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CONFERENCES
on the
EDUCATION & MANAGEMENT
of
CHILDREN

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Other references to Conferences on Children:-

Conference August 30.....pp 244-251

Conference September 13.

1912 Sept 13: Present at conference today:

Mrs Bell, Miss Fletcher, Miss McKinney, Mr Bell, Mr Smallwood.

Discipline and Moral Courage

Miss Fletcher: First I would like to bring up for discussion a point in the discipline of Graham that came up yesterday.

Graham has been asked several times by Mr Davidson not to pick the flowers in the garden which Mr Davidson has charge of.

He and Lillian decapitated several very lovely flowers yesterday and while at luncheon Charles brought them in on a tray, Mr Davidson having brought them down to the house.

I said "I think Graham had better go up after luncheon to see Mr Davidson and see what can be done about it, - what reparation he can make".

Graham said:- "I am scared to go".

Mrs Bell said "Those flowers are mine. Graham should come to me about it".

It seemed to me a very valuable lesson had been lost. It would have taken moral courage for Graham to go up and interview Mr Davidson upon the subject. It would have been a "man to man" meeting.

Mr Davidson is responsible to Mrs Bell for the flowers. Mrs Bell's attitude towards Graham is that of a very loving Grandmother toward a little child and he feels with her, however unconsciously, that she is acting as a buffer between

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Miss Fletcher contd | him and anything disagreeable. What
does Mr Bell think about this. RFB

Mrs Bell: The lesson was lost further back than
Miss Fletcher realises. On Sunday we went to the vegetable
garden and we pulled some vegetables, and I encouraged him
to do it. That was all right, if, after doing so, we had
gone up to Mr Davidson and asked how much we should pay for
them, because that is the way that we arrange about the vege-
tables, but the flowers come under another arrangement and he
can pick any that he likes if he asks me. The mistake was,
in the case of the flowers-- picking them without asking me. MGB

Miss Fletcher: Then I suggest that Mr Davidson
be told that Graham can pick the flowers and that Mr Davidson
teach him the proper way to pick them. I think it very
demoralising to the garden and Graham both, for him to pull
them off at the heads the way he does now. RFB

Mrs Bell: That is very true. MGB

Mr Bell: What does Miss McKinney think? AGB

Miss McKinney: I would rather not enter into the
discussion. We can all discipline our children our own way,
I think. McK

Herbert Spencer's "Natural Punishment"

Mr Bell: I suppose I must say something, I can't get
out of it as easily as Miss McKinney has done and can only
suggest Herbert Spencer's principle of "natural punishment"
as much as possible.

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(Bell contd) The trouble is, I have not a very clear idea in my mind exactly what the offense was.

I thought that Mr Davidson had charge of the flowers and was responsible for them, therefore it seems to me that any one who plucks flowers without Mr Davidson's knowledge is doing something that is, at all events, not fair to Mr. Davidson and if as I understand Mr Davidson had specifically told Graham not to pick the flowers there is a distinct issue between Graham and Mr Davidson quite irrespective of any issue between him (Graham) and Mrs Bell.

The fact is he picked the flowers without asking permission of anybody (offence number one) and he damaged the beauty of the garden by leaving unsightly remains behind.

What is the remedy (Herbert Spencer's "Natural Punishment")?

I think it is that he should no longer be trusted. That is the natural consequence of his act. He should no longer be allowed to go among the flowers without some older person with him, because he has shown by his acts that he cannot be trusted to do no damage.

We cannot ask him to pay for the flowers, or to do anything in the way of reparation, that an adult would do.

I would recommend therefore, treating him as I would one of Mrs Bell's Angora Goats. Its no use telling the goat not to eat the flowers, and you must either keep the flowers away from the goat, or the goat away from the flowers. I would not let him go among the flowers without some older

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(Bell contd) person with him, and if he does not obey this injunction - then compel him to! It is not really a "Punishment" but the natural consequence of his act. It is not a reflection upon him as though he had committed a crime, but a necessary precaution to prevent damage to the flowers which his own sober judgement might endorse. He should be made to feel that we would only be too glad to have him go among the flowers and have a good time all by himself if we could only trust him to do no damage. But alas we cannot. If he wants to go alone among the flowers would not this be a stimulus to him to make himself worthy of trust. AGB

Miss Fletcher: My idea of "reparation" was possibly cutting off the ugly stalks he had left, or something simple of that kind. I think we are each one dwelling on a different phase of the issue. How does it look from an outsider's standpoint? RTF

Miss McKinney: I think if Mr Davidson has been held responsible Graham should have gone to him and also to Mrs Bell. It is by doing the hard things, we gain. McK

Underlying principles of the Montessori Method

Miss Fletcher: Montessori's method of educating children is founded on the following theories.

