

# Class VII Nutrition

by GORDON PURDY

The *Clashing Rocks* were an early hazard in Jason's journey, and in presenting aspects of Physiology to Class VII it is all too easy, even for the teacher whose own education has not itself already been formed in the materialistic tradition, to be trapped in matter. The 'Particular thing' can halt the proper description of the living process of which it is only a part, and the movement of the spirit somehow quickly crystallizes in mechanical technique. Main-lesson books are at risk of becoming records of frozen events, and, for once, beautiful illustration serves less the desired mood than the glorification of intellectual knowledge.

For this reason I am hesitant to isolate one element from this four week block, in which mood and movement must be so important. At most it should only be the pause of a heart beat in the exciting journey from the four elements through the life of the plant, through the human digestive and circulatory systems to their outcome as acts of the human will. For good reason the skeleton and the functions of the ear and eye are kept back that little longer to Class VIII.

The working of the mouth should be considered as a whole, from the point where we take in food and begin its destruction to the moment when we loose consciousness of what is happening in this process. Teeth, tongue and saliva should be considered in movement together, chopping and dissolving and reducing the outer forms to a substance which our internal muscles can deal with; we can contrast the work of these solid and liquid tools and of the amazing mobile muscle which combines the nature of both. When discussion does focus on the teeth alone, the teacher can move from the recognition of the three different types of teeth we each possess to recall that lack of specialization, dealt with in Class IV, which distinguishes Man from Animal.

As in so many areas these days, the teacher soon finds that the children are well equipped with terminology they do not really understand, and which can work against the understanding we are trying to foster. Most will have sat in a dentist's chair, surrounded by illustrations deliberately designed to attract and distract, and almost as many will have had the working of natural processes halted or 'improved' by a combination of alien minerals and sophisticated technology. It is not surprising if they have come to regard the teeth we have produced ourselves as a rather unsatisfactory step towards something more efficient and less open to trouble, and are ready to offer themselves sooner to the impatience of the technicians than to the contemplation of the 'Sages'. A third of my class have suffered for some time now the real discomfort of a brace (I have at times wondered whether braces inserted for aesthetic effect are really worth the severe impediment to speech activity in these years), and in discussion it turned out that few had any appreciation for the need of it. In these circumstances it is a real challenge to a teacher to bring the children back to value their teeth as one of the jewels in, to use Traherne's phrase, this "Treasury of Wonders".

One of the aims of this main-lesson must be to bring the children to undertake a conscious care for the bodily processes, which to this point in their lives has on the whole been managed on their behalf. Here, teeth can be an illustration most of them can easily appreciate. Children can be made aware of unconscious will at work, of the effects of so much activity and of neglect, and be led from a recognition of illness and its prevention in one area to the need for care in less easily observed processes. Teeth have for the teacher one very useful aspect; loss of the first teeth is still within easy reach of memory and this loss is perhaps the most striking and easily perceivable example of the body's working at the constant replacement of itself. Much of my class's work at this point

consisted of discussion, as they brought to consciousness their experience of tooth growth, repair or adjustment. This discussion produced one of the most awakening moments of the main-lesson: when I asked the children what they remembered of the loss of the first milk tooth, one very solid lad blurted out, with a nervous laugh, "I was terrified!" As an instance of both the persistence of physical matter and the impermanence of our hold on it, they could hardly have lighted on a better.