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Education

THE BEST ARE VERY GOOD

ARE school-teachers to-day better than their predecessors of a generation ago? F. L. COMBS, who attended the first New Zealand Students' Congress at Curious Cove, Marlborough, came back convinced that they are.

THIS is not a solemn article. It might very well be called *The Girl with the Chestnut Hair*, but of her more later. It is not a solemn article because to the girl just mentioned teaching was all it should be—and fun as well, which it also should be. It was not so much fun to her at the end of the year because after all 40 odd pupils is rather many. Say about twice as many as a nice girl, not a superwoman, should be asked to tackle.

The University Student Congress at Curious Cove brought together some seven score students. Its effect on an almost septuagenarian was heartening. "Work while you work, etc." The gathering did. One session on Musical Appreciation by Mr. A. Barker lasted three hours and was followed by a hang-over demonstration from records which went on till past midnight. That the other sessions aroused keen mental interest was shown by discussions that were very much to the point.

Why to the point? Because this group of students, who admittedly were better than the average, feeling all dressed up academically and perhaps a bit over-dressed, were keen to make sure there was somewhere to go. They were even browned off as regards the Know How of education but sincerely troubled as to the Know. "What were they a-doing of?" They could answer that question volubly and with considerable precision, but Why were they doing it? That question phased them much as it does the most pontifical of educational spellbinders.

Nature Was Her Guide

The Girl with the Chestnut Hair was not thus harassed by professional enigmas. Like the clucking hen she got her guidance from Mother Nature and even if there were one or two ugly ducklings in her classes she was not altogether baffled. The Girl with the Chestnut Hair was no female Samson; she was lightly made and may have weighed seven stone seven. If (see Lucy Grey) she did not "float along" she skipped and bounded. The eager happy look in her grey green eyes explained why. She was in love with Life and could not get enough of it.

There was some talk of "cold hard facts" at the Congress, talk that would have goaded Charles Dickens to savage

satire, for he would rightly have said "Did I not hang, draw, and quarter that fact-monger Thomas Gradgrind a century ago?" But the Girl with the Chestnut Hair by-passed the cold hard facts of her calling with graceful abandon. Even the hard fact that she was given only half the needed floor space for her 40 P.4's did not get her down. And as for "cold," it was simply inconceivable to her that you could do anything that was really teaching unless your sympathies were at blood heat. That was the secret of her approach to her job—a sympathy that gave rise to and went hand-in-hand with absorbed observation.



"He stayed behind to wash blackboards"

There was the bad little boy with deep blue eyes whose record as a militant against pedagogical tyranny was formidable. He crumpled up and became as putty in her hands because, most unfairly, she got fond of him on sight and used her instinctive mother-wit to understand him. He is now in such evil case that he stays

behind to wash her blackboards.

There was also the little boy with huge feet and boots and a deep voice. He was of a philosophic turn of mind with a range of knowledge apt to be disconcerting. His morning talk on the Untouchables ending "but now they are banding together and gaining their rights" was listened to with uncomprehending awe by classmates whose feet and heads were only half the size of his. Of course there were in addition ordinary unbeautiful little scrubbers of boys whom she satisfied by being equally fond of them and there were, too, the little misses who purred, perhaps not unprigishly, at a hint of her approval.

The Girl with the Chestnut Hair dreaded "number work" as all real teachers dread it but, with a long pull and a strong pull, they all went at it together, the naughty little boy with blue eyes in the lead and the inspector, using his marvellous science, ascertained that the norms in this subject were good.

Emotional Cot Cases

Of the emotional cot cases, pupils perhaps beloved but hopelessly misunderstood at home, there is not much time to write. Their teacher became to them a psychological nursing mother and rejoiced over a recovery as another master of hearts (not heads) rejoiced over the one sinner saved in a hundred sure of their salvation.