That the true development of the individual must come from within, as Mr Bell so aptly put it, that the human brain is a living organism which cannot be made to grow by some outside force, but it can be put into surroundings where it

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(Miss Fletcher contd) can get what it needs, and what it can take.

Montessori believes that the attitude of the teacher should be scientific, that the teacher is there in the capacity of a scientist to observe natural phenomena and the conditions that are favorable to their growth.

The teacher must first of all possess the scientific spirit of open-mindedness and reverence for the phenomena he is observing. In order that the observation may be as accurate as possible, the child must work in freedom and activity, that he may reveal his true individuality to the teacher, just as a natural scientist prefers the native haunts of a wild animal, to a cage, when he comes to study the habits and instincts of the animal.

Montessori believes that the brain develops largely through the senses, and that if our sense impressions are accurate and well ordered, we will develop accurate and orderly minds; therefore most of her exercises for young children are those in sense training.

She also emphasises hand-work for children - handwork so simple and direct that the child of and by himself can accomplish it.

Montessori feels that nature plays a colossal part in education; That a child belongs first of all to nature; and that as civilized life is made by renunciation of the life of nature, a child should be led gently and gradually into the required social life which is to extend his usefulness,

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(Miss Fletcher contd) not snatched roughly from the lap of nature.

Therefore she believes in a child literally living close to Mother Earth. She believes in his being allowed to wander unhampered in the open, observing what he will, asking questions about it, and loitering over it.

Then she believes in the planting and watching of a garden for the child. It develops in him patience and "confident expectation": A faith in things unseen (which has the germ of optimism in it) that all life, though we do not always see how, will shape itself, and someday flower.

Montessori regards material rewards as belittling to man's nature, and has abolished them in her schools. She tries always to call to the man within the child, rather than to bring oneself down to the child.

Conference September 20.

1912 Sept 20: Present at conference today:

Mrs Bell, Miss Fletcher, Mr Bell.

Mr Bell: I am very glad to read Miss Fletcher's notes on the principles underlying the Montessori method for it assures me that my own mind is in full sympathy with the Montessori principles so far as I understand them.

First: The child is a living organism and must develop by himself from within.

Second: The Director's chief duty is to study the child, and see that the materials for his mental growth are

placed before him within his reach, so that all he has to do is to pick them up and absorb them when the inward impulse comes.

It is the old question of feeding the chickens. It is our duty to provide the food and scatter it around, and allow nature to do the rest.

We may perhaps, like the old hen, guide the chickens to the places where the food is to be found, and even scratch and peck ourselves, to stimulate the chickens to eat. But the old hen never rams the food down the chickens' throats. They take what they want themselves. AGB

Miss Fletcher: Mr Bell has hit the salient feature of the method. Graham needs food -perhaps not just the kind provided, Montessori provides sufficient food for little children, Graham is older and may want more.

Graham has had too much done for him, - too much

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(Miss Fletcher contd) picked off the ground for him. His natural tendency is to be indolent through having too much done for him.

In school every thing he does he does for himself. He took an interest in the names of birds when helped, but not enough to go on by himself.

(Note: At Mrs Bell's suggestion Mr Smallwood was here asked just to put down his impressions of the discussion instead of writing the notes in full.)

Mr Smallwood's Impressions of the Conference.

Mr Bell thought he might be of some use in giving suggestive ideas. Study a child and find out what he is interested in. Lead him from what he wants to do, to other things.

Gave a story illustrating the attitude of many children towards information: Little girl's mother always seemed to be chewing gum. But this was a mistake. The little girl was very fond of biscuits but she preferred to have her biscuits chewed rather than munch them dry herself!

