

The Last Day at the South School.

Written for Farm and Home by Helnetto Lovewell.



"DIDN'T EN in school yet?" Mrs. Gale asked, as she stooped to pick up the borrowed tin she had just dropped.

Mrs. Brown carefully let the last drop of hot fat fall from the

doughnut she held poised on a fork before replying. "No, Mary, I haven't. I don't generally get in till the last day, fur, as I tell Joe, I hear about what's going on in the school right here at home, morn' 'sif I went in and set through one or two classes."

"Well, I dunno, Sarah, there's a good deal said this term about the teacher, and I feel it's my duty to find out what's going on. Fur's I've heard, the children all think she's perfect, and that to my way of thinking is reason enough for desirin' a change. To my mind, children never like a real good teacher. I dunno as you remember Jane Bartlett, that taught when I went to school. The young ones didn't like her because they were scared to death of her, but she jest knew how to teach them 'rithmetic and spellin'. Land! they would sing the multiplication table to Yankee Doodle, and many's the time I've seen her stand over Lime Wood with a ruler till he could spell the words he missed."

Mrs. Brown lifted her eyes from the pan of savory, beautifully browned doughnuts and fixed them upon the face of her guest. "My brother Joe used to go to her," she said, "and I remember how he'd study his spellin' book to home nights till he could spell the words backwards and forwards, but as soon as he'd get up to spell he couldn't remember one. Every time he missed one she'd give him a crack with the ruler, but after all, I dunno as she ever taught him to spell."

"From what I hear said," put in Mrs. Gale darkly, "this last teacher is about the worst fur notions of any they've had since they began talking about these normal ideas. From what they tell, she's the only real graduate that has ever taught here, and I heard her telling Charlie Spooner that she come out here to study existin' conditions and get a broader view of her work. I shud have had more respect fur her if she'd said she was teachin' fur the money she got."

"So Charlotte was a-tellin' me, but hey you heard about there not being any last day this term?"

"That's just what I was goin' to mention. I think somethin' ort to be done about it." Mrs. Gale's thin lips set themselves in unpleasant lines and her high-pitched voice rose with excitement. "I heard her a-tellin' Mrs. Gilman right before little Harry that the idea of an exhibition at the end of the term had been given up years ago, and that she couldn't spend time fur special preparation. I saw fur a girl a-pre-tendin' to teach school, that don't take interest enough in her work to get up a last day. It is pretty small talk. Sakes alive! how we ust to count on the last day fur weeks be-forehand!"

Mrs. Brown occupied herself by unpinning her sleeves and slowly unrolling them until her large bare arms were again covered. "Probably she's like all the rest of them, teach a few terms and then get married. They are tellin' though that she is makin' a regular fool of that Charlie Spooner. Miss Jones told me that she sends her letters up to the office by John and every week she sends two to the same person. She looks real mighty and Charlie might know she is only triffin' with 'em."

"Did you know about her getting a telegram last week?" Mrs. Gale broke in, "about some ball game or other?" Hob Lewis brought it up and Miss Gates was real scared of giving it to her fur fear it was bad news, but she opened it cool enough and Miss Gates told Mary she jest yelled, 'Seventeen to nothin'!

I'm so glad!" Miss Gates spoke up and asked her if that was better than 16 to 1 (you know Edwin is a Democrat), and she laughed and said it was the result of the greatest football game of the season, and she knew someone who played. From pictures I've seen, there ain't no great difference between football and prize fightin'."

Mrs. Gale sighed profoundly. "As I said, I dunno how much the children are learnin'. I say it stands to reason that if children are all over a teacher, she can't hev much government, and a teacher has got to hev government. Fred Lyman told his Aunt Hannah and she told me, that when that Elliott boy said ramrods was what women jammed their hats on with, she jest laughed out loud. Now wasn't it her duty to restrain herself? What kind of a way is that to govern children? I'm glad enough that my children got through going to school years ago, and I don't take a mite of interest in the school, but I should like the privilege of goin' in the last day, same's I allus hev done."

