WHY HAVE BACKWARD CHILDREN?

By HELEN JOHNSON KEYES.

This is an age of hope—of hope built upon the surest foundation, knowledge. No longer are all backward children destined to remain backward, to grow up stupid, useless, and discontented. Science has sought for and found what are often the causes of this dullness, while doctors, teachers, and philanthropists are using the knowledge and applying the cures.

There are children, it is true, who can never be made normal, because their nerve cells are lacking in actual tissue, which we do not know how to supply. The problem of their care is of very great importance, but it is not the subject of this article. The boys and girls of whom I am writing are dull because of conditions which may be overcome either entirely or in part.

Perhaps this kind of pupil makes up three per cent. of your district or consolidated school. They are very unhappy because the brighter pupils make fun of them; they worry the teacher because it is impossible to keep them up to grade; and their parents are mortified and, possibly, impatient.

What shall we do about it?

In the very first place, let us get up in our community a parent-teacher organization, a club with a membership of mothers and fathers whose children are in the school, of the teacher or teachers, and of the local doctors and dentist. Working together, parents, teachers, and doctors should make out a program which will secure for these children special treatment and a special education capable of making them normal eventually.

Although I have mentioned the doctor last, it is to him that parents and teachers must turn first for help. Before the spiritual influences of home or the educational assistance of school can be the slightest use in developing the backward child, the physician must remove those physical defects which are the causes of backwardness.

It will usually be found that dull children are suffering either from defects of sight, hearing, or breathing; from decayed teeth, or from deformities such as curvature of the spine (which is exceedingly common in school children), hip disease, or "pigeon breast," or from undernourishment.

It is easy to understand that a child whose eyes are so formed that the rays of light do not focus at the right point on the retina, but, instead, spread out too soon or not soon enough, giving a confusion of blurred images instead of one clear picture—it is easy to understand that this child will be dull. It is impossible for him to see quickly what is on the blackboard or on the page. But the eye has an astonishing power to strain itself and get the correct vision finally by tremendous muscular effort, and the defective sight is often overlooked. The effort, however, occupies time, injures the eyes, and fatigues the whole mind and body.

Why Some Children Appear Dull.

In a similar way, the child who does not hear clearly appears dull, even though his brain is all right, because he simply does not know what has been said.

The child whose breathing passages are plugged up by overgrown tonsils and adenoids, or by spurs of bone in the nose, or by a crooked middle partition of the nostrils, fails to get the amount of oxygen which the body must have if the brain is to work normally. He is dull because the valve is shut through which the fuel for his brain should pour in. His mind may be an excellent engine, but it cannot work without oxygen power.

Decayed teeth are painful, and pain distracts attention from everything else. Besides this, the decaying spots are breeding grounds for poisonous germs and acids which pass into the digestive tract, bringing about chronic stomach and bowel trouble. It is plain why children with aching and decaying teeth should be dull at school.

Children who are improperly fed, and those who, although given nourishing things to eat, have bodies which are not able to digest and distribute this food through the body mechanism, are of course backward. Eye-strain, bad breathing, decayed teeth, and pressure occasioned by deformed bones may all lead to this condition of digestive insufficiency and brain starvation.

The remedies for these conditions are well known. They require good doctors and good after-care, but there is nothing alarming about them. I trust that a time will come soon when county hospitals will provide proper working places for doctors and skilled care at low prices for patients; but even without them it is usually possible for parents to take their children to a competent eye doctor for glasses, to a nose and throat specialist for defects of hearing and breathing, to a surgeon for deformities, to a family doctor for advice as to food, and to a dentist for the filling of teeth. This sounds rather formidable, but of course one child is not likely to be in need of all these cures.

It is the part of the physicians in the parent-teacher organization to examine at fair prices and with utmost care the children who are brought to them, and, furthermore, to watch the children of the community in school and at play and to recommend to mothers, fathers and teachers such medical examinations and treatment as suggest themselves to their trained eyes and intelligences. Better still would it be if the doctors were paid a regular salary as health officers for looking after the children, using what curative measures lie within their scope, and recommending other doctors to perform them as occasions arise. This arrangement might be made not as a legalized office but simply between the parents of the organization and a physician in it.

Mothers Must Co-Operate.

The mothers' part is to believe in the doctors, if they are good and competent, and to use their knowledge and skill for the restoration of their children to health and normal powers. Besides this faith in medical skill mothers must make home conditions just as healthful and happy as possible. They must see that their children go to bed early and sleep with open windows or out of doors; that they have enough nourshing food, and no food which is hard to digest; that their hours of work are not too long nor depressing, and that they are frequently relieved by play. Mothers must cooperate with the teachers also, keeping them acquainted with the health and home occupations of their children, and seeking to understand and assist the efforts the teachers are making.

The teacher cannot perform successfully her share in bringing backward children up to a level of usefulness and normality unless she separates them in their class work from the brighter pupils. They are subjected to ridicule and cruel discouragement when they are expected to compete with the usual grade work. Even though they are placed in grades with younger children, their poor vision or hearing, or general ill health, stands absolutely in the way of their comprehension and progress.