No child is natural who can concentrate his attention for any length of time. Child crying, attention easily distracted to some thing else and he forgets his grief.

Miss Fletcher: Graham doesn't seem to surmount obstacles, - walks away from them.

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Mr Bell: The bee is typical of industry, and yet he doesn't keep to one flower.

All children interested in pictures, therefore they are getting something from them.

Develop child's ideas by asking questions.

Miss McCowan, of Chicago, has struck a great principle in the development of young deaf children. First thing, she puts them before a black-board, and encourages them to draw. She believes in drawing as a means of expression. They generally attempt to draw some incident that occurred at home before they came to school.

Miss Fletcher: I believe in drawing for children but outsiders don't seem to understand it. They think the children are wasting time.

Mr Bell: It cultivates the faculty of observation. Cannot attempt to draw anything without observing details. Crudity of drawing shows crudity of observation. If he draws an insect or spider with four legs, it shows that he has not yet observed that an insect has six legs, and a spider eight. The attempt to draw makes him observe details. Form comes first in natural order.

An adult likes to go from the abstract to the concrete, a child from the concrete to the abstract - with everything.

The child takes in the whole more easily than a part; Especially if it is an abstract part having no real existence by its self. Blue things, red things, and so forth are O.K., but blue and red by themselves come at a later stage.

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(Mr Bell contd) The childish method of acquiring music is to begin with an air as a whole. A child easily learns to play melodies and harmonies on the piano by ear. Scales and exercises should come at the end, not the beginning of a musical education. They are useful to improve technique, but do not teach music.

Children can learn to read twenty-six different words, sooner than twenty-six letters. Each word has a meaning; whereas letters by themselves have none. They are abstract things.

Word method of teaching approved.

Child not capable of abstraction to any great degree; but can grasp readily a concrete whole.

Miss Fletcher: A child learning how to skip cannot describe how to skip, but can do it.

Mr Bell: We teach deaf children to speak by beginning with elementary sounds. That is the adult's method of approach not the child's.

How do we teach a hearing child to speak? We start by presenting whole sentences at once to his ears. A baby in arms hears whole sentences, which he interprets by what he sees.

First process, Comprehension. We gabble to it whole sentences not syllables or elementary sounds. Child begins to associate certain ideas and actions with the sentences;

and when he begins to talk he utters words, not elementary sounds.

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(Bell contd) Children learn foreign languages much more quickly than adults. They acquire phrases to begin with. A phrase is the unit of speech - not a word, or a syllable, or an elementary sound. These latter are abstractions, like blue, red and so forth, although words do have a meaning by themselves when used as nouns.

Drawing cultivates observation. Drawing a means of expression of child's vivid imagination.

Gretrude lackadaisical - worries me. Woke her up with our bricks. She has built a whole house in imagination and has furnished it too.

Stimulation of imagination is the beginning of the reasoning process. At first ideas not logically connected (Cinderella for example). Proper sequence of ideas lacking. Can go with a child's mind from any one thing to any other by jumps. Connected reasoning only gradually acquired. Should be helped here.

I know of no better means of stimulating the faculty of observation than drawing; and in Drawing form comes first. Then other details are added, as they are observed.

Miss Fletcher: Encourage Graham to go ahead and draw anything he wants ?

Mr Bell: Yes, and don't judge his efforts by artistic points, but by the details that show what he has observed, and what he has failed to notice.

Miss Fletcher: Interesting to try children with a picture and a word on the board.

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Mr Bell: A child will learn the word 'elephant' as soon as the word 'bee'. Not necessary to confine ourselves to mono-syllables.

Teaching a deaf child by writing - the case of George Sanders.

Miss Fletcher: Suggestion to write incorrect words, and play incorrect music to test observation.

Mr Bell: Melville knew the signs on the Beinn Bhraigh estate by association before he could read. He knew the names of the roads and therefore knew what the signs meant.

Keep certain words, the names of the children for example, permanently upon the blackboard. They will soon come to recognise them, partly by their position on the board, partly by the lengths of the words, and partly by the observation of other differences.

