

What is the Matter with the Teacher's Job? -- 1919

This is the second of a series of articles on "What Is the Matter with the Teacher's Job?" We put the question to a large group of teachers in every state in the Union and asked them to answer from their own experience and to suggest improvements. Their replies came in by the hundreds, and Mrs. Wilkinson, who besides being an author is a teacher's wife, has arranged from them five articles that give the inside information on the teachers' grievances—low pay, school board administration, lack of respect in the community, curtailment of personal rights, unwise choice of school executives. The sixth article will set forth the teachers' own suggestions for the reconstruction of their profession.

Article 1: Are Teachers Underpaid?

Are Teachers Underpaid?

Here Are Some Facts

In a small school in the South a college graduate taught for \$360 a year.

An Iowa farmer pays a man \$100 a month to train his horses and a woman \$30 a month to train the school children of the district.

Teachers in Tennessee got \$30 a month when convict labor was getting \$46.

There are plenty of places where the school janitor gets more than the teacher.

A man who has been teaching forty years earns more money selling strawberries raised between-times on his farm than he does from teaching.

An almost illiterate Italian laborer earned \$2,126 in a year; a teacher of twenty-five years' successful experience earned \$2,000.

Article 2: Why Is a School Board?

Why Is a School Board?

"Frankly I don't know," says one teacher. "Relic of the past, perhaps. We hear a good deal about the qualifications of teachers, but who ever heard about the qualification of a school board? School boards are sometimes elected by the people and sometimes appointed by the mayor. Both are absurd methods because personal feelings and politics are bound to enter into both."

And another:

"I accuse them promptly of the following sins:

"They play politics—the crime of educational work today;

"They are ill-prepared for educational work—as one said to me when I cornered him, 'Schools ain't our line';

"They love to boss—comment unnecessary;

"They have low ideals of and for the school;

"They demand individual toadying;

"They act under pressure of sentiment rather than by conviction on the merits of the case.

"I never saw a school board that was 'of, by and for the people.' Since school boards never agree, rarely encourage, always find fault, never give constructive criticism, forever 'lord it,' why endure them?"

Article 3: It's Only Teacher! Which Is Where Society Makes a Mistake

A male teacher wrote:

"Is the teacher, like the doctor and the lawyer, respected as a member of the community? No. All my life I have heard remarks derogatory to the teacher and the teaching profession. Such remarks as 'He is only a teacher,' 'No man with ambition stays long in the teaching profession,' 'Oh, he's a teacher, is he? He looks it.' 'She's a school-marm!' with a grimace. About a year ago my sister wrote me, congratulating me on getting a promotion to a better school position. She wound up her letter, however, by asking me if I did not intend to drop teaching and go into something 'better' soon. She said she hoped I would because, 'nobody thinks much of a teacher, especially of a man teacher, do you think so?'"

Article 4: Is Bootlicking Part of the Teacher's Job?

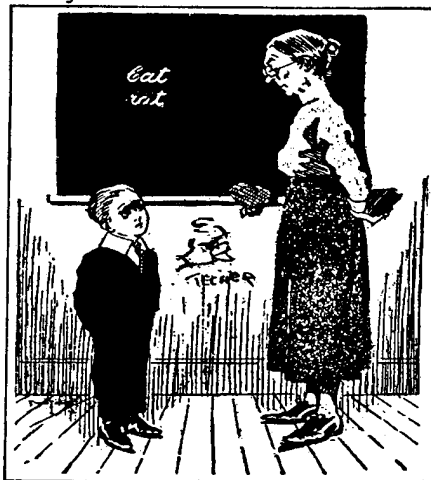
"Have teachers the right of free speech?"

Read These Two Comments

Here is what one teacher says: "They are fools if they exercise it. The safest policy for the teacher is to take a fence-straddling point of view in everything."

Or as the president of the Board of Education in one city puts it: "I don't care how you teach. If you don't please the man higher up, out you go!"

Article 5: Too Many Bosses And They All Take It Out on Teacher



Teacher: "You've been a very naughty boy, Bertie, you must stay in for an hour after school."

Bertie: "Very well, Miss Jones, if you aren't afraid of the principal, I'm not!"

