

THE TEACHER, THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

BY
INEZ N. McFEE

AUTHOR OF STUDIES IN AMERICAN AND BRITISH LITERATURE
AMERICAN HEROES FROM HISTORY
THE STORY OF THE IDYLLS OF THE KING



AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

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W. P. 4

PREFACE

IN preparing the following pages the author has had in mind the three-fold object of modern education: the training of the physical, the mental, and the moral nature of the child. The environment of school life should be in harmony with his unfolding nature and growing abilities, and it should also be a source of constant pleasure to him.

The pupil who is absent from school should be conscious that he is missing something — not enjoying a reprieve. To this end, a variety of suggestions, helps, and recreations are offered to make the study of the common branches more interesting. The chapters on nature study, the country school as a public health educator, and what to do with agriculture and home science may be most welcome to the rural teachers who have been struggling with such problems. Effort has been made to unify the work of the school and the home, and special consideration has been given to the school as a community center and as the stimulating source for clear thinking, good farming, and right living.

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And he gave it for his opinion that whoever would make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.—JONATHAN SWIFT.

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If angels ever visit our earth and hover unseen around the gatherings of mortals to survey their actions and contemplate their destiny as affected by human instrumentality, it seems to me there can be no spectacle so calculated to awaken their interest and enkindle their sympathy as when they see the young gathering together from their scattered homes to receive an impress for weal or woe, from the hand of him who has undertaken to guide them.

DAVID P. PAGE.

THE TEACHER, THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

CHAPTER I

BEGINNING THE SCHOOL YEAR

The first day of school is perhaps the most critical day of the year, for much depends upon a good beginning. Before opening a school, the wise teacher has clearly in mind a general plan of what she intends to accomplish. Perhaps in no other enterprise is a little forethought of so much advantage. Even an experienced teacher would be confused if suddenly placed, without plans, before half a hundred eager children awaiting occupation and direction. They have come full of interest in the prospects of the new school, and most of them are ready to engage cheerfully in whatever plans the teacher may have to propose; but they will soon be equally as ready to arrange and carry into effect their own plans of disorder and misrule, should they find that there is no definite system to be introduced.

Glance back upon your own school days. Do you not remember how eagerly you awaited the advent of the new teacher? How carefully you "sized her up," and then retired under some shady tree or behind the woodpile to discuss what you thought she would or would not do! Then when the bell summoned you into the schoolroom, how narrowly you watched for some sign of defect or

weakness! And at last, when you hastened home at night, there was not a child who had not a definite answer to his parents' question, "What do you think of your new teacher?" Children are good judges of human nature, and you know you were seldom mistaken in your first estimate. This recollection of your own experience as a pupil should lead you to spare no pains to make the first day in the schoolroom the most successful of the year.

A teacher was once engaged to teach in a country district several miles from her home. She was not acquainted in the neighborhood, and knew nothing of the reputation of the school until it was announced that she was to teach there. Then her friends and acquaintances began to tell her all sorts of stories, both true and false. They said that the children were ungovernable, that the last three teachers had actually been driven away, and many other things equally disconcerting. For a time she regretted taking the school; but she was not easily discouraged, and determined that she, at least, would not be defeated.

She spent a great deal of time and thought in preparing for the new work. She wished very much to call upon the patrons in her new field, but being unable to do so, she contented herself by going very early to the schoolroom on the first morning. She had previously visited the room, and had then called upon the president of the board, requesting him to make some repairs. He had cheerfully consented to do this, and so she found everything in excellent condition.

She busied herself for an hour in putting things about her desk in order, arranging books and the few pictures which she had brought, placing copy work upon the board,

and getting things ready for the pupils. She had taken the register and class records home with her after her first visit, and by careful study had been able to make a specimen program which she thought might serve temporarily. She had just finished writing this upon the board when a group of children entered.

For the next hour, she moved about among them, talking pleasantly, and by nine o'clock she felt that she had made some friends and created a feeling of good fellowship. At first her friendly advances were received very stiffly. Evidently the pupils were not used to being treated as companions, and they eyed her in surprise; but soon they were ready to meet her more than half way, and several times during the hour she overheard snatches of favorable comment.