Writing the names individually on the board will force them to observe minor differences even before they know a single letter of the alphabet. Children might be taught to read the nursery rhymes with which they are familiar, long before they know anything of letters.

Conference September 27.

1912 Sept 27: Present at conference today: Mr and Mrs Bell, Miss Fletcher, Mr Smallwood.

Miss Fletcher: I wish to ask Dr Bell if he ^{had} had any suggestions to give me as to the best way to cultivate more original work and keener observation in Graham.

Graham has a very retentive memory and upon observing him I am convinced that what he gets is what other people give him in conversation. Every other child in my school has developed a certain interest and intensity in work that they have chosen for themselves. It is very marked in Lilian. As long as I stand and feed Graham from my hand he takes the food, but the instant that I go, he either rests or else runs from one thing to another.

Now would it be a good plan to give him his proportion of my time and let him then do absolutely as he wants. Is it not a sign that physically perhaps, he is not as strong as other children and needs more rest and recreation? Or would it be better to give him more attention, encouraging him all the time to work things out for himself as much as possible, for he very soon gives up. (If you do not give him the benefit of your knowledge he very soon tires).

RTF

Mr Bell: I think that Graham is a child of very unusual intellectual abilities. He should be carefully studied so as to allow his individuality to develop in natural directions, and stimulate his growth where it seems weak.

He absorbs a great deal of information from others and

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(Bell, contd) remembers it and makes it his own. That is Nature's indication of the way in which his mind is growing, and I should therefore think we should follow him up and tell him, the things he wants to know. That's the special direction in which he is growing.

The weak point seems to be that he "likes his biscuits chewed". His reasoning, so far as it has developed, seems to be based much more upon what others have told him, than upon what he has observed for himself. A good way to make him observe for himself is to make him draw. I have already spoken of the importance of drawing as a means of stimulating the faculty of observation, and need not repeat here.

While his love of going from one thing to another is not specially characteristic of him but a general characteristic of little children - the desultory observation of a multitude of different things seemed^s to be more marked in his case than in others.

I am not so sure but what it is a good thing. At all events it is his method of gathering information, by flying from subject to subject.

Now it is important in regard to children's minds, that we should help them to help themselves.

Therefore in Graham's case it seems to me, it is more necessary than with other children, to present to his notice a great multitude of very different things, great variety and great quantity, so that he shall have scattered upon the ground in front of him, a great variety of mental food which

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[Bell, contd] he will pick up little by little in his own way. After all, the basis upon which a reasoning mind depends is a little knowledge of a great many things. It is variety of subject rather than any great acquaintance with any one, that is advisable at first with the young. Specialization comes later.

I don't think we need worry about Graham, I think he is going to grow into a very exceptional man and our best plan is to study his growth so that he may teach us how to develop his mind and in what direction, - follow out Nature's indications.

- 1st:- In order to stimulate original observation present to him a great variety of subjects and leave him alone. Also make him draw.
 2nd:- encourage him to ask questions and give him the benefit of the knowledge you have about the things he wants to know.

I am much more troubled about his acquisition of moral principles than I am about his intellectual growth. That is all right, and all we need bother ourselves about is to place a great variety of subjects before him and let him browse; and also give him all the information we can upon the subjects he wants to know about. AGB

Mrs Bell: I wish you would tell me how to make a good man of him. Isn't your plan in danger of making him a Reuben? "Unstable as water thou shalt not excell". MGB

Miss Fletcher: Undoubtedly the gravest question in

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Miss Fletcher contd) regard to Graham is the moral one. As long as I have had him I have never once found that I could trust him. I send him down from school room to ask Mr Byrnes for something. He promises solemnly to bring it right back. In the course of a few moments I go down after him to find him playing on the wharf or beach. It is the same way with promises he voluntarily makes.

One day I allowed him to go up to play with the Davidsons. I was looking after Barbara so could not conveniently go after him. I did not make him promise not to eat fruit as I knew that was asking too much of him, but did make him promise immediately he got up there to ask Mrs Davidson to tell him when it was five o'clock. He voluntarily said "and I promise not to eat any fruit".

At five thirty I went after him, found he had said nothing to Mrs Davidson and had been eating plums. I keep telling myself that he is very young and that instability is something he will outgrow.