1800s

Boarding Round in Vermont

Monday. Went to board at Mr. B's; had a baked gander for dinner; suppose from its size, the thickness of the skin and other venerable appearances it must have been one of the first settlers of Vermont; made a slight impression on the patriarch's breast. Supper — cold gander and potatoes. Family consists of the man, good wife, daughter Peggy, four boys, Pompey the dog, and a brace of cats. Fire built in the square room about nine o'clock, and a pile of wood lay by the fireplace; saw Peggy scratch her fingers, and couldn't take the hint; felt squeamish about the stomach, and talked of going to bed; Peggy looked sullen, and put out the fire in the square room; went to bed, and dreamed of having eaten a quantity of stone wall.

Tuesday. Cold gander for breakfast, swamp tea and nut cake — the latter some consolation. Dinner — the legs, &c., of the gander, done up warm — one nearly despatched. Supper — the other leg, &c., cold; went to bed as Peggy was carrying in the fire to the square room; dreamed I was a mud turtle, and got on my back and could not get over again.

Wednesday. Cold gander for breakfast; complained of sickness, and could eat nothing. Dinner — wings, &c., of the gander warmed up; did my best to destroy them, for fear they should be left for supper; did not succeed; dreaded supper all the afternoon. Supper — hot Johnny cake; felt greatly revived; thought I had got clear of the gander, and went to bed for a good night's rest; disappointed; very cool night, and couldn't keep warm; got up and stopped the broken window with my coat and vest; no use; froze the tip of my nose and one ear before morning.


Thursday. Cold gander again; much discouraged to see the gander not half gone; went visiting for dinner and supper; slept abroad and had pleasant dreams.

Friday. Breakfast abroad. Dinner at Mr. B.'s; cold gander and potatoes — the latter very good; ate them, and went to school quite contented. Supper — cold gander and no potatoes, bread heavy and dry; had the headache and couldn't eat. Peggy much concerned; had a fire built in the square room, and thought she and I had better sit there out of the noise; went to bed early; Peggy thought too much sleep bad for the headache.

Saturday. Cold gander and hot Indian Johnny cake; did very well. Dinner — cold gander again; didn't keep school this afternoon; weighed and found I had lost six pounds the last week; grew alarmed; had a talk with Mr. B. and concluded I had boarded out his share.

Teachers Duty?

1887

 *Teachers are employed for purposes “vastly great.” They must teach the science of health with all the learning but without the pay of the doctor; they must inculcate the principles of morality with all the impressive sincerity but without the sectarianism of the minister; they must be altogether more patient and discreet than God Almighty himself, for He was “wroth” when He punished the wicked, whereas, if a teacher punishes in anger, he is guilty of an assault and battery; they must invent schemes to invert human nature, and make every good thing and thought enticing and every bad thing and thought abominably disgusting . . . they must tenderly moderate the zeal of the too ambitious, and inspire the dullest blockhead with a manly thirst for fame and knowledge; the incorrigibly uncouth and vicious, they must endow with the tastes, the instincts, and the manners of the refined and virtuous. And in short, they must turn all from the thousand paths that lead to indolence, ignorance, and folly; and prepare them to find infallibly all the ways of pleasantness and all the paths of peace.*

Marble, A. P., 1887

Would You Sign The Contract To Be A Teacher?

See next page:

Teachers Contract, Term 1923

*This is an agreement between Miss _____ teacher,
and the Board of Education of the _____ School,
whereby Miss _____ agrees to teach in the
_____ School for a period of eight months,
beginning Sept, 1, 1923. The Board of Education agrees to pay
Miss _____ the sum of \$75 per month.
Miss _____ agrees:*

1. Not to get married. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher marries.
2. Not to keep company with men.
3. To be at home between the hours of 8 pm and 6 am unless in attendance at a school function.
4. Not to loiter downtown in ice-cream stores.
5. Not to leave town at any time without the permission of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.
6. Not to smoke cigarettes. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher is found smoking.
7. Not to drink beer, wine or whiskey. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher is found drinking beer, wine or whiskey.
8. Not to ride in a carriage or automobile with any man except her brother or father.
9. Not to dress in bright colors.
10. Not to dye her hair.
11. To wear at least two petticoats.
12. Not to wear dresses more than two inches above the ankles.
13. To keep the schoolroom clean:
 - A. To sweep the classroom floor at least once daily.
 - B. To scrub the classroom floor with hot water and soap at least once weekly.
 - C. To clean the blackboard at least once daily.
 - D. To start the fire at 7:00 so the room will be warm at 8:00 am when the children arrive.
14. Not to use face powder, mascara or paint the lips.