Mrs. Gale rose from her chair and wrapped her apron over her head. "I must be goin' now, I've left bread in the oven." Suddenly, "Do look at this, Sarah," broke out the departing guest, as she gazed out from the side window along the stretch of road, where at the top of a sharp rise stood the white schoolhouse that for years had been kindergarten and university to the youth of district number three. Perched upon a high stone wall, a bag of books swung over her shoulders, contentedly eating an apple and gazing toward the western sky where the marvelous tinting was fast turning to somber hues, was the figure of a tall girl. As the two women watched, she sprang to the ground and ran easily down the slope. "Look at that and tell me if she has had much bringin' up."

Sarah shook her head, but made no reply, and Mrs. Gale with sudden thought of her neglected bread hastened home.

It was never known just how it happened that Dastown had united with a neighboring town in the hiring of a superintendent, but the action had been deeply regretted, and between the long-suffering individual who filled the position and the committee, chosen for their firm adherence to the views of their fathers, was constant friction. In vain had he striven to have the pupils of the outer districts carried to the center of the town and there establish with the united forces a graded school with well-trained and salaried teachers. The proposition was bitterly opposed, old John Gilman was reported to have said that "his children got holt of enough deviltry as it was, without gittin' any more from the town young ones."

It was through this superintendent's instrumentality, however, that Catherine Mason had come to teach in district number three. She was eager to learn of new conditions and if possible remedy and perfect them. It was a firmly fixed idea, she found, that if a child had not got his lesson at 4 o'clock, he should be punished, and that severely, preferably by the use of the rod. "They will not treat the child as an individual," she had despairingly ejaculated to the superintendent. "They won't tolerate any evidences of the young animal. Why won't they study their own children and help me with data?"

The genial superintendent gave his hearty laugh. "Don't expect too much, they are of sterling material, after all, in spite of unreasoning and unrooted prejudices, and have the children's welfare at heart. Rest assured that your influence will make itself felt in time."

"Ca!" she laughed good-naturedly when the children told her of the preparation, as for previous last days, when for weeks before they had studied their "pieces" and their fond mothers had worked on new dresses. Some had even confided the number of braids in which their hair had been confined the night before, and of its wondrous crimped appearance upon the eventful day. Had she realized the significance of this custom to the parents and children, she would never have treated the matter as lightly as she did. To her the idea of wasting precious moments in such a way seemed folly, and she gave the matter little thought. The children, innocent little mischief makers that they were, were quick to report that "teacher wasn't going to have no last day," and all unknown to the earnest young

worker, the matter was being deeply agitated throughout the district where the doings of the "schoolma'am" proved a never-failing source of interest. Mrs. Jones voiced the opinion of her neighbors when she stated plainly that she "shud go in school jest as she allus had done, and set there, even if there wa'n't nothin' to see."

The last week drew to its close and Catherine worked constantly for the completion of cherished plans. She had determined to keep up regular recitations to the last moment. Especially was she anxious to demonstrate to a class in fractions why they "inverted the divisor and proceeded as in multiplication." How she wished they had never seen that odious rule. Friday came quickly, and at quarter past 1 a rap at the door caused Catherine to admit Mrs. Jones. Before 2 o'clock the astonished young teacher had welcomed some 20 "parents and friends." Nothing daunted, although compelled to send to the neighbors for chairs, she strictly adhered to her program, but she felt the disparaging glances and realized the unfavorable feeling.

Never had she shown an example of better teaching than now, in her brief reviews, her inductive presentation and her crisp drills, and she felt secure in the fact that she held the children's interest and attention. Her enthusiasm and magnetism could hardly fail to affect the stern array of critics, and many a severe skeptic felt in a dim way that the pupils were gaining more than they realized.

At 20 minutes of 4 the children were asked to lay aside their books. Quickly and quietly it was done, and 30 pairs of eyes were fixed upon their teacher. Rising from her chair Catherine faced her waiting audience and smiled.

"My dear friends," she said, "you have come here to witness a last day exhibition for which I have made no preparation. I am glad, sincerely glad, that you have come, but I am unwilling that you should judge my work by a few recitations, a song or two, and a sample lesson in reading. I do appreciate your interest," she said, "gladder than you can possibly realize, if you would only try to learn just what I am doing or trying to do, but one day at the close of the term isn't the best time to do this. Come in any time and come often. When you wonder how a certain principle is being taught, come and I will show you. Let me tell you of the real results of the apparently strange methods I use; I realize the lack of time in your busy lives for this, but what you can for your children's sake spare, use it so it will every moment pay. I want you to know what I am doing, but more what the children are accomplishing. Teaching is only to be valued in the degree it shows the children how to teach themselves, all through their lives they must be their own teachers. Your interest is the best possible incentive for them to do their best."

