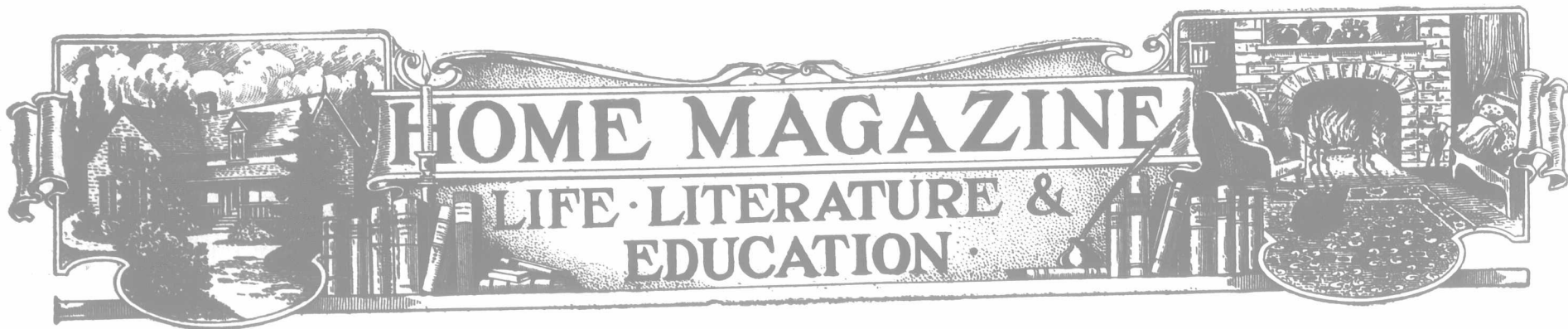




The Teacher's Side of the Story.

By "Elsbeth."

[The following letter has been submitted to us by an Ontario teacher. Although the references made are particularly directed to conditions connected with city schools, the article must form interesting reading to all who are interested in our teachers and our schools. After all, there is very little difference between city and country schools, and observations made in regard to the one may usually be made in regard to the other. Has anyone anything to say about this letter, for or against?]

Just recently, so many individuals have come forth with loads of blame and responsibility to heap on the school teacher that I feel bound to tell the teacher's side of the story.

Four accusations have come to my notice: We are blamed for the faulty speech, tardiness, rudeness and dishonesty of the rising generation, and for some of these faults in a risen generation, with whose training we had nothing to do. To begin at the top.

No less a person than Earl Grey states that Canadian children do not speak the King's English, because the subject is neglected at school. Nearly everyone will admit that the majority of Canadian children do speak badly, and I doubt not will as glibly apportion the blame to the teacher. Earl Grey and other critics can have no idea of the obstacles confronting the teacher who tries to improve the speech of children who come from homes where English is murdered.

Picture the situation. In the present overcrowded conditions a teacher is rarely given fewer than fifty pupils. Teachers whom I have consulted confirm the statement that four answers a day from each pupil is a large average. Even granting that the teacher corrects every mistake in these four short speeches, and in all written work, anyone who thinks at all can see it is almost impossible to get good results in language work, under such handicaps.

Doubtless our celebrated critic was thinking of the work of Old Country schools, where the children board with the teachers, sit at table with them, play cricket, row and tramp with them. There is, too, a system of pupil government in such large English schools as Eton and Harrow whereby a boy who speaks badly is so "roasted" that he in time corrects himself. An Eton graduate told me that he and some other young English boys so ridiculed and thumped an American who persisted in saying, "Well, I guess," that they cured him of his provincialisms very shortly. Fancy the parents of a Canadian child submitting to such treatment of a pampered and cherished darling! Moreover, the children in the English boarding schools come from homes where good expressions are used. Such pupils cannot in fairness be compared with the children from the average Canadian home, where parents rarely give the matter of speech a thought. The English children we get in our class-rooms here may be compared more fairly, and these in some cases have a better accent than colonial children, but make the same atrocious blunders in speech.

A few instances of the speech spoken and written by parents of both Canadian and British-born chil-

dren will give some idea of the "mother tongue" we must overcome.