A separate class should be formed for them, and, besides this, they should receive individual instruction. No effort should be made to advance this class as a whole, but only to develop each child within it as far as possible. Although this suggestion may seem to place an added burden upon the teacher, she will find her normal classes very much easier to handle with the backward children removed, and in giving individual care to the retarded pupils she will be free from the anxiety of keeping them up to a certain impossible standard.

If they are under medical care the removal of physical defects may bring them forward in a few months to a degree of intelligence enabling them to enter once more the classes for normal children. In the meantime they should be protected against humiliation and misery, and the principle underlying their instruction should be to train them along those lines for which they show some ability, not to drive into them the sort of instruction which they show themselves incapable of receiving. Always it must be remembered that their backwardness is an actual physical condition, not a moral weakness. They have to be backward, just as a man with one leg shorter than another has to limp.

Until their cure is well under way it will be better not to give them much book work. If the school curriculum permits it, let them work with their hands in the garden. School credit for home work is excellent in these cases.

Often backward pupils have unusually good memories, and when this is the case the committing to memory of multiplication tables, of grammatical rules, and of fine bits of poetry and prose may be included in their studies. But do not expect them to be able to reason from these facts which their memories hold; do not expect them to be able to apply the facts they have, or to combine them with other facts. They cannot do it, will not be able to use their information until eyes, ears, lungs, and brain are working properly.

Almost a divine patience is required of the teacher of backward children; but her task is made easier if she lets them set their own standards according to their abilities, instead of imposing on them the curriculum for healthy youngsters.

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Richard's Easter

Richard lived on an island, and, like most little boys and girls, he lived with his mother and father. But the house in which he lived was not the least little bit like your house or like mine. It was built on rough rocks, and in its tower was a huge lamp—a lamp that was kept burning all through the night, in winter as well as in summer. On beautiful nights, when the moon and the stars shone—there stood the light! On wild, stormy nights, when the wind howled and the waves dashed madly against the ships at sea—there stood the light, to warn sailors from the rocks and to guide them to a safe harbor.

Now you know that Richard's home was a lighthouse. Some day you may sail to it. In summer a great many people go there. It looks so quaint and comfortable that it is fun to picnic there. The people watch the waves. They dash and break on the rocks, and then sliding back, call to their fellow waves, "Come, let us try it again!"

Richard watched the people just as the people watched the waves; and as they did not speak to the waves, so he did not speak to the people. In fact, he did not know what words to use. Perhaps the people felt the same way.

His mother had bits of lace pinned in the window to show visitors that she could make pretty things as well as tend the light. Often they knocked upon her door to ask whether they could buy some lace. Gladly she sold to them. Gladly she told of wintry evenings passed in reproducing favorite old designs from her pattern book. She always ended by holding up one strip of lace and saying, "This is what my Richard made for me one Easter Day!"

At last a lady came who wanted to buy the strip. That time Richard's mother did not smile. Instead she pointed to her doilies and her tidies. But the lady shook her head. Richard whispered, "Oh, let her have it, mother! I'll make another, a better one, this Easter Day!"

So the lady bought the lace and asked Richard to help her to find her boat. Then as they wandered down the little wooded path she asked: "Why did you make this lace for your mother's Easter?"

At last he spoke: "I made it because—because it's hard to know it's Easter Day upon this island. You see, it's cold and chilly. We have no church, no friends. I've never seen a real Easter. Mother tells me that people have lilies; that in churches children sing; that all is bright upon that happy day. I wish that she could have an Easter once again! You see, she's used to it. I'm not. That's why I put the lilies in the lace."

The lady looked at Richard's crooked stitches. But lilies, Easter lilies, sure enough, were scattered here and there!

She whispered, "You and I will share a secret! For I, too, had a little son. Perhaps—who knows?—he might have made me Easter lilies! I'll send your mother some on that happy day."

"Your lilies wouldn't live! They'd die! We get the mail here only once a week in winter time."

The lady wrinkled her forehead into tiny lines, then whispered some words to Richard, who clasped his hands. When she stepped into her boat to sail away, she called, "I shall not forget! You wait and see! I shall not forget!"

About the box that came to Richard his mother did not know. Nor did she know why Richard carried old tomato cans from out dark corners into the light. When tall green shoots began to sprout, he hid the cans in a secret spot. His mother worked, but while she worked she smiled. Perhaps she, too, had a secret!

On Easter morning Richard clasped his mother's hand and led her to his secret spot. There bloomed what seemed to them an altar white with lilies!

Suddenly from his mother's room a strange sound floated! Richard lifted frightened eyes, but his mother folded him within her arms. A voice from somewhere sang, "Christ the Lord is Risen To-day, Hallelujah!" It was his mother's turn to take her Richard's hand and lead him to her room, where his father stood, with lips tight closed, beside a wooden box. Yet from that box came words she used to know—those old, glad words of Easter Day!

And Richard cried, "My lady, then, did not forget! She's made my lilies bloom! She must have made these voices sing! Here on the rocks! O mother—'tis Easter Day! 'Tis really, truly, Easter Day!"