Barbara is entirely different although only three. She invariably keeps her word. RTF

Mr Bell: I noticed Graham was very proud of a little white silken badge he showed me. Has any use been made of that? AGB

Miss Fletcher: I have something in my note book about that. RTF

Mr Bell: Why not continue these discussions in the evenings. AGB

Conference October 4.

1912 October 4: Present at conference today: Mr and Mrs Fall, Miss Fletcher, J Smallwood.

Miss Fletcher read the following extracts from her note book relating to the wearing of badges. JS

Miss Fletcher's notes about badges.

(Aug 31) Some time ago Mr Bell suggested that we have badges for the children, white for the child whose conduct had been very good, red for the child whose conduct had been only fair, and black for the child whose conduct had been bad. That the parents should know of this and regulate their attitude toward the child accordingly, thus bringing about the desired "pressure of public opinion". The idea struck me as very good, and I at once purchased the ribbons and pins, and then I began to think more about it.

Montessori, whose materials and whose method to a great degree I am using, pleads very strongly for the abolition of prizes in a school, and in regard to rewards a remark of Graham's comes into my mind. His Grandmother came home one afternoon and upon entering the house asked Graham if he had been a good boy. He had been a very good boy and he said "Yes, very, what are you going to do for me?"

Now is the spirit we invoked in him a good or bad one - should he feel that when he is good, things - nice things will be done for him, or should it be a perfectly natural, always to be expected thing, that he should be good and only rewarded by love and approval.

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(Miss Fletcher contd) Montessori speaks of the rewards of a great actor or orator, as being the emotions he is able to awaken in his audience rather than the bouquets of flowers that are sent up over the footlights as the curtain is falling.

"All these petty things such as the desire for decorations or medals are but artificial stimuli, lightening for the moment the dark barren path in which the child treads."

But the child must have stimuli - moral as well as mental, and these stimuli must be childish, or at least childlike, in order to appeal to a childish mind. Is the fact that the stimulus is artificial, sufficient reason to condemn it?

{Sept 13.} I have since tried Mr Bell's badge suggestion. I wanted to experiment for myself. I made soldier's badges. A white one for the Captain, a white one for the Lieutenant and one for each soldier. They marched with these.

Graham himself asked "Are these for being good?" I said "No, they are to show that you are good, so of course if you should not be good I couldn't let you wear them."

A soldier's shoulder-straps (which is the same as our badges) are taken away from him if he doesn't behave as he should.

Graham was very much pleased with his badge and at luncheon that day said he was going "to be good two whole days and nights!"

The next day he was very disorderly and seemed to have gotten out of the wrong side of the bed that morning. I said nothing about the badge but he came to me and asked, "Will I have to take off my badge?" I said "I hope not, but

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(Miss Fletcher contd) ofcourse if you go on acting this way I could not let you be Captain, for the Captain sets the example for the others".

A few minutes later he came to me and said "I took it off myself, I don't want to wear it". A few days afterward he said "You know those badges don't do any good!" "no" I said "they're not supposed to do good they are just signs to show you have been good". He said "Well if you are good, they aren't anygood, they don't do anything anyhow." I tactfully changed the subject.

Its just the result Montessori predicts. She tells of an incident in her own school. Her directress thought that she could improve upon Montessori's ideas by introducing rewards. When Montessori came into the schoolroom she saw a very good child with a gold star pinned on his little apron. A naughty child was "isolated" seated by himself on a chair in the middle of the room. The good little boy going past with some work dropped his star which fell in front of the naughty child who stooped and picked it up calling -"you dropped your star". The good child turned around and said indifferently, "I don't want it, you may have it." Whereupon the naughty child pinned it on and seemed much pleased with himself.

RTF

Mr Bell: I quite agree with the remarks quoted from Mme. Montessori relating to rewards, prizes etc.

I also feel that if badges are worn they should only be for good conduct. We don't want to point the finger at

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(Bell contd) the boy who is bad, and humiliate him unnecessarily by hurting his feelings. I feel myself in full sympathy with Mme Montessori on this question, and yet think it would be well to consider how far an important object could be gained by the use of decorations viz:- bringing public opinion (in this case the opinion of the people at home) to bear upon the conduct of the child.

