beyond the elementary schools, wholly or in part."

The junior high school is the money saving device for lopping off three years at the top of the public school system, i. e., three years from the high school; the platoon system is the scheme for cutting costs at the bottom of the system—the elementary school. Both are acceptable to school administrators because they help solve their housing and budget problem. It is only the teacher who sees, knows, and understands the harm to the child involved in the platoon system with its inevitable lack of correlation and unity in education of the child and lack of opportunity for the influence of the personality of the teacher, the prime essential of character building.

To a nation that is fed on machines, eats, drinks and sleeps by their assistance, the evils of this mechanized system of education, the platoon schools, are too subtle to be seen and understood. There is a lack of any general understanding of educational principles. There is no intelligent, critical faculty developed so that they can detect essential weakness in a school. People take for granted that when children assemble in a schoolhouse, they have a school.

Honest, but superficial observers judging external appearances give glowing reports on the mass formations and the machine-like movements of the children in platoon schools. They fail to recognize what the educator sees—the factory system carried into the public school, which needs only the closing-time whistle to make complete its identification with the great industrial plants!

MARGARET A. HALEY.

Any School Morning

SIT up tall—every one of you!" commanded the teacher.

Forty-six boys, ranging in age from nine to twelve, their arms crossed behind them, chests swelled to bursting, strained themselves against the backs of their desks.

The teacher regarded them fixedly until the last child was frozen into immobility.

"Arithmetic books—out!" At the signal, forty-six books appeared on the desks.

Begin at the top of page 47 and work examples 12, 13, 14 and 15. All except you, Nathan, and you, Davis, and you, Paul. You three go to the board and write down what I tell you."

"These dull fellows need a little extra drill," declared the teacher in a loud aside to the visitor. "I always say the dull child has as much right to be educated as the smart one. That means giving him a hand once in a while. Now then, boys, clear the board. Put down six million, three hundred and twenty-seven thousand, five hundred and forty-two. Divide by nine hundred and fifteen. Nathan, where are your eyes?"

The teacher's voice was hard and metallic and her face lined with a multitude of little seams of nervous irritation. Police duty is hard work, when it means keeping forty-six children caged and immovable in a tiny room five hours a day, five days a week for ten months a year.

For caged and immovable they were in a space measuring certainly not more than fifteen by thirty feet, a space completely filled by cumbersome desks at which the children sat, two and often three to a seat. Blackboards filled the front and one side wall, a clothes closet ran across the rear, and windows were on the remaining side. A few stereotyped drawings of birds labelled "Bird Week" were pinned to the closet doors and three posters, one of a truck, one of a street car and the third of an ambulance, all marked "Safety First!" surmounted a blackboard. In one corner hung a chart showing liquid measure. Next to it was a small supply chest. On the teacher's desk drooped three peonies at the point of disintegration. On the board in neat script were the letters p-e-o-n-y.

This was actually all there was in the room. In this cramped and arid space was not one thing to call forth the slightest creative impulse of the children who were

doomed by law to spend the sunniest hours of their lives there. All they could do was to sit up rigid and "tall," while the teacher doled out irrelevant and uninviting bits of knowledge in the name of "education."

The worst of it was that four years of this kind of treatment had had its deadly effect on the children. They sat there, this spring morning, sunk in apathy, not one of them by even so much as a shuffle venturing to rebel openly against the accustomed régime. One boy, to be sure, instead of working his sums, was, under cover of his hand, scribbling a series of ciphers across his paper, and another was stealthily watching the meaningless performance in awed fascination. The three "dullards" at the board went through the drill with perfect precision. It was no doubt as good a way of passing the time as any other.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the teacher ordered the arithmetic papers to be collected and then announced with a show of liveliness that the class would write a composition about a trip to Central Park planned for the morrow.

The children brightened visibly. Here was a real event worth discussing. They waited cautiously however for directions as to how to proceed to discuss it. The teacher wrote the heading on the board:

"A trip to Central Park."

"Put that down," she commanded. Forty-six pencils wrote as a unit. Then the children waited again.

"Next, write in your own words all the things Miss Perkins has told you not to do on that trip." Not a child moved.

"Oh come," urged Miss Perkins, "you remember what those things are. Tell us one, Nathan."

"Not to knock no papers on the floor."

"You mean, to throw no papers on the grass. Yes, we must leave everything orderly. What else, Benjamin?"

"Please, we should listen on your whistle and come right back."

"Yes, nobody is to go beyond the sound of my whistle, and the moment I blow it, you must return instantly."

It was no doubt natural that Miss Perkins should be concerned at the prospect of conducting forty-six East Side youngsters to Central Park and back. All but one, she explained, had never been there in their lives, and all but three had never ridden in a street car before. Small

wonder that she suggested a composition full of prohibitions.

After a sufficient number of these negative reminders had been given, the children set about writing them down. The task seemed more congenial than the previous one. To discuss a real coming event, even in the negative, was far more agreeable than to work arithmetic sums in vacuo.