"Won't you believe that we teachers have the children's welfare most deeply at heart? We try to study them in the few hours they are with us, but think how much wider are your opportunities, you who have watched each budding characteristic, you whose lives are centered in them. Won't you tell us about them? Come to us frankly and tell us wherein we fail to aid them as you wish. Do you realize, can any of us realize how much depends upon these childish minds? Cannot you feel a lack in your lives? See to it that it doesn't come into theirs. Cannot you remember the words of some one teacher in your school days who made your life richer by a simple stated ideal, by a vivid picturing of some goal toward which you were asked to strive? Which helped you the more, the loving thought that has remained with you all these years, or the pounding into your head of long division?" Is it wrong to take some time to show the children the lives of men like Lincoln, to teach them a little of Longfellow and Whittier and Emerson? Some of you ridicule our 'nature study.' Can we give these little people a more beautiful conception of God than in the wonders of his creation? Will you not strive to make this in truth the last day of life curiosity, the last day of listening to unverified reports, the last day of the old unsympathetic, narrow system, and the beginning of a new day when teacher and parent shall work together solely for the nourishing of the best that is in the child and the creating of new

ideals, the broadening and widening of dawning conceptions, and the fruition of the highest type of human life?"

Flushed with excitement from the unwonted and unrealized eloquence, Catherine dismissed the pupils, and bent over them a moment later, touched with the sincere sorrow of their good-bys. A constraint existed among her auditors. A few made some stilted, worded remark, but the greater number passed quickly out, leaving Catherine alone with the children—the children who had found no meaning in her words, but were quick to understand the tender light in her eyes.

"Well, Charlotte, what did you think on't?" Mrs. Jones asked, hastening down the road after the tall, lank figure of Miss Atkins. Miss Charlotte smiled contemptuously. "What she said sounded well enough, and I presume there was those that took considerable stock in it, but I say, Mary, that 'talin' preachin' we want in a teacher, it's practice. There won't no good come from changin' from the solid ideas of our forefathers. There ain't no way to teach readin' but to learn them their letters, and when the Bible says 'Span the rod and spoil the child,' I don't presume to see it in any other light on account of a girl like her."

Miss Charlotte expressed in a measure the views of the majority, for the instinctive homage they for the moment gave to the teacher's words was partly obliterated by their firmly fixed prejudices—theirs by birth and environment. Yet a start had been made along the line desired, which after experience of both parents and teacher strengthened.

A PRONUNCIATION MATCH.

Pronunciation matches are in vogue conducted after the manner of the old time spelling matches. At a recent parlor match the pronouncers chose slides, each contestant being allowed but one trial. The hostess had previously prepared a list of words, writing to noted authorities for "the latest" in doubtful words.

Those who care not to spend so much time may take the Century dictionary for authority, or Webster's. An hour in the nearest public library will prepare a long list. Trifling prizes were awarded the winners, and a consolatory prize to the lad who missed every word.

After the match closed funny games were played, as a relaxation after the more sedate feature. One was a contest of skill. The company was marched single file through a long room, at the entrance of which sat a bushel basket of peanuts. She or he who could seize the largest handful of passing and carry them, without dropping one, to the basket at the opposite door was awarded those remaining in the first basket after all had passed. The winner was a woman, who secured 48, but there was only a quart left for her prize. Those in the second basket were "passed around" amid much merriment.—[The Maine.

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State Flowers—The state flower of Alabama, Nebraska and Oregon is the goldenrod, Iowa and New York the rose, North Dakota the wild rose, Colorado the columbine, Delaware the peach blossom, and Idaho the syringa. Maine, the pine tree state, chose the pine cone and tassel, Minnesota has the mosses flower, Montana the bitter root or bitter sweet (I am not certain which), Oklahoma the mistletoe, Utah the rego lily and Vermont the red clover. Wisconsin and Rhode Island have a tree, the beautiful and useful maple. Other states may have flowers, and at this time of writing the Massachusetts legislature is trying to choose a floral emblem for that state.—[Allie L. Nay.