

TEACHERS TALKING.

West Huron Teachers' Association Meets.

Good Papers Read—Interesting Discussions—Music and Recitation—Discussion of Graces.

The population of Goderich was considerably increased during the latter part of last week by the advent of teachers, from Amherley to Grand Bend, to attend the semi-annual conference of the West Huron Teachers' Association.

The business meetings were held in the High School, and at every session the large room was packed by enthusiastic educators of both sexes. None of the ladies, however, availed themselves of their right to take the floor, although we understand that not a few are fully competent to discuss professional subjects in fair style. Many of the members of the association made copious notes of the points made by the speakers, which were frequent and good.

The SIGNAL made a special arrangement with the authors of the various papers to print them, entire or condensed as the nature of the subjects call for, and we take pleasure in re-producing some of them this week. The others will appear in our next issue.

The first session was held on Friday morning.

The chair was occupied by Mr. H. I. Strang, President of the Association.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

A committee consisting of Inspector Miller, and Messrs. Hall and W. R. Miller were appointed to arrange the order of business.

Mr. H. E. Huston, delegate to the Prov. Teacher's Association gave, a very full and interesting report of the deliberations of that body. After some discussion, it was resolved that a hearty vote of thanks be rendered Mr. Huston, and that his expenses be paid by this Association.

A short discussion on the advisability of raising the standard for entrance to High Schools then took place, the general opinion being that such change should not be made. A resolution committee, consisting of Messrs. McPhee, Huston and C. L. Craswell were appointed, after which the meeting adjourned.

The Association met again at 1.30, when an excellent address on "Composition" was given by Mr. A. J. Moore, of Goderich High School. It will be found on the eighth page, amongst our other Association matter, having been received by us too late for its place in the order of reading.

The following interesting paper was read by Mr. Hugh McPhee:

Hindrances to Progress in School Work.

The obstacles in the way of progress in school work are very numerous, but for my present purpose I'll confine my remarks to two, which, in my opinion, stand prominently in the way of the teacher's best efforts. The first and most potent of these obstacles to progress is irregularity of attendance on the part of scholars. The conduct of many scholars attending our public schools is so strongly marked by irregularity, that they should be designated visitors and not scholars. Though these nominal scholars attend only a day or two in the week, yet they and their friends express great surprise at their lack of progress. Indeed, the parents of these children who attend most irregularly are the loudest in denouncing the teacher's professional incapacity, to which they attribute the little progress their children are making.

What would be thought of a man who had a large piece of work to perform within a limited time and would devote himself to it only two days in each week? Evidently the work would be long of accomplishment. The work of education is tedious under favorable circumstances, but such irregularity of attendance as I witness year after year in our public schools, renders progress very slow indeed. The conclusion that long experience in teaching has forced upon my mind is the following:—That two days' attendance each week confers little or no benefit upon the scholar so attending. Besides, there is a positive injury arising from his or her example which affects the whole school in a greater or less degree. The class of which these occasional visitors are members suffers particularly; they, as it were, forming a sort of dead weight and materially retarding its progress, proving a source of irritation to ambitious scholars and teachers. What is to be done? How are these visitors to be disposed of and still maintain a good organization of the school? The formation of new classes for the special accommodation of these nominal scholars would be attended with great disadvantage to the rest of the school—that of too many classes. The question then that presents itself to our mind is, how is this evil to be remedied? He is a poor doctor who points out and names a disease but cannot prescribe a remedy. I am of opinion, however, that every teacher can diminish the evil, though he may not be able to wholly eradicate it. To effect this purpose, that is, to induce scholars to attend more regularly, the teacher must employ all means within his reach to impress on the minds of his scholars the importance and great value of education, the life-long advantages the want of it will impose on them, in a learned community; how every office of importance in the State is unattainable to the illiterate; how dull and comparatively unprofitable must their lives be devoid of education. These and similar representations will not fail to make an impression on the minds of pupils old enough to understand their force. Every opportunity should be seized by the judicious teacher to create in the minds of his scholars a desire to attend school regularly. Competition in the different classes tends to bring about this desider-