The writing period was soon over, however, and the readers were ordered out.

"Turn to page 62," commanded Miss Perkins, "and read, sentence about."

The class relapsed into its former apathy. It had apparently read the story of "Iduna and the Golden Apples" many times before, and the theme was worn threadbare. The children rose mechanically and read the sentences in shrill, labored tones, chopping off each word with meaningless emphasis. A number yawned and squirmed miserably.

Miss Perkins seemed as aware as anyone else of the futility of the performance. Still, was she not as trapped as the children? Her time table called for so many minutes of reading daily and the course of study prescribed this particular reader. She must drive relentlessly ahead, in appearance only more free than the driven. She scanned her watch nervously.

"Time for music," she announced.

The class shuffled the readers out of sight and sat woodenly erect.

"Sit up tall," Miss Perkins said for the twentieth time that morning. "Make your mouths nice and round." She drew a little pipe from her pocket and blew "A."

"La-a, everybody!" Her right arm wagged through the air.

The class rose to its feet.

"Now then—'Happy School Days.' Sing as if you meant it. Wake up, can't you? Some of you look only half alive. Remember, we must sing our best on Commencement Day."

Even so, the song dragged miserably.

"We'll try, 'Watchman, What of the Night?' next," The children responded drearily.

"Ready, sit!" ordered Miss Perkins. The class sat.

"Patrick, let us hear you recite, 'Robert of Lincoln.'"

Patrick, a wan, gaunt lad with tousled hair and a splotched face, came up front. He went through the poem at a tremendous speed, intensely eager to get the business over with.

"Peter, recite the same poem. Try to give it a little more expression."

Peter's notion of "expression" was to recite extremely slowly with special emphasis upon the lines, "Bobolink, bobolink, spink, spank, spink."

"Now, everybody, the poem over again."

The class repeated the poem in utter indifference.

"Next, 'The Mountain and the Squirrel,' John!" Miss Perkins moved to the side of the room. Half a dozen heads turned towards her.

"All those facing the side of the room, face front!" she ordered peremptorily. "Go on, John."

"One more—'The Fountain'—Thomas."

Thomas, thin and undersized, one eye twitching nervously, shrieked the verses in his tense treble. The contrast was cruel between his misshapen little frame and the words of the poem. "In-to the sun-shine full of de-

light . . ." he halted miserably.

"Go ahead," prodded Miss Perkins. Thomas stood his ground a moment in a desperate search for the next line, then crumpled into his place.

"Next boy!" "Next boy" began the poem at the beginning and ran it through successfully.

"Monitors, open the windows!"

A two minute drill followed, the children responding with exact military precision to the orders given. Every iota of expression had left their faces. Blankly, almost blindly they wheeled from left to right and from right back to left. They seemed in no wise like children but like wooden dolls moved by a master hand.

"Chests up— in—out—! Arms upward stretch— higher— down! Knees— bend! Left— turn— step! Form lines for marching. About face! Mark time— halt! Forward march— halt! Run in place— halt! Forward march— halt! Breathe in— out! Left— turn— to your places, step! Sit!"

The class sat.

Miss Perkins examined them critically. "Now that we are all freshened up and have our wits about us, let us try . . . the boys who have pens in their hands, put them down instantly! . . . let us try a spelling match."

This was obviously for the visitor's benefit. The children smiled feebly. "Henry, choose for one side, Patrick, for the other. Be quick."

The spelling match was executed without the slightest show of animation. The class seemed past any possibility of life. But as the big noon bell cut through the building, a shiver of expectancy went over the room. The door opened and a child entered with a note for Miss Perkins. Instantly a score of heads craned down the hall and one boy involuntarily thrust his foot into the aisle . . . in the direction of freedom.

"John!" snapped Miss Perkins, "you may stay after class for fifteen minutes." She began to count slowly, the signal for the children to get their wraps. Each row rose in turn, faced about and marched in dead silence to the clothes closet, got their wraps and returned to their seats. The other rows waited in an agony of suspense. When everyone had hats and coats, Miss Perkins gave the signal to rise. All, save the luckless John, fell into line and marched to the door.

"We shall stand here until every head is still," announced Miss Perkins. "The boy who has his elbows up, put them down." There was another half minute of anguished immobility. "Good morning, boys," said Miss Perkins finally.

"Good morning, Miss Perkins!" came the reply in a roar of spontaneity, the only sincere response of the morning.

Miss Perkins watched the line file down the hall where it was met by other lines, each presided over by its glaring guardian. Only at the downstairs door was vigilance relaxed, when the children burst out into the free air of the streets like so many exploding shells.*

AGNES DE LIMA.

* (The foregoing is an exact transmission of what took place during a visit to a fourth grade class in a New York public school last spring. Both school and class were selected at random, the visitor merely choosing the first school she happened to come across after going into an unfamiliar part of town. Save for certain notable exceptions, her notes would probably have been little different, no-matter what school or class she had visited.)