

Circular to Teachers

London 4 June 1844

MR, -

I beg to submit for your consideration and guidance as a Teacher, the following observations. My object is not to cramp your exertions with rigid rules, but to offer you hints which may be useful in the performance of your arduous duties.

Your first and constant care should be to convince your pupils, that you have a high duty to perform,—that you are anxious they should learn, not because it benefits you, but themselves; that their ultimate character, success and happiness will, in a great measure, depend upon the instruction they receive from you, and that your desire is to make all they have to learn as easy as possible. You should be unceasing in your endeavours to cultivate the affectionate regard and respect of your pupils, and you should be fixed in your resolves never to be partial or unjust. You may fail in producing affection, you may fail in your appeals to duty made to the incorrigible, but even these cannot, and will not withhold from you, the sense they entertain of your justice and impartiality, if you really deserve it.

In the management of your school and classes, value and take care of time, never lose a moment unnecessarily, but guard against hurry and over anxiety. Arrange a general plan of instruction; arrange its detail—what is to be done—what can be done—and the time in which all is to be done, and your school will go on like clock work. There will be no confusion, no bustle, no lessons badly learned, because every one will know what he has to do, and when he is to do it, and no one will be tasked beyond his powers. The regularity and order of school discipline has a wonderful effect on character in after life. That, will be but half an education which has no tendencies beyond the acquirement of the prescribed branches. It should embrace thinking—self dependence—individual industry—correction of disposition, social duty, rational enjoyment, kindness, gentleness, and the thousand little things which make existence pleasurable and mankind amiable. Every opportunity therefore, should be seized upon, to inculcate and enforce these desirable attainments.

In your intercourse with those connected with the school, be guarded and circumspect, neither making too free nor putting yourself in a position to allow of freedom being taken with yourself. You must expect to have enemies,—they spring up from among the envious, the censorious, the fault-finding, and those whom you may have unconsciously offended. The best answer to all they can do or allege—is, to let your conduct be such, as will set calumny at defiance. It is just as much for the well being of a reflecting man, to have enemies, as to have friends. Friends seldom see faults and less seldom speak of them. Enemies see little but faults, and speak of little else; thus by having your faults set sometimes prominently before you, you will be enabled the more certainly to walk uprightly. Be neat and cleanly in your dress and person; the general rule should be, to keep yourself in point of dress and appearance on a par, with the neatest and most tidy, sensible person in the neighbourhood, avoiding both the extremes of dandyism and slovenliness.

It will always be found prudent to refrain from political discussions; the line of your duty is rather to allay than stir up the bitter waters of strife; and a moment's reflection will show you, that in advocating either one view or another, you expose yourself to attack which may result in bad feeling, perhaps dislike. And the same observations apply with double force to religious discussions. To whatever denomination you belong, see that your conduct is consistent, and that in your walk and conversation you show that you are actuated not by feeling and impulse, but by fixed and steady principles. Christian conduct is best taught by christian example; and this can be done, without inculcating the peculiar tenets of any denomination or wounding or offending any member of the community.

Never carry the tattle of the neighbourhood from house to house, or retail news in school, it is unbecoming a teacher to do so—your legitimate business in this respect, is to check, not to promote the natural thirst for idle curiosity. Never complain but where you have good cause, and to prevent misunderstanding let your complaints be in writing, dictated in mild and respectful—yet firm language, and as a precaution do not send the letter on the same day it is written. This gives time for reflection; and if it then be found not quite what you approve, correct it, and let it lie over another day, then read it and you may venture to send it. But never complain to parents of the rudeness, idleness, disobedience or stupidity of their children. It is your province to correct these faults, and since some of them at least, have had their origin in the want of due exercise of parental authority, it will be vain to complain with a view to call to your aid an authority which is shewn not to exist, by the very presence of those faults of which you wish to complain. Besides, parents never hear with good grace the faults, follies and deficiencies of their children. In truth you must do the best you can, but never presume to complain on these grounds.

One of the great evils existing in this country is a want of respect for parental authority, and its baneful influence spreads, as young men emerge from the parental roof, and manifests itself in a recklessness of bearing and contempt for any opinion or authority which opposes their impetuous desires. You must, as a special duty, inculcate obedience to parents as the first and most important part of a child's conduct: and you will have no difficulty in shewing that they are generally the best and most respectable men who have been most noted for obedience to their parents.

Be punctual, never be behind your time a moment, better leave without breakfast than be five minutes too late in opening your school; if you have occasion to do this once, and your conduct shows that it is not done from ill temper or ill feeling, but from a conscientious desire to discharge your duty, breakfast will be in time next morning.

In the discipline of your school, punishment of some kind will frequently be necessary. To me it appears that the moderate and judicious use of the rod is the most salutary and efficient, but it should never be applied while any irritation exists, nor until you have appealed in vain to the good sense and good feeling of the pupil, nor until you have endeavored to shew him that the punishment you are about to inflict is deserved, and that you do it in the discharge of a painful yet necessary duty, and if you attempt to punish with the rod it must not be done by halves. In many instances it may be unwise to attempt to punish in this way. In some neighbourhoods a squeamish dislike exists to this kind of infliction, and where this is the case no good can result from personal chastisement. Every pupil knows the views his parents entertain in this respect and the scholar's tale will be listened to by the indulgent parent, and you will be branded as cruel and tyrannical,—and thus the beneficial results you anticipated from the punishment will be frustrated. Wherever a morbid feeling of this kind exists, it is wiser to adopt the next best mode of punishment which circumstances dictate.

Always take the precaution to reduce to writing your agreement with your Trustees, and let every thing be expressed, leaving nothing to be explained, varied, or understood, your lists should be kept with scrupulous correctness, never putting off an entry till to-morrow which should be made to-day. In order to afford yourself all the time you can, and to avoid causes of discord which every Teacher has felt, avoid boarding round with the parents of your scholars. It will be more satisfactory to do this, if your salary should be less, and indeed, the difference in emolument can be no compensation for the evils it necessarily brings. And in conclusion, I would earnestly recommend the use of the books I have mentioned to the Trustees, and discourage the use of those whose tendencies are injurious. Be studious in your habits, and steadily pursue a line of conduct which will ensure self respect, without which you cannot be respected. You should feel, and act on the principle that you are, and deservedly so, a useful and influential member of the community, and thus Teachers instead of being what they have hitherto too frequently been, will become a class, deserving, and commanding universal respect.

I am, &c.

Wm. Mullock
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