An English mother brought her boy to school the other day with this information: "Teacher, I'm bringin' this boy to school. Now, H'Algernon iant cryzy, 'e's just 'arf-witted, and whatever you do don't you argitate 'im, for if you do 'e just aks like the deevil."

This little speech is scarcely less original than the following note received from a Canadian parent:

Dear teacher,
my boy was not kep home from skool, but ran away on toosday. i no his mother sed she kep him home but she is a liar, so there.

yours truly

jim brown.

Such are the parents of many of our pupils.

Another great drawback to the teacher is the overloaded curriculum. It is so elaborate that the teacher, in order to cover the course mapped out for the children must do nearly all the talking. If less crammed information were required, the pupils would have greater opportunities for oral work, and conversation with the teacher would then be possible. The subjects taught in five hours a day are: Arithmetic, reading, penmanship, geography, history, grammar, spelling, hygiene, written reading, art, music, composition, and nature (with time taken off class-work for household science and manual training). Now, any or all of these subjects can be made a basis for language-training, but so much tangible information has to be poured into the heads of the boys and girls that lengthy conversations are impossible.

The trouble of incorrect speech lies in conditions which cannot be

remedied in a day. Canadians came originally from the poorer and less grammatical strata of the British Isles. The past generations found the struggle for existence sufficiently engrossing to preclude any very deep anxiety as to speech. The ordinary expressions used by the forbears are handed down to "the children of the third and fourth generations." Many readers of this article can, if they will, recall crude expressions they have outgrown since leaving the home neighborhood. With no unflattering remarks to aforementioned home neighborhood, I say that teachers cannot uproot in the day time of comparative silence, on the part of

the pupils, what has been instilled for six long years before the little curly-headed boy or girl dreamed of such a place as school.

But enough of our defence. What can we do? What are we doing? We try to set a good example in speech. In primary and junior grades, when children make a mistake, I merely say so, and give the correct form, having the pupil, and later the class, repeat it aloud. In senior forms I do the same, with the addition that I back up my argument, where possible, by using the error as a grammar exercise later. I try to encourage, coax or incite the children to read good books. Beyond this, we can do little but make them feel that forms of speech really matter.

The second accusation came from the editor of a prominent daily paper. He said the reason so many business men are not on time at business appointments is that the schools do not encourage punctuality, "the teachers themselves often coming late and keeping the classes waiting."

The cause of his mental disturbance was that he chanced to meet a teacher on the street at half-past nine one morning. He did not know that that teacher's class did not meet until half-past ten, owing to congested class-rooms. She had arrived at school at eight forty-five, but at nine was sent by her principal to inquire at a doctor's about pupils absent through illness. Was she late?

Another source of his information—the inspector's annual report—showed how often teachers were late in the year. The cold, cold figures seemed to indicate a deplorable disregard for punctuality. He published them in his paper. Every parent in the city was up in arms. The situation looked black for the teachers,

respondent to the Women's Column of the Globe. This lady had been rudely treated by a Toronto street-car conductor, and stated that the man should not be blamed for his rudeness, as he had doubtless attended our public schools, where "please" and "thank you" are unknown terms, and manners are untaught, as is shown by the rude, jostling crowds emerging from our public schools."

The contention was, that, if a man be rude twenty years after leaving an institution, said institution is still to blame. But taking it seriously, teachers work under the same disadvantages when improving children's manners as in the language classes. Pupils have a six years' start of the teacher. The school has but a limited scope for such training, because pupils are for the greater part of the time kept quiet and still. The occupations of school, I am sorry to say, have very little to do with the situations a child meets out in the world. But I do maintain that teachers insist on quiet manners, saying "please" and "thank you," lifting one's hat, letting girls precede the boys passing through doors, etc. Ask yourselves how teachers maintain such order and discipline if deportment is not a large part of school training.

Table manners and many other little graces cannot be taught at school by actual examples, but I do know teachers who discuss them with pupils.

