

Teachers' Miscellany.

COURTEOUS NOTES TO PARENTS.

FROM A PRIMARY PRINCIPAL TO HER FRIEND.

Graytown, Oct. 28th, 1894.

MY DEAR MISS WINTERS,—Which of the immortals was it who said, "Trifles make perfection; but perfection is no trifle"? One of those trifles which make or mar perfection occurred this afternoon, and this evening I am going to free my mind to you. I wish we could sit down and "talk it over" as we used to last year when any question came up.

To-day I sat at my desk writing much later than usual, that all reports might be in on time. As I put away the last sheet the clock outside struck six, and I went hurriedly down to the cloak-room. There I saw the wraps of one of my new teachers, a bright young girl, who had had excellent training; but is now getting her first real experience. She has done wonderfully well, too. I put on my hat and then stopped at her door to bid her good-night, and to advise her to go home, as she would need both strength and enthusiasm next spring, and must not use it all the first month.

As I glanced in at the door, she sat there at her desk, her head on her arms, sobbing as if her heart would break. Perhaps it is needless to say that I did not go home just then, although it was six, or that we settled down for a long talk. I'm not going to bore you with a long account of our conversation. These are the facts in brief:

She had been very much troubled by one boy's attendance. He had had five tardinesses and eight absences during the month, and the day before I suggested that she write to Mrs. Murphy and ask her to see that he was more regular hereafter. She had sent the note, and this noon had received a reply, such a reply as only Mrs. Murphy (who stands as the personification of an aroused mother) could write. You or I would have laughed; but Nell—well, she thought her month's work a failure!

In her desire to be very decided Nell had almost forgotten to be courteous, and, when I saw the note she sent, I was not at all surprised at the reply she had received. I saw both notes, as Mrs. Murphy had obligingly written her answer on the other side of Nell's. Here they are, as nearly as I can remember:

Graytown, Oct. 27th, 1894.

MRS. MURPHY,—Dick was tardy again this noon. This is the fifth time this month. He has been absent eight times besides. If he is going to stay in this room he must be here on time every day. He isn't smart enough to stay out half the time and keep up with his class.

Truly yours,
E. N. BROWN.

MISS BROWN,—I got your note. I send Dick when I don't need him to home. He is just as smart and able to keep up as any boy in your room. He was alright last year. If he don't keep up now it's cause you don't show him right. Why don't you write to Mr. Jones bout her boy's being late, out riding round with her half the afternoon yesterday? You needn't send me no more notes. You just tend to teaching Dick when he is there.
MARY MURPHY.

Now, from Mrs. Murphy's standpoint, her note was a fair reply to Miss Brown's. The first, to her mind, was a challenge. She took it as an implied insult to her boy's ability, entirely overlooking the main point, of the effect his irregular attendance would have on his work, and she answered accordingly.

I felt very sorry both for Nell and for Mrs. Murphy, and blamed myself that I had not asked to see the note before it was sent. However, Nell went home comforted, and I came home to meditate on the question of notes in general. This is the conclusion I have reached at the present time.

At our next teachers' meeting we will discuss the subject of "Notes to Parents," and, after suggestions and discussion, I shall assign some imaginary cases to each of these girls to write up. You know they always give me young girls for assistants, and I am very glad they do.

Do you want my points?

First, especially if you have something unpleasant to say, use pretty paper, ink, and your best handwriting. Money put into a pretty box of stationery for school use is money well spent. A note nicely written on pretty note-paper impresses Mrs. Murphy more favorably at the outset than one scribbled with a lead pencil on a sheet of quarter cap, the corner turned down, and the address on the fold in lieu of an envelope.

Then begin your letter just as you would one to any lady with whom you are slightly acquainted—"Dear Mrs. ——" To be sure, the "Dear" is only a form; but it is a commonly accepted one, and why should you omit it in this case when you admit its use in others? It makes your letter sound unnecessarily formal and cold.

Then as to the body of your letter—make it just as pleasant, just as courteous, as you can. It will be just as effective, generally more so. If Nell had written:

DEAR MRS. MURPHY,—I have been hoping you would call at the school, as I wish to have a little talk with you about Dick. We would like to have you see what we are doing, and the children are always very much encouraged and helped by the parents' interest.

I am very anxious that Dick should do well this year. He is a bright, capable boy, and will have no difficulty in accomplishing the work if he is regular and punctual in attendance.

Can you help him in this respect? He has already been absent eight times and tardy five.

I sometimes think that no one but the teacher can realize how much every half-day's work means. We try to make every hour precious, and do not want our boys and girls to lose any of them if it can be helped.

Cordial y yours,

NELLIE A. BROWN.

wouldn't she have received a different answer?