Promptly at nine o'clock she rang the bell, and as soon as the pupils were seated, she called upon one of the older girls, who she had learned was organist for the church services held in the building every Sunday, to take the place at the organ. They sang "America," but the result was far from satisfactory, as not more than half a dozen voices joined in. Then the teacher addressed the children, saying that with their help she hoped to make that term of school highly successful. She pointed out to them her one rule which she had framed and hung above the blackboard behind the table. It was very short: "Do right." She then told them a good story, after which they sang a familiar working song.

The teacher had prepared busy work for each grade, and soon every pupil was provided with something to do. Then she moved quietly about, keeping a watchful eye over all,

taking the names, and arranging the classes for that session. As soon as any pupil showed signs of neglecting his work and getting into mischief, she promptly called at his seat and inspected his work. If it was well done, she praised his efforts and supplied him with other employment; if it was poorly done, she requested him firmly but kindly to try again. Supplied with the right kind of work before they had time to provide a wrong one, most of the pupils settled busily to work, and it was time for recess before they were aware of it. She avoided administering reproof in public, and so only the very few of the pupils she had reproved knew that she had whispered gentle reminders. In all cases, the hint was effectual. As she sat wearily in her chair at recess, she wondered if she would be able to maintain this strict watch until the necessity for it should no longer exist.

The session after recess was devoted to reading and history. As there were about thirty-six pupils studying reading, she could not possibly pronounce words for all; so she asked a bright young girl in the fifth grade to pronounce words for her in the four lower grades, adding that each pupil must make three copies of each word, thus preventing any fun over asking words. By having a helper passing about the room, she herself was able to give her entire attention to the classes and to maintain a general watch over all. The session passed fairly well. About 11:20 when the pupils were becoming restless, she had them lay aside their work and practice for a few minutes the first stanza of a lively motion song which she had written upon the board. Then she told them an interesting story, and all turned to their work again refreshed and eager.

In this way the first day and many other days passed. There were times when affairs did not glide so smoothly, but the rebellions were few and of short duration. At the close of a month, she had the satisfaction of hearing one of the older girls, the daughter of one of the directors, say to her: "I told pa when I went home the first day that we had got a teacher this time. We all agreed before you had been here half a day that we would have to come to time. Ben said before school that morning that he guessed we had got to the end of our rope, but I told him let's begin with all our old tricks and see what you would say. So we did, but we didn't try very long because we knew it wouldn't do any good: besides you're the only teacher we ever had who treated us as though it rested with us to make the school good. I thought that was the teacher's business."

Let us, then, begin the year's work with well-laid plans, and resolve to keep the pupils so busy that they will not have time to think of mischief. The following rules will be found of material help:

Make the schoolroom homelike and pleasant. Interest the children in the decorations, and in collecting specimens for the various cabinets and for the satisfying of their own curiosity.

Consider your scholars as reasonable and intelligent beings, and, in correcting faults, take such a course as will promote cheerfulness and a disposition to try to amend.

Reproof should be administered kindly and very seldom in public. Never manifest anger, but show firmness and decision. Be very slow to believe that a pupil has done wrong, and never compare one child with another.

If a child is indolent, exercise ingenuity to occupy him pleasantly in some useful employment, and then commend him for his industry.

Remember that a little "thank you" is not out of place in the schoolroom.

"Do right" is the only rule necessary to give the pupils. This allows the teacher the largest discretionary power. All children have a fairly well-defined sense of right and wrong. Don't worry pupils with one hundred little rules concerning the things they must or must not do.

Don't be hasty and impatient, or let little wrongs pass unnoticed.

Don't tell pupils to do a thing, and change your mind before they begin. They will never thoroughly understand you at this rate.

Determine to succeed, and be not easily discouraged.

Work away!

For the Master's eye is on us,

Never off us, still upon us,

Night and day.

Work away!

Keep the busy fingers plying,

Keep the ceaseless shuttles flying;

See that never thread be wrong;

Let not clash or clatter round us,

Sound of whirring wheels confound us;

Steady hand! let woof be strong

And firm, that has to last so long!

Work away!

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

Order is heaven's first law, and it is scarcely more essential to the peace and harmony there, than it is to the happiness and success of a school. If, then, order is of so much importance, the ability to secure and maintain it must be one of the essential qualifications of a good teacher. Many fail in government; and this failure can usually be traced to some defect in the mental or moral culture of the teacher. Let us consider some requisites for good government.

