

Speeches

"School Matters, Old and New
Youth's Companion

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SCHOOL MATTERS, OLD AND NEW.

My theme has been given me. It is a very good one, but it covers so much ground that I hardly know how to treat it. Some stories about famous teachers would probably come in well, and perhaps I shall tell them. But first I wish to remind the readers that there are other teachers besides living men and women. Nature is at once, the oldest and the youngest. The verses that Longfellow wrote to Agassiz, on his fiftieth birth-day, make a very pleasant allusion to this familiar fact. It was the beautiful Pays de Vaud, where,

"Nature, the old nurse took the child up on
her knee,
Saying, 'Here is a story-book thy Father has
written for thee'."

Emerson expressed the same thought when he said that Nature was God found real in time and space. These are modern ways of telling the old story, that in the Garden of Eden, God walked and Adam heard His voice. Experience is almost as old a teacher as nature. The burnt child dreads the fire,- and from this lesson of the nursery, to the deepest study of the laws of light and life, Experience is man's constant guide. Necessity, the mother of Invention, is nearly as venerable,- a severe instructor, using the rod and the ferule, and never failing to make an impression. Ideas are splendid teachers, formed by unknown processes in our minds, or got from poems, dramas, histories, memoirs, and the manifold pages of books.

But in the place of Nature, Experience, Necessity, and books, let us consider teachers in flesh and blood like ourselves. It is a red

roll of honor of interminable length which for our race begins with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and does not end with Arnold of Rugby, or with Thring of Uppingham. Every year adds to the list.

I have been reminded of a pre-historic school master. If we believe in myths as we do in history, we might assert that never, on the face of the globe, was there the equal of Cheiron, the Centaur, famous as the wisest of his time, and as founder of the healing arts. Prince of pedagogues, let us call him. Among his boys, we are told were Hercules, Achilles, Aesculapius, Ulysses, Castor and Pollux, Aeneas, Theseus, Melanger, Nestor,- and how many more, the unpublished annals of Olympus can alone revealed. If anybody would rather trust to poetry than to prose, for a version of this story, look up a copy of Pindar, and the third Nemean ode will tell him that, "in his cavern of stone, deep counselled Cheiron reared Jason and next Asclepios, whom he taught to apportion healing drugs with gentle hand", and Achilles, "strongest of men, rearing his soul in a life of harmony." And while he is working up this story we will hardly fail to notice that in those splendid poems, which honored the athletic victors at Olympia, the school masters in Sport were not forgotten. For example, Agesidames, who was the winner in a boxing match, is told to render thanks to Ilas, his trainer. "If one be born with excellent gifts, then may another who sharpeneth his natural edge speed him, God willing, to an exceeding weight of glory". This is the right idea of a school master's work:-God willing, he sharpens the natural edge of those who are gifted. By good methods and by bad, by ^hoats and by spurs, by praise and by blows, training is secured. Bearing such diversities in mind, I shall try to show how great the power of school masters have been,, schooling as Xenophon

Turning from mythology to ancient history, we are at once reminded that Socrates was a school master and Plato his scholar,- while "to see Plato", a famous writer tells us was "a liberal education". Alexander the Great was taught by Aristotle the Greater. History does not record the methods, but from the writings of the philosophers that are extant, it is safe to surmise that he gave good lessons in the right conduct of business and the noble uses of leisure. The world would give any price to recover as good a record of Alexander's schooling as Xenophon

has preserved for us of the lessons received, by Cyrus at the Court of Cambyses. Of the quizzing ways of Socrates, we have abundant memorabilia. The record of Plato's school have been carefully preserved. We also know that the theatres and the games of ancient Greece were schools in which great writers like Pindar and Sophocles, and many more, were the school masters of a nation. Successive generations have never ceased to wonder how such teachers were produced and how the people of Greece came to excel in sport, war, architecture, sculpture, painting, philosophy, poetry and the drama.

Very little information is extant about the boyhood of Caesar, the great Roman commander, but the early life of a later Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, is well worth recalling. He had the advantage of a good preceptor, but his real teacher was his father by adoption, the Emperor Antoninus. In a meditation, addressed to himself, a sort of self-analysis, Aurelius draws the portrait of Antoninus, that "paragon of humanity", as Merivale calls him. A boy who had access to Merivale's History should turn to it and read the entire passage from which I copy these suggestive lines. Antoninus says Aurelius.

