

Cleanings.

HINTS ABOUT LETTER-WRITING.

READ THIS TO YOUR SCHOOL.

Our letter-writing is very much a matter of habit, and for that reason it is important that young people should learn early to consider it a pleasant way of communicating thoughts and feelings to their friends, instead of a burdensome task to be got over as quickly as possible.

We often hear people excuse themselves by saying that they have no "gift for writing letters," as though it were something like an ear for music, only accorded to a favored few. But the truth is that any one can write interesting and pleasant letters who will take a little trouble and really persevere in the effort. The grand difficulty in the way is that they are too selfish and too indolent to try. Nothing that is worth anything comes without effort, and if you do not care enough about gratifying your friends to take a little pains for it, you deserve never to receive any letters yourselves.

A few simple rules, carefully observed, will help you over some of the things which you call difficulties. In the first place, *always write distinctly!* It destroys much of the pleasure in receiving a letter if it cannot be read without puzzling over every word. Many an epistle, written on heavy cream-laid paper, with a monogram at the top, is only an annoyance to the one to whom it is addressed, on account of pale ink and careless hand writing.

Be particular in the matter of dating, giving every item distinctly, and sign the letter with your full name. If this habit is formed, you will not run the risk of losing valuable letters, which cannot be forwarded from the Dead-Letter Office unless accompanied with the full address.

You will find it more easy to reply to a letter soon after you get it than if you neglect it for a few weeks, because you will have the impressions which the first reading made upon your mind. Tell your friend when you receive the letter which you are answering, and take up the topics in the order in which they naturally come, remembering to answer all the questions which have been asked. Try to think what your friend would like best to hear about, and when you undertake to tell anything, do not leave it half told, but finish the story. People who are not careful about this, often give a false impression without meaning to do so. For instance, one of these careless writers, in giving an account of a fire, simply stated that the house was burned, without giving any qualifications, thus giving the impression that it was entirely consumed, thereby causing a whole family much unnecessary trouble and anxiety, as the actual burning in question was very slight.

Do not consider anything too trivial to write about which you would think worth mentioning in conversation. Writing letters is simply talking upon paper, and your friends will be much more entertained by the narration of little every-day affairs, than by profound observations upon topics which you care nothing about.

In writing to very intimate friends, who will be interested in the details of your daily life, it is well sometimes to make your letters a sort of diary—telling something of how you have spent each day since you wrote last, what books you have been reading, what letters you have received from mutual friends, and what you have heard or seen which has interested you.

Write all that you have to say on one subject at once. That is, do not begin to tell about your garden and then about your school, and then about your garden again; but finish one subject before you begin another. Do not be afraid of using the pronoun *I*. Some people avoid it and thus give their sentences a shabby and unfinished sound, as "Went to Boston—called on Mrs. Smith." Never apologise for what you write, by saying that you do not like to write letters. You would not think it quite polite in visiting a friend, to say, "I do not like to talk to you, so I shall not say much." Keep the idea before you that you are writing for the sake of giving pleasure to your friend.

When your letter is merely an enquiry, or on a matter of business, the case is different. You then should try to be as brief, concise, and clear as possible. An elaborately drawn out business letter is as out of place as it is inconsiderate.

"Do not think what to write, write what you think," is an old rule, and a good one to remember. If you are away from home, it is very selfish not to share your good times with the family by writing frequent letters. You can tell what you are enjoying so

much better while it is fresh in your mind, than you can after your return, when you may not have leisure to go over the whole ground; and these home letters may be a means afterwards of refreshing your own memory, and reminding you of incidents which you would otherwise have forgotten. There are many other things which might be said here, but this will do for the present. A very good rule for letter writing is the golden one, "Do as you would be done by."—*Susan A. Brown in St. Nicholas.*

SCHOOL COMMITTEE-MEN "COMMITTED."

BY M. P. COLBURN, IN NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL.

In order to show that the interests of education are not always served at the polls, I send you the accompanying "string of pearls," which have dropped from time to time from the mouths of various school committee-men within the range of my experience:

I.—One of the *g-ns* entered a school-room in one of our suburban towns, and, as he found the geography-class up for recitation, took occasion to expatiate upon the benefits accruing from the study of this branch in this wise:

"Yes, children, it does you good to know things. You don't want to be dolts all your life; but when you see things, you want to *know* 'em; when you see Alps, you'll know them's *mountains*; when you see Appenines, you'll know them's *mountains*, and when you see *Dardanelles*, you'll know *THEM'S* mountains!"

II.—To show what qualifications in a teacher seem to be necessary and sufficient in the opinion of some of the "powers that be" in some sections, I am able to vouch for this:

A gentleman, having a friend for whom he wished to obtain a school, called upon the man filling the office of committee, and stated his wish.

"Is she handsome?" quoth Mr. H—. "Yes, sir: she is called very handsome." "Well, then," said the high-minded dignitary, "*she shall have a school!*"

Alas, in this state of things, for the plain aspirants to pedagogic honors!

III.—About thirty miles "up north" is a *destrict* where the prudential committee is a man who was put in the position "just for fun," by his townsmen.

Joke as it was at first, it got to be dreadfully practical when the grave "know-nothing" grew to the habit of visiting his charge regularly once a week, and always making a speech, of which the following is a true transcript:

"Scholars, you must love your school, you must love your books, you must love your teacher,—*I do!*"

IV.—A very important personage was one who confided to me the trials of his public life. Said he:

"I have to work too hard. It is enough for me to have to 'tend to my milk bizness without doing so much else." "What else," I said, interestedly. "O, I am s'lect man, school committee man, and member of the House!" "Which shall you give up, do you think?" "Well, I've been thinkin' I'd better give up on the school committee!" and I thought so, too!—but I only said. "Do you find your duties onerous?" and his reply was worthy a Timon of Athens. "Yes, *I do*, but the