Ventilate the hotbed on warm days. If the wind blows, raise the sash on the side away from the wind. Close the sash early so that the hotbed does not cool off too early.

The Sunday School

EASTER LESSON
APRIL 20.

Lesson III. Our Risen Lord—Matt. 28: 1-10. Golden Text, Matt. 28. 6.

"Late on the Sabbath day." The Jewish Sabbath corresponded to our Saturday, and ended at sunset. But there was a popular way of reckoning which made the Sabbath include both the day and the night following, and it is thus that Matthew reckons here. It was in the early morning of the first day of the week that the women came to the tomb. Mark says "when the Sabbath was past," and Luke "at early dawn." Both Mark and Luke say that they brought spices to anoint the body of the Lord. They found to their great surprise the stone that closed the entrance of the artificial cave or tomb rolled away. Matthew says there had been an earthquake and an angel had rolled away the stone. To the women the angel appeared as a young man, "sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe" (Mark 16: 5). Luke tells of two men "in dazzling apparel."

"Fear not," the angel said, "ye seek Jesus." He is not here; for he is risen, even as He said." Both Matthew and Mark report that the angel said to tell His disciples, "He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him." Matthew adds that Jesus Himself met the women and greeted them, and gave them the same message for the disciples. It is difficult to reconcile this with the stories told by Luke and John, according to which Jesus made His first appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem. The explanation of the difficulty must lie in the fact that there were different stories told by these first witnesses of the resurrection, and that the differences were magnified in the traditions of subsequent years. What else, indeed, could have been expected, if we recall the amazement, the mingled joy and fear, and the incredulity of some, which marked that first day and the dawn of the new hope? Is it any wonder that the stories told were incoherent and fragmentary, or that the facts were pieced together differently by those who afterward sought to make out a connected story? The very lack of exact agreement becomes itself an evidence of the truth of the narrative, for if the early Gospel writers and preachers had been capable of deceit they could have fixed the stories to suit their purpose and could have made them agree with each other.

St. Paul regarded the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as having the highest importance. If Christ has not been raised, he declared to the members of the Church in Corinth, "then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain." For he saw that the resurrection vindicated the character and the claims of Jesus, and justified those who believed in Him. "He died for our sins and rose again for our justification." "It was the method," says a recent well-known writer, "which God took to convince those whose faith had been staggered by the crucifixion that Jesus was really what He claimed to be, the Lord of the world and the Saviour of mankind."

The disciples of Jesus hoped for a glorious kingdom. In bitter grief and disappointment they saw Him nailed to the cross. Was that the end? Jesus had spoken to them of resurrection, but they had not understood. Their faith would have failed them if it had not been for this amazing and triumphant fact—"He is risen." Now faith grew strong again, hope blazed up to a brighter flame, love was satisfied. Jesus, their Master, lived and would forever live, and they, they would live with Him. In the confident assurance of that new hope it was as though they were already risen with Him from the dead, and already sitting with Him in heavenly places. Their faith and their hope has become ours.

Of course immortality has always been a fact. Jesus brought the fact into prominence and convinced men of its reality. He brought life and immortality to light. But Jesus did not reveal to His disciples the nature of the life after death. It was going to the heavenly Father; it was being with God; it was to be in the mansions of His Father's house, whither He had gone to prepare a place for them. Beyond that He told nothing. Nor do we need to know, and the so-called communications which some profess to receive from spirits in the other world add nothing to our real knowledge and help us not a whit. Our hope is in Christ, and that is enough.

Early Easter Morning.

"Easter!" said a sudden wind,
Talking in a tree.
"Easter!" sang a listening bird,
Looking out to see.

"Easter!" breathed a violet,
When the song was sung.
"Easter!" called another bird,
Window vines among.

"Easter!" cried a little child,
Waking to his call.
"Easter! Easter! Easter!"
Joyful sang they all.

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Making Easter Eggs.

First make a fondant. Put one pound of granulated sugar in a saucepan, add three-quarters of a cupful of boiling water and stir until the sugar is dissolved. Let the mixture boil without stirring for six minutes, then test with a fork. If it spins a thread or forms a soft ball when dropped into ice water, remove it from the fire and turn on to a buttered platter. When it is blood-warm stir it with a wooden spoon or paddle until it begins to crumble, then knead it in the hands like dough. Pack in a bowl, cover with a damp cloth and set it away until needed. Shredded cocoanut may be added if desired. When ready to use melt a cake of bitter chocolate, form the cream fondant into small eggs of the desired size and dip them into the chocolate, then place on waxed paper to dry. If desired, the chocolate can be sweetened, although I have always considered it much more toothsome when left unsweetened.

Egg molds can be purchased for a small sum in any store. Two dessert spoons or larger cooking spoons make very successful molds.

A Song.

April, April,
Laugh thy girlish laughter;
Then, the moment after,
Weep thy girlish tears!
April, that mine ears
Like a lover greetest,
If I tell thee, sweetest,
All my hopes and fears,
April, April,
Laugh thy golden laughter;
But, the moment after,
Weep thy golden tears.

More matches are used in Great Britain than in any other country.