

*Special Papers.*

## THE SCHOOLMASTER IN FICTION.

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IF it be true that the creations of a good novelist are accurate and truthful reflections of the characters and manners of his age, and that his stories are all true except names and dates, then may not we pedagogues of the last decade of the nineteenth century find interesting and instructive recreation in following the gradual development of our own species?

The schoolmaster has ever furnished a good-sized target, against which fiction writers of both Europe and America have driven their shafts of ridicule. At the present time neither Britain nor America may be said to possess a novelist of more than ordinary genius, but I often wonder if our eccentricities and frailties will be used by some great writer to furnish amusement for the teaching profession of a half a century hence.

Perhaps there may be some of you who will be surprised that any member of our profession could be so uncharitable as even to hint at the possibility of finding among our ranks to-day, men and women with peculiarities enough to attract the attention of a story-writer.

How true the words of Burns when he says :

"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us  
To see ourselves as ithers see us!  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
And foolish notion;  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us  
And e'en devotion."

And I have no doubt that should some close observer of human nature carefully cultivate the acquaintance of the teachers—not of Wentworth, but of some adjoining county—he would find sufficient material for many a curious tale. Now, I do not intend to weary you with an account of all the dominies portrayed by even the great writers, but will notice a few of the most characteristic.

According to the eighteenth century writers the teachers of that period were old soldiers who were no longer able to serve their country; spinsters and widows who had no other means of support, and finally anyone who was of no mortal use for anything else.

The majority of these educators seemed to have but one well-defined idea concerning their calling, and that was that "lickin' and larnin' go together."

Goldsmith's village schoolmaster, who caused the people to wonder that "one small head could carry all he knew," is too familiar to need more than a passing notice.

In his "Guy Mannering," Scott has left us a genuine curiosity in Dominie Sampson. This worthy character was born of poor and humble parents whose attention was drawn to his serious disposition when he was but a few years old. The parents considered his soberness a very hopeful sign and resolved that they would make a great effort and suffer any amount of privation in order to educate their son for the Church. With this aim in view Abel Sampson was sent to College, and appears to have been by no means slow in acquiring knowledge. But even here the poor fellow was the butt of much ridicule; and it is said that the small boys would congregate in the hall to see him come down the stairs, his long legs sprawling about and his great awkward shoulder blades moving in time to his walk. His eyes were goggle, his voice harsh and something like that of a screech-owl, and when he began to speak it seemed that his jaws were moved by some complicated machinery within. In due time Sampson was appointed to preach his first sermon. He entered the pulpit, but his native bashfulness quite overcame him and after grinning and leering about the congregation for a few minutes he was greeted with uproarious laughter. Striding down from the desk he quitted the church and gave up all idea of becoming a preacher. It was now, when he discovered that he could do nothing else, that he began his career as a schoolmaster. His school was large and his fees were small, but he managed to increase his income by writing letters for a Scotch laird. This laird finally induced Sampson to give up his school and make his home a permanent residence. The schoolmaster owed this preference to the fact that

he was a good listener and said nothing himself, and that he never detected the grossest imposition. It is said that our hero never laughed but once in his life. His only method of expressing surprise or curiosity was by the one word "pro-di-gi-ous." Scott gives an amusing account of how the Dominie's friends managed to replenish his wardrobe. They dared not trust him to make his own purchases and they feared to wound his feelings should they call in a tailor and have him measured like a boy. So they engaged a tailor to take a good look at him and size up his ungainly proportions. The clothes were accordingly made by this novel measurement and sent home; but how to get them on was the next question. Sampson slept very soundly and a servant went into his room the first night and removed his old waistcoat leaving the new one. The next day he appeared in the new jacket none the wiser of the change, and by this means his whole suit was changed, piece by piece.

Our friend does not appear to have been at all averse to good living, commonly bolting his bread in three inch squares and bestowing a generous portion of his soup on his clothes; but he often forgot the dinner hour and the housekeeper would frequently have to waylay him with his share of the meal.

Charles Dickens wrote one novel with the express purpose of showing the infamous character of Yorkshire private schools, and with what effect may be judged from the fact that at least two or three Yorkshire schoolmasters threatened to prosecute him, each thinking that his own school was the one honored by the novelist's notice.

It would be difficult to conceive of a more detestable wretch than Wackford Squeers, whose name has become a synonym for those who take pleasure in torturing and abusing children. He advertised his establishment as follows: "Education—At Mr. Wackford Squeers' Academy, Dotheboy's Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge, in Yorkshire. Youths are boarded, clothed, booked, furnished with pocket money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages, living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of globes, algebra, singlestick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification and every other branch of classical literature. Terms, twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations and diet unparalleled."