able end, and stimulate to greater diligence in study. Change places in classes according to the merit or demerit of its members, number the standing of each one at the class of each recitation, beginning at the foot. Record these numbers in the class-book after the respective names to which they belong, giving a night after the names of absentees. Add your numbers at the close of the day or at the end of the week, and announce to the school the best scholar in the class for that day or that week, at least the one who stood the highest. The writer has found this plan to operate very beneficially, not only stimulating to greater assiduity in study, but inducing scholars to be present to engage in the contest. Send a boy a journey alone and he will most likely find the road very long, send one or two along with him to contend for first arrival at the destination, and he will not find the journey half so long and, in all probability, will accomplish it in half the time. The same trait of character is manifest in study, and should be taken advantage of. Set up an honorable competition among the scholars, and I am persuaded that the result will be satisfactory.

Let us now suppose that the pupils are anxious to attend school regularly, the next step is to secure the willingness of parents to dispense with their labor at home and send them steadily. To secure this end, I admit, is a very difficult task, but before dealing with the case of the parents permit me to observe that very young pupils are not likely to be influenced by the representations just suggested. To induce such to attend, the teacher should make the school-room as attractive as possible, keep it scrupulously clean, adorn it with pictures, and above all let him manifest sincere kindness and be cheerful and pleasant in his intercourse with them, as often as duty allows.

In order, then, to reach the parents of those who attend irregularly, let the teacher pay them a visit at their respective houses, explain to them in a friendly manner the loss their children are suffering from this cause, how desirable it is to secure an education when young, how other children, of less natural capacity perhaps, are surpassing his or hers, and the cause may be, by the parent's injustice to the child in causing his absence from school, how incapable the youth will be in after years to manage their affairs, transact business, or guard against imposition without the aid of education. Let the teacher bring to the father's mind the very important fact that all his outlay in supporting the school, year after year, brings him no direct return unless he sends his children to school, and that regularly. Frequent intercourse with the parents has often removed misapprehensions, and has led parents to understand the teacher's aims and motives and their own true interest. It is true that the teacher, in following the course now suggested, will incur the risk of violating the rules of etiquette, and may find himself an uninvited guest at the homes of the patrons of the school; but I'm persuaded that such violation will never redound to his disadvantage, and may be the means of doing a deal of good by adding to his attendance. My present limits do not permit me to dwell longer upon this obstacle to school progress and its remedy; suffice it to say that experience has taught me to believe that if teachers would approach parents in a suitable manner, discuss the benefits of education, the aims of the teacher, &c., a great amount of good would be accomplished.

Home influence is the second great hindrance to progress. In many families every conceivable kind of work stands higher in the estimation of parents than school work. This want of appreciation on the part of the parents is communicated to the child, who soon comes to regard school-work as a useless task imposed upon him by some ill-natured and crusty teacher. I have known cases in which a youth's fondness of study was ascribed to laziness. Johnny asks, "Can I go to school to-day, ma?" The indulgent ma replies, "If you have nothing else to do you may; but be sure to be home in time to attend to your chores."

Is it any wonder then that Johnny starts to school with the expression on his lips, "I'm going to school to-day to have some fun?" Is it a wonder then that the school and its objects stand so low in Johnny's estimation, and that the instruction intended to be conveyed, and the teacher's counsels, are regarded by him with the coolest indifference? Many parents instead of speaking respectfully of the teacher and his work, instead of raising both in the estimation of their children, speak disparagingly of them to the great injury of their own children. The child readily and naturally imbibes the ideas of the parent on most subjects, especially on those relating to the teacher. The parent, from some mistaken notion, expresses some injudicious opinion in the hearing of his family respecting education, teachers and school management in general, and thus sinks them in the estimation of his hearers. The youthful members of that family in the course of time make their appearance in the school room, and their conduct, as might be naturally expected, is characterized by listlessness and even disobedience.