If a pleasant note does not prove a help, sometimes other means have to be resorted to, I admit; but I am firmly convinced that more will be gained by a courteous one than by a curt demand. What do you think? I expect my girls will say, "But that seems like being politic," and if they do I shall refer them to Webster, that they may discover that politic means "wise, prudent, sagacious," as well as "artful, cunning." I do not wish to give up that word as used in its "good sense" yet awhile.

If you have any suggestions that might be added to mine, let me have them as soon as convenient. How is the work going on in the new field? Have you grown to feel at home in it yet? Write me all about it. And now, good night.

Very sincerely your friend,

FIDELIA KING.

'HIS GREATEST NEED IS SELF-RESPECT.'

Tommy Murphy was unquestionably a bad boy. He had been born in a low home, of the most material of parents, and had been utterly destitute of that indefinite commodity termed "early training." And yet, no one thought of this when he came to school. He only brought his own individual world with him, as we all do, but some way his world failed of the recognition which was given to others. He was branded as a "mean boy"; ugly, stubborn, and rude, and between his world and that better world which he had never seen—from objective rather than subjective reasons—there hung a dense curtain of frowns, harsh words, pedagogical compulsions and leather straps, which his faith was, as yet, too feeble to penetrate. Of course, he was neither bright nor studious. He could not have been bright from the facts of his birth, and he had never been given any motive for being studious, except that lowest of all motives—fear of punishment—and, unfortunately for his teachers, Tommy was not a coward.

And so his school days passed on. He was retained as long as possible in one grade, and was then reluctantly passed on to the next, his "yellow passport" of ignominy going with him, until his eleventh year, when his teacher told me that she was obliged to "strap the boy once in four or five weeks to keep him decent." She said it was all she could do. I had no reason to doubt her assertion, though I could not refrain from pitying the

boy, and wishing that she were as addicted to the study of practical schoolroom psychology as she was to the use of "straps."

But, fortunately for Tommy at this time, a new teacher was appointed to take charge of his room. She was small and frail-looking, but possessed of that combination of wisdom, sympathy, and tact, which knows no fear in the schoolroom.

Of course, she was informed from many sources of the notorious "case" which she would soon be called upon to "manage." Each of his preceding teachers considered it her duty to inform Miss L—in detail of his misdemeanors during her particular reign, closing the account with a remark like this:

"I do not want you to think that I wish to injure Tommy, but I thought it was no more than right that you should know what to expect, so as to be prepared."

Ah, that "yellow passport"! Who can estimate the number of children's lives that have been brightened by those same words, so sweetly spoken? For it is but rarely that they fall into Wisdom's ears.

But Miss L— smiled and said, "We shall see. I trust he is human." And then came the first day of the new term. Tommy more than maintained his reputation, for, as he said to the boys, "She ain't big enough to lick a feller like me. I'd fight first, and I guess she knows it."

But she had been studying him. He certainly did look ugly—low forehead, overhanging brows, deep set eyes, and round, stubborn head—but the more she studied him the more thoroughly she became convinced that the greater part of that look came from habitual expression, rather than from the gifts of nature, and she fell to wondering how that face would look if it should wear the light of happiness upon it.

He was making spit balls. She was looking at him, but at that particular time she cared more for the boy than she did for the balls.

"Poor fellow," she thought, "he has been strapped at school and beaten at home, until, from the world's thinking no good of him, he has come to think no good of himself. It seems to me his greatest need is self-respect."

Just then Tommy looked up. He caught the expression of her face.

There was no frown there—no expression of weakness either, as though she were afraid to attack him. But, some way, he wasn't quite used to that kind of a look, and it rather dampened his ardor for spit balls. They slid into his desk and did not appear again that day.

In the afternoon she placed the spelling words toward the top of the board. Several children raised their hands, when the study period was over, to erase them.

"They are rather too high for you," she said quietly. "I think we shall have to depend upon Tommy to do that for us."

Master Tommy was bending a pin for the toe of his shoe at that particular time, and had not one word of his lesson, but he was so surprised to hear his name spoken in such a way that he dropped the pin. "Depend upon him!" No one had ever depended upon him before, in all his short life!

And then she began to interest him in his work. She began in his own world, with ant hills and orioles' nests, and gradually pushed aside the curtains which had concealed from his sight that better way of life. She gave him new motives, and kept his mind well filled with new thoughts.

She was constantly curbing his nature, but she did not once draw the reins so tight that he knew it. She was always his friend, and reposed all the confidence in him that she could, never going so far as to give him the chance to betray any trust. To be sure, he frequently made trouble; she punished him by denying him some pleasure—he was fond of sports—but he was always led to see the justice of his punishment and treated like a rational human being, which many of his class are not.

Gradually there came fewer complaints from the playground and halls, and when June came the principal congratulated Miss L— upon the improvement manifested in Tommy's books and deportment. There was a suspicion of tears in her eyes as she said, "I shall be sorry to part with Tommy. We have been good friends. I thought it was self-respect that he most needed."—*Primary Education.*