"Knew when to relax, as well as when to labor; he taught me to forbear from licentious indulgences; to conduct myself as an equal among equals; to lay on my friends no burden of servility; neither changing them capriciously, nor passionately abdicating myself to any. From him I learnt to acquiesce in every fortune, and bear myself calmly and serenely; to exercise foresight in public affairs, and not to be above examining the smallest matters; to rise superior to vulgar acclamations, and despise vulgar reprehension; to worship the Gods without superstition, and serve mankind without ambition; in all things to be sober and stead-

fast, not led away by idle novelties; to be content with little, enjoying in moderation the comforts within my reach, but never repining at their absence. Moreover, from him I learnt to be no sophist, no schoolman, no mere dreaming book-worm; but apt, active, practical, and a man of the world; yet, at the same time, to give due honor to true philosophers; to be neat in person, cheerful in demeanor, regular in exercise, and thus to rid myself of the need of medicine and physicians."

To discover in the middle ages, when monasticism dominated society, examples of good school-masters,-good in the sense of knowing how to teach,- we need only look up what is known of Paris, Laon, and Chartres, at the beginning of the twelfth century. In Paris we shall find William of Champeaux, at the school of Notre Dame, to which students were attracted in throngs,- among them a pupil who became, as a teacher, more illustrious than his master, Abilard the philosopher. Of Laon we know less. But of Chartres we have more abundant knowledge, especially in the time of Bernard Sylvester. Or we may read the annals of Bec, where Lanfrance and St. ^WArselm were teachers, successively, before they became Archbishop of Canterbury. Or we may study the career of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, freshly told, within the last few months by Dr. ^{Stories}~~Shows~~, the story of a great teacher and a great preacher, who now after eight centuries, by the force of his life and character, helps upward the teachers and the preachers of our day. In all these monastic schools, the power of living men ^{was}~~were~~ felt as it rarely is in these days when so many consider what books are our best teachers.

But let us come nearer to our own time. It is natural that there should be a good deal of curiosity ^{about} the school-masters of royal and princely personages, for they are supposed to enjoy both the means and

motives for securing the best education that their times can afford. Fortunately we have many such records in modern biography, from the time, for example, of Sir John Chete, the tutor of Edward the Sixth, down to the days of Baron Stockmar, the preceptor of Prince Albert. The most noteworthy of this tutorial group is Roger Ascham^m, the guide and friend of Queen Elizabeth. I prefer however, to draw my illustrations from the life of humbler families and the experience of less favored scholars.

During the early part of this century there was a group of writers living in the lake region of Northumberland; Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, with whose names it is natural to associate those of De Quincey, Lamb, and Arnold. Of all the six, Wordsworth was the most fortunate in his school-master. For nine years before he went to the University of Cambridge, he was taught in the Hawkshead grammar school, near Windermere, in a building that still stands. Loving memory in recent days has covered with glass the autograph that he scratched on one of the benches, and has decorated the walls with mottoes from his works,- among them, "The child is father of the man". In this school, the principle teacher to whom Wordsworth was indebted was William Taylor. Under his gentle sway the poet had both guidance and freedom. His poems bear many illusions to the influences by which his character was developed. To him Cambridge never proved as congenial as Hawkshead had been. The "Ode to Immortality", is associated with those days in the country school. The "Prelude" and the "Excursion" as well as several of the minor poems have frequent allusions to that happy period.

Southey's experience with his school-masters was less fortunate. He was expelled from Westminster because of an essay that he wrote for

the Flagellant, on flogging, thus incurring the displeasure of the head master, Dr. Vincent.

Charles Lamb has left two essays which record his recollections of Christs Hospital, a school for boys in the heart of London, which he attended; and in both of them he had drawn the likeness of one of the principal teachers, the Reverend James Boyer. There is an amusing contrast in these portraits,- one colourless, respectful and mildly grateful; the other lively, suggestive and tolerably severe. The latter shows the treatment to which the school-boys of the period were subjected. Mr. Squeers, whom Dickens describes as the Master of Do-the-boys Hall, could hardly surpass Lamb's disciplinary Master. "J.B." (writes Elia)"had a heavy hand." I have known him double his knotty fist at a poor trembling child, the paternal milk hardly dry upon his lips,- with a "Sirrah, do you presume to set your wits at me?" From his inner recess or library he would sally into the school-room, and singling out a lad, roar out, "od's my life, Sirrah, I have a great mind to whip you." Then after a cooling pause, during which all but the culprit had forgotten the context, he would add the expletory yell, and--"I will too."