But how, it may be asked, can the teacher combat this evil, and disseminate a healthier tone in his section? I admit the task is rather a difficult one; still the prudent teacher by a little effort, can reduce this evil to a minimum. The teacher and his work are closely associated in the minds of both parents and pupils, so much so, that the one cannot be regarded with respect and the other with indifference. If the teacher is regarded with favor and respect, full confidence placed in his probity, his work will accordingly rise in the estimation of parents and pupils. In short, he must raise himself head and shoulders above the people by his superior intelligence, his exemplary conduct, and, above all, his Christian demeanor, with all that the latter term implies; and thus bring such moral force to bear on his patrons as will oblige them to respect him and his work, and deter them from uttering indifferent language towards a noble profession, and a man fitted for his position. The teacher then is not only the instructor of the youth of the section, but also an instructor of the parents, at least as far as their duty in educational matters is concerned. It is of the first

importance that the parent should manifest the most lively interest in the work of the child, and thus stimulate him to greater assiduity in his studies. The teacher, on one of his friendly visits, should intimate to the parents their duty in this particular, and suggest to them that their co-operation is essentially necessary to the advancement of their little ones.

Literary taste is wanting in most neighborhoods; and parents, comparatively destitute of education themselves, cannot be expected to give their children much assistance in their home studies; but, irrespective of this, a healthy stimulus may be given to the child by the parents proposing the following and similar questions, "Have you been head of your class to-day?" "How many questions did you miss?" "Did you get a new lesson, and what lessons did you recite?" "What are your prospects of promotion at the end of the term?" Such questions, it is true, are very simple in themselves, yet the proposing of them would manifest that the parent feels an interest in the work in which the child is engaged and would not fail in stimulating the child to greater efforts and assiduity, that he may be able to return satisfactory answers. Teachers on visiting the houses of the parents should recommend this course to them, and I am satisfied their advice would be acted upon. It may be urged in opposition to what I have written that I'm imposing labor upon the teacher beyond what his duty demands; but it should be borne in mind that he who desires to excel in his profession, do the greatest amount of good to his charge, and elevate his own position, must go beyond the limits which the law literally requires of him. In conclusion, permit me to observe that the teacher is a power in the section in which he may be located, and by a proper exercise of his power can mould the minds of pupils and even impart a healthy tone to those who are not directly under his instructions. He exerts a most powerful influence in shaping the destiny of the Dominion, and the social condition of its people.

Let teachers, then, fully realize the importance and dignity of their vocation, impress them on others, and indifference, the great enemy to educational progress, will disappear. For the sake of brevity, I have invariably employed the masculine gender in the foregoing remarks, but the suggestions are equally applicable to the ladies of the profession.

H. MCPHEE.

The paper was well received, and drew forth a lively discussion, especially upon the subject of teachers' visits, in which the following gentlemen took part: Inspector Miller, Connelly, Elliott, Weir Cameron and Lane.

(CONTINUED ON EIGHTH PAGE.)

Pecculiarities of Authors.

Like other people, authors have their pecculiarities. Walter Scott was an abstemious eater; Dr. Parr had weakness for hot boiled lobster; Pope was a great epicure; Dryden was passionately fond of bacon, and Charles Lamb of roast pig; Shelly utterly despised the pleasure of the table; Newton lived on the simplest food; Aristotle dieted upon acorns; Homer was a beggar; Plautus turned a hand-mill; Terence was a slave; Otway died of hunger. The "Vicar of Wakefield" was sold for a trifle to save its author from being sent to prison; Savage died in jail; Chatterton committed suicide; and Kents died of a broken heart!

Mr. Moody is a shrewd man at answering questions. "What do you think of the present system of training in our theological seminaries?" asked somebody at one of his meetings. "I have no opinion about it," was the sensible reply. "I never went through a theological seminary, and I never talk about anything I know nothing about."

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Exoter

CIDER SYRUP.—Mr Robert Lang, of Rodgerville, showed at the Exoter fair the other day a very fine sample of syrup made from cider, by some process known only to himself. The syrup is as clear and bright as the best golden syrup, and is equally pleasant to the taste. It is made entirely from the juice of the apple, and a better substitute for syrup could not be got. It is yet destined, we believe, to largely supersede syrup as an article of consumption, as it can be produced very much cheaper, and is quite as palatable and more wholesome. We wish Mr. Lang every success in his enterprise.—[Expositor.]

Our politics swarm with pastiferous insects of Guitau class—always pestiferous and sometimes, as we now know, deadly—they have been quickened into activity by the smiles of party leaders who, wanting all sorts of work, deem it only prudent to keep on good terms even with the very spawn of the slime.—[Springfield Republican.]

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