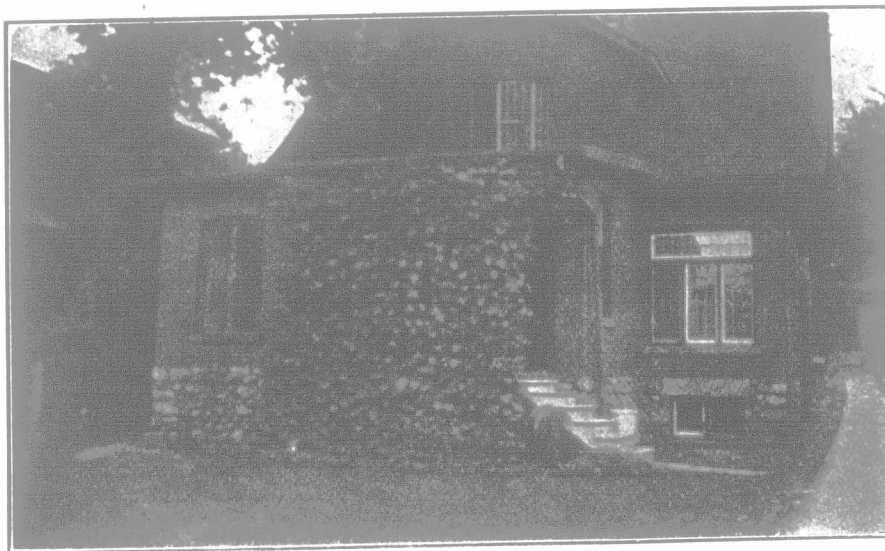
The responsibility for Canadian ill-manners lies in the homes. Not long ago I was asked to help entertain a club of twenty-five boys ranging from twelve to fifteen years of age. Not one rose when introduced to me. Every one of those boys is compelled to rise at school when addressing his teacher. Evidently, none are taught at home, to rise when a lady enters the room. Only one of those twenty-five boys thanked the hostess for a pleasant evening.

Someone will say, "They must have been from very 'ordinary' homes." Judge of that for yourself. They are the material from which we are expected to make orators, punctual business magnates, and polished courtiers.

I have saved the most unjust stab at the teacher till the last. It was more absurd than all its mild predecessors combined and concentrated. One begins to wonder where responsibility will cease, when loaded with the blame for crimes other people's children have committed. This is the story:

School children, after school hours, stole articles and money from various down-town places of business. The case came up in the police-court. It caused earnest discussion all over the city, and vociferous controversy at the next meeting of the school board. Here came the sting. A member of the board (with only two badly-trained children) rose to explain his views. Growing redder and angrier as each new flash of eloquence dazzled his audience, he concluded his disparaging remarks about school influence in general by saying, "Gentlemen, if school teachers had more personality, there would be no police-court cases." Fortunately, there was one brave man in the party, who said, "If the parents had half the influence over their children, out of school, that the teachers have over them from nine o'clock till four, they might be proud of themselves."

Now, readers, do you wonder that we feel like defending the profession?



Japanese Hops.

Growth in one season. An annual, but practically perennial, as it self-sows.

remedied in a day. Canadians came originally from the poorer and less grammatical strata of the British Isles. The past generations found the struggle for existence sufficiently engrossing to preclude any very deep anxiety as to speech. The ordinary expressions used by the forbears are handed down to "the children of the third and fourth generations." Many readers of this article can, if they will, recall crude expressions they have outgrown since leaving the home neighborhood. With no unflattering remarks to aforementioned home neighborhood, I say that teachers cannot uproot in the day time of comparative silence, on the part of

until they told that every teacher not at school at eight forty-five in the morning and one-fifty in the afternoon, registered as "late," and thus might be marked so four hundred times in the year, yet never keep one class waiting. The investigation went further, and showed that, out of twenty-six thousand registrations (there were sixty-five teachers in the city, each registering twice each day), only twelve classes had been kept waiting, and all such delays had been caused by late trains. I am sure, if city officials are tardy, it is not because they "learned it at school."

The next thrust came from a cor-