

**SCHOOL-ROOM  
CLASSICS. II; THE ART OF  
QUESTIONING; PP. 78-139**

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**JOSHUA G. FITCH**

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SCHOOL-ROOM CLASSICS. II

THE ART  
OF  
QUESTIONING

BY

JOSHUA G. FITCH, M. A.

NINTH EDITION



SYRACUSE, N. Y.

C. W. BARDEEN, PUBLISHER

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The following paper contains the substance of a lecture delivered to training classes established in connection with the British Sunday-School Union. In editing it for this series of educational publications, I have omitted such portions as pertained exclusively to the work of mission Sunday-schools, and were unessential to the continuity and completeness of the work as a valuable manual for public-school teachers.

C. W. BARDEEN.

Syracuse, January 22, 1879.

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## THE ART OF QUESTIONING

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I have undertaken to say a few words to you on the "Art of Questioning." It is a subject of great importance to all of you who desire to become good teachers; for, in truth, the success and efficiency of our teaching depend more on the skill and judgment with which we put questions than on any other single circumstance.

It is very possible for a teacher to be fluent in speech, earnest in manner, happy in his choice of illustration, and to be a very inefficient teacher, nevertheless. We are often apt to think it enough if we *deliver* a good lesson, and to forget that,

after all, its value depends upon the degree in which it is really received and appropriated by the children. Now, in order to secure that what we teach shall really enter their minds, and be duly fixed and comprehended there, it is above all things necessary that we should be able to use effectively the important instrument of instruction to which our attention is now to be drawn.

I have called questioning an *art*. It is so, inasmuch as it is a practical matter, and to be learned mainly, not by talking about it, but by *doing* it. We can become good questioners only after much patient practice; and, as is the case with every other art, proficiency in this one can be attained only by working at it, and education in it only by the teaching of experience.



But if this were all I should not have ventured to make questioning the subject of an address to you; for the only advice appropriate in such a case would be, "Go to your classes, work in them, and learn the art of questioning *by questioning.*"

The truth is, however, that there is a science of teaching as well as an art; every rule of practice which is worth anything is based on some principle; and as it is the business of every good artist to investigate the reasons for the methods he adopts, and to know something of those general laws which it is his business to put to a practical application, so it will, perhaps, be worth our while to dwell for a little on the general principles which should be kept in view in questioning, and

to ascertain not only *how* a wise teacher should put questions, but *why* one way is better or worse than another.

Questions as employed by teachers may be divided into three classes, according to the purposes which they may be intended to serve. There is, first, the *preliminary* or *experimental* question, by which an instructor feels his way, sounds the depth of his pupil's previous knowledge, and prepares him for the reception of what it is designed to teach.

Then, secondly, there is the question employed in *actual instruction*, by means of which the thoughts of the learner are exercised, and he is compelled, so to speak, to take a share in giving himself the lesson.

Thirdly, there is the question of *exam-*

*ination*, by which a teacher tests his own work, after he has given a lesson, and ascertains whether it has been soundly and thoroughly learned. If we carefully attend to this distinction we shall understand the meaning of the saying of a very eminent teacher, who used to say of the interrogative method, that by it he first questioned the knowledge *into* the minds of the children, and then questioned it *out* of them again.

Perhaps I can best illustrate the nature of what I have called preliminary or experimental questioning, by referring for a moment to the history of a very celebrated man—an Athenian philosopher—who lived more than two thousand years ago, but whose name and influence survive even in this age.