

only from amongst all the teachers of the district is absent. He is ill. The front row of desks is left unfilled. Every newspaper in the county will send its representative to hear what the Teachers' Union thinks on current educational politics. For what Government could reasonably hope to stand against the united voice of the teachers of the schools of the people? And does not this Union include a membership identical—no more and no less—with the number of certificated teachers quoted in the Blue Book? Besides, according to the programme of the meeting, are not the two teacher M.P.'s to be present, and is not everyone anxious to hear what their views on the topic of the hour are?

The church clock is slowly and with an undercurrent of wheezy cogwheel movement booming out "seven"! . . . The black schoolroom is in the clutches of a clammy fog that freezes the very marrow. . . . It is appallingly silent, save where a little mouse is nibbling at a reading-book in the corner of the cupboard. But there is no longer gloom for the old schoolmaster. He sleeps on. . . . Now all is bright. For fifteen years he has sunned his declining years in the pleasant bower in front of that charming cottage nestling over beyond the Barton coppice, from which in the early summer the young wood pigeons coo. His wife is by his side, and their two children are again playing at their feet. He has given up active school work years ago, and a grateful country has generously met its obligation towards him, and has done its best to soften for him the hard track of downhill life.

Suddenly there is a sound of life in the lobby—a scraping of feet, and a jarring of careless voices that break in rudely upon the silence that can be felt. The door is thrown open. "Well, upon my word!" incisively flings out an authoritative voice. "This is a pretty state of things! I distinctly told old Wilson to be sure and have the desks put ready for the carol concert to-night, and he hasn't even lighted a single candle! How abominably provoking! Lydia, dear, tell him to come to me *at once!*" It would have done the heart of the finest "drill" in the British Army good to have heard that "at once" delivered.

The vicar's daughter is back in the doorway again in a breath with the information that the little schoolhouse is dark and empty, and that "old Wilson is nowhere to be seen."

"Abominably provoking!" bites out the vicar.

"Don't be too hard on him, pater," softly conres through the darkness. "His examination's only just over, and that's always a great worry to him, as you know."