"He that reigns within himself and rules passions, desires, and fears, is more than king."¹ The teacher who is not complete master of herself will certainly fail to master others. Often her patience will be most severely tried in school; in fact, she cannot expect the current of affairs to run smoothly for a single day. She should be prepared for this, and thus be able to master her temper; for nothing will weaken authority so much as an exhibition of anger. If she finds she cannot exercise this self-control, she should seek other employment, for she is certainly unfit to be entrusted with the training of children.

Having gained self-command, let the teacher next consider her manner. Some teachers are so frivolous with their pupils that they can never command with authority or gain respect. There are others who are constantly finding fault, scolding, and nagging. Such teachers cannot hope

¹Henry Calderwood.

to gain the affection of their pupils; and without securing this, government will not be of the right kind. The teacher should endeavor to cultivate the true spirit of kindness and a desire to be useful. Courtesy as well as dignity is essential. "We must be as courteous to a child as to a picture; give it the advantage of the best light."¹

Much depends on making the pupils feel that the rules and regulations are for their own good, and not to gratify the whims or caprices of the teacher. Most pupils really prefer order to disorder, and they do not respect the teacher who fails to maintain authority. One object of discipline is to secure a sufficient degree of order and quietness to enable the pupils to pursue their studies without interruption; but the higher aim is to train the will, and teach the pupils self-control. Cheerful obedience, respect for law and order, a hearty acquiescence in whatever is good for the entire number, are characteristics of a school which is well governed.

The management of the school requires both tact and skill on the part of the teacher. Tact, in gaining the necessary confidence and good will of the parents, involves a large amount of common sense; for parents do not always see their children's faults as the teacher does. The management must be firm and unvarying; there must be the same spirit and the same requirements every day of the term. If a teacher punishes to-day what she tolerates to-morrow, she cannot expect obedience. The teacher who said to her pupils: "I've got a bad headache, and you had better all look out to-day for I feel very cross," might better have dismissed her pupils until she felt able to teach

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes.

them. Quite often the pupils have to suffer because the teacher has indigestion, or has been out late, or is feeling somewhat indisposed.

Always convince your pupils that you mean what you say; but if you punish them, by no means give them any chance to feel the undercurrent, "I'll show you that I mean to have my way."

Observe the strictest impartiality. Each child has a right to the best which the school affords in government as well as instruction. One cannot help liking a bright-faced, neatly-dressed little boy with clean hands and face better than an unmannerly urchin with black hands, grimy face, and uncombed hair. Yet, if a teacher wishes to succeed, she must be very careful not to show this preference. Each child has a soul, and the teacher is responsible to the Great Teacher for the way in which she attempts to mold it. Few teachers realize the importance of their work.

In almost every school there are pupils who are backward or dull, or who may have some physical defect. The teacher should be very careful in the treatment of such pupils. She should try to enter into the feelings of their parents; encourage rather than crush them. One teacher had in her schoolroom two children who could not speak plainly. Their talk was almost unintelligible. For this failing, which was a misfortune rather than a fault, the teacher punished them in various ways. She even resorted to whipping when other means failed. Such treatment not only failed to produce the desired effect, but made those children despise her and everything connected with school work. It also weakened her authority over the other pupils, and she therefore failed to govern the school.

Above all, a teacher must be a scholar, and if she is to be a teacher of real power, she must have wide and accurate scholarship. "It is the man who takes in who can give out. The man who does not do the one soon takes to spinning his own fancies out of his interior, like a spider, and he ensnares himself at last as well as his victims."¹

The teacher should thoroughly know and understand what she expects to teach. She should go to her class so full of her subject that if she were deprived of the textbook she could conduct the recitation without difficulty. Imagine a teacher of geography trying to hear a recitation with a finger on the map, and as soon as she asks a question, starting out to find the answer. It seems ridiculous, but how often is this very thing seen in the schoolroom. Study diligently that you may be able to teach with enthusiasm and power; remember that *it is the master who makes the school*.

Having considered the five things that distinguish a good teacher — character, sympathy, firmness, common sense, and knowledge — let us discuss some methods of securing good order.

First of all, be careful of the early impressions that you make. Begin as you expect to hold out. Be natural; children are good readers of character and are quick to see through a mask of affectation. If you wish to win the love of children, you must first gain their respect. If you have been told before beginning a school that certain pupils are bad characters, that you must watch them or they will give you trouble, remember it if you must, but *don't let them find out that you suspect them*. Treat them the same as the other

¹ Dr. John Brown.