Coleridge was Lamb's schoolmate at Christs Hospital and in the Biographia Literaria he has paid a glowing tribute to the skill with which the instructions in Greek and Latin were given by this same Mr. Boyer. He was a severe critic of English compositions. "Lute, Harp, Lyre, and Inspirations, Pegasus, Parnassus, and Hippocrene, were all an abomination to him". "In fancy", continues Coleridge, "I can almost hear him now exclaiming, "Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and Ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, muse? Your nurse's daughter you mean. Pierian Spring? Oh aye, the cloister pump, I suppose."

Dear old Mr. Bøyer, with his sharp tongue and sharper rod, shall be forgiven because he trained two such masters of diction. Who can equal the grace of Lamb or the brilliancy of Coleridge? Who would not submit to the discipline of the birch if the use of the quill could thus be acquired? "Poor J.B." said Coleridge, when he heard that his old master was on his death bed; "May all his faults be forgiven and may he be wafted to bliss by little cherub boys all head and wings, with no bottoms to reproach his sublunary infirmities."

Macauley was one of the brightest boys that has lived in the nineteenth century. He has a narrow escape from going to Westminster or Harrow. Instead he was sent to a private school of the Reverend Mr. Preston, first at little Shelford and afterwards at Aspenden. His biographer says that if he had received the usual education of a young Englishman, he might have kept his seat for Edinburgh, but he could hardly have written the essay on Von Ranke of the description of England, in the third chapter of the History. Macauley like Wordsworth had the good fortune to come under a schoolmaster "Who knew both how to teach his scholars, and when to leave them to teach themselves."

One of the most amusing portraits of a school-master that I can recall is that of Dr. Keate, headmaster of Eton College, to be found in Lytes history. "His red, shaggy eyebrows were so prominent that he habitually used them as arms and hands for the purpose of pointing out any object towards which he wished to direct their attention." Severe as he was, and ill-tempered, "it was honestly believed by his best pupils and assistants, that they owed almost everything to his soundness of mind and vigorous accuracy." On one occasion of rebellion, he flogged eighty boys, having them brought to him from their beds in relays of two or three.

Once a boy, accused of wrong doing, proved an alibi. "Then I'll flog you for your trick". was Keate's rejoinder. His comment on the text, "Blessed are the pure in heart", was this, : "mind that it's your duty to be pure in heart; if you are not pure, in heart, I'll flog you."

Hawkley the successor of Keate, was his opposite in many respects. He used kindness, not severity. His characteristic utterance was "Very well, very good exercise". Once he said publicly, "I cannot feel the sadness of growing old, for this place supplies me with an unfailing succession of young friends". For fifty years he seized every opportunity of doing kindness to a man who had tormented him at school. No wonder that old men and young, wept at his funeral.

It is fitting to remember that school-masters are working in our day with all the acquired experiences of Christendom upon the most primitive people of the earth,- those who are cannibals, who have the most limited ideas of God and morality. Some of the most remarkable school-masters of this century are those who have gone among savage men. Father Van Gorp, in the far northwest, is an example of such men teaching not only the alphabet of a language, just reduced to writing, but the simplest principles of decency, order, industry and religion.

Bishop Taylor, in the heart of Africa, acquaints the natives with simple manual arts like house building and farming, as an introduction to a christian life, and Mr. Duncan, at Metakatla, in Alaska, is the same sort of a teacher, introducing the habits of thrift, industry, economy, and temperance among those who were lately cannibals.

Dr. Paton and his co-laborers, in the New Hebrides dwelt among cannibals and brought them out of paganism into decent Christian life.

He tells some good stories of his experience. One day he took a board, and writing on it a few words sent it to his wife, who sent back the wished for nails and tools,- to the amazement of the messenger. "Who ever heard of wood speaking?" was his comment. The first visible difference between a heathen and a Christian, Dr. Paton tells us, is that one wears clothing and the other does not. Yakin, the wife of Nelwang, was converted, and she seemed to think 'the more clothes the better Christian!', for on state occasions she appeared dressed in every article of European apparel, (mostly portions of male attire), that she could beg or borrow on the premises. With such ignorance as this the Missionary School-master is obliged to deal. But even greater ignorance than this has been overcome, for one of the most gifted of modern teachers, contended against the want of sight, hearing and speech in his pupil; and by teaching her to talk and read with her fingers introduced her to a knowledge of the world around her, to the enjoyment of Society, poetry and religion. By extraordinary tact, Dr. Howe thus became the teacher, not only of Laura Bridgeman, but indirectly also of others likewise deficient, for example of Helen Keller.

What do all these stories illustrate except the principle already quoted from Pindar. "If one be born with excellent gifts, then may another who sharpeneth his natural edge, speed him, God helping, to an exceeding weight of glory".