People are naturally more ready to do things for a child to please him, amuse him, etc. when he is good and to mark their disapproval of his general conduct in various ways when he is not; and it is the pressure of this public opinion upon the child that has perhaps the most force in leading him to conduct that will be approved of, and of avoiding conduct that he knows will meet with disapproval from all.

Now, how are the parents of a child to know about the general character of his conduct when he is out of their sight unless the people who are with the child can signify by a sign or symbol intelligible to the parents what the character of the child's conduct has been.

If they know this they would often be willing to cooperate with the Directress or teacher in making the good conduct badge have some meaning.

Suppose we give a pretty ribbon or badge to every child, not as a prize, not perhaps even as a badge of good conduct

- Simply a thing that is pretty and that they would like to wear. Then if the child has not been acting well the badge

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(Bell, contd) might be taken from him for that day, and this would be a negative indication to the parents and friends, which might lead them to avoid doing certain nice things to the child, or deny him liberties they would have given him had he been wearing his badge.

My great objection to prizes, or the reverse - is that selection is made, instead of all being treated alike upon their merits.

For example, in my early days there were two individuals always singled out from my class called respectively the Dux and the Dunce.

Now only one member of the class could be Dux however many members might have been worthy of distinction, and only one member Dunce however many bad boys there may have been.

When I came to America I was much struck by the improved system in use in American schools, of giving marks so that every boy who really worked hard could earn his merit marks etc.

Now in the above use of the badge it is not given to one alone, it can be obtained by all by reasonably good behaviour; and there is no labelling of the bad boy, but simply depriving him of a decoration which he could have obtained by his own exertions if he had tried. So that there is a distinction between a universal decoration and a prize; and I think it worth while bringing this forward, tentatively, without being wedded to it, by any means. Its simply an attempt to bring public opinion to bear upon the child, both

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(Bell, contd) in and out of school. Prizes and rewards are exceptional things, whereas the proposed badges constitute the ordinary, normal, everyday decoration for everybody - the shoulder straps of the soldier. Their presence does not mean anything special, but their absence indicates, negatively, something wrong. AGB

Miss Fletcher: I have been very much interested in what Dr Bell has just said. I do not feel myself that my experiments are complete and shall most certainly continue them. I particularly like his idea of accenting the good conduct and negatively treating the bad.

Lillian said this morning "Mother wants you to give me a mark each day, a bad one if I have been bad, a good one if I've been good". I said "Very well I will give you a ribbon to wear if you would like it" Graham said "Will you give me one too?" I said "Yes certainly, if you want it." I don't want to force something upon you that you don't want but if you really desire it I'll give it to you".

He rather sheepishly said "Yes" he did want it very much so I have promised him the ribbon for Monday and the way is open for further experimenting. RTF

Mr Bell: I can cooperate by giving my study candy only to little boys and girls who are wearing ribbons.

Mr Davidson, Mr Eyrnes, Mr Rose and Mrs Grosvenor might cooperate by not letting their children play with little boys and girls who don't have ribbons. This would, at all events, enhance the value of the ribbon. Its worth a trial

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(Bell, contd) if carried out consistently. AGB

Mrs Bell: I asked Graham one day why he was not wearing his badge, I asked him if he didn't want to wear it and he said "No" and I asked him why not and he said "Because it makes me feel shy". MGB

Mr Bell: A boy might well ^{feel} shy in wearing an unusual decoration which would make him conspicuous. But if it is the normal every day thing for all the children to wear, then he would want to wear it, and feel shy about appearing without it.

In order to be effective all the people on the place should know the meaning of the badge and guide their conduct accordingly. It is not the badge itself that would have any corrective effect, but the attitude of other people towards the child. Its efficacy would depend upon what they do.

Its presence means nothing special and need not therefore be specially noticed. It is the absence of the badge, not its presence, that calls for attention. It is this that should be noticed by friends.

As a matter of policy they should admire his pretty decoration, and express disappointment when he does not wear it. Their attitude would dictate his, and lead him to dislike to be seen without it.

Does not this mean that public opinion, the opinion of the people at home, would be brought to bear upon the general character of his conduct. AGB