"This delightful home was a miserable hovel, reeking with filth, and into it were crowded some two score unfortunate children of parents who knew little of their condition and cared less. Squeers and his amiable wife fed the children on brimstone and molasses to take away their appetites, half froze them, let them go naked, made them sleep six in a bed, forced them to eat the meat of animals that had died from natural causes, turned them out in turnip fields for a change of diet and finally beat them unmercifully for no cause whatever. Was it any wonder that the publication of "Nicholas Nickleby" aroused the English people to action against such places of infamy, and did much to rid the land of that class of schools?"

In "Dombey and Son," a work written some years later, Dickens gives us a picture of a school conducted upon very different principles from that of Wackford Squeers, and yet its effect upon the pupils can scarcely be said to have been much better. This establishment was conducted by Dr. Blimber and his daughter. The Doctor was a well-intentioned gentleman, whose idea of a school was a mental hot-house, where boys were stuffed with Latin and Greek from seven years of age.

Every boy who attended this school, no matter how young, was supposed to conduct himself as a young gentleman, and anything approaching play was looked upon with great disfavor. Study was the watchword. But little time was taken for meals and none for play. The result was a weakly lot of boys who either died in their teens or went daft before completing the course. It is said that they lost their spirits in three weeks and even approaching holidays failed to awaken any enthusiasm among them.

Now, while both Squeers and Dr. Blimber blasted body and mind, and destroyed every capability for usefulness, their methods were exactly opposite; the former starved the mind and showered his abuse upon the body, the latter killed mind and body by over-burdening the mental powers.

The "school marm" is a product of nineteenth century civilization, and flourishes best in America. While, therefore, I cannot give you a picture of a schoolmistress from the pen of an English author I will give you a short description of a schoolmaster as portrayed by a lady writer who holds a high place among English novelists.

George Eliot certainly knew some wonderful people and had a happy way of telling about them.

Bartle Massey, a schoolmaster of George the Third's reign, was not the least curious among her acquaintances. He lived in one of the north midland counties and not only kept a day school for children, but a night school for men. As a teacher he was very useful and had a love for his work which would do credit to any teacher of our own day. The ignorant country people looked with great awe upon his learning and agreed among themselves that it was possible he might have something to do with the bringing about of daylight and the changes in the weather. His most marked peculiarity was his hatred of women, and it was surmised by his friends that before he came among them he must have had some unpleasant experience. He said that he never knew a woman who didn't think that two and two would come to make five if she cried and bothered about it enough. Having such unfavorable opinions regarding the fair sex it was no wonder that he did his own housekeeping and lived alone in a room adjoining the schoolhouse.

Allow me to quote a short extract from the author: "I hate the sound of women's voices; they're always either a-buzz or a-squeak, and as for the young lasses, I'd as soon look at water-grubs. It's the silliest lie a sensible man ever believed to say a woman makes a house comfortable. It's a story got up because the women are here and something must be found for 'em to do. I tell you there isn't a thing under the sun that needs to be done at all but what a man can do better than a woman, unless it's raising children, and the women do that in a poor makeshift way; it had better ha' been left to men; it had better ha' been left to the men. I tell you a woman 'ull bake you a pie every week of her life and never come to see that the hotter the oven the shorter the time. Look at me! I make my own bread, and there's no difference between one batch and another from year's end to year's end, but if I had a woman I must pray to the Lord every baking to give me patience if the bread turned out heavy. And as for cleanliness, my house is cleaner than any other house on the Common, though half of 'em swarm with women. Don't tell me about God having made such creatures to be companions for us! I don't say but he might make Eve to be a companion to Adam in Paradise; there was no cooking to be spoiled there, and no other women to cackle with and make mischief, though you see what mischief she did as soon as she'd an opportunity. But it's an impious unscriptural opinion to say a woman's a blessing to a man now; you might as well say adders and wasps and hogs and wild beasts are a blessing when they are only the evils that belong to this state of probation, which its lawful for a man to keep as clear of as he can in this life, hoping to get quit of 'em forever in another." Such was Bartle Massey's opinion of women, and let us hope it was an opinion not shared in by the profession of to-day.

Let us now glance at the wielders of the rod described by American writers. Those of you who have not read Washington Irving's description of Ichabod Crane have a delightful hour yet in store. As to his personal appearance I shall quote from the author: "The cognomen of Crane was not inapplicable to his person. He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small and flat on top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose so that it looked like a weather-cock perched upon his spindle neck to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield." The scene of Ichabod's labors was a rude log building of one room, having many broken windows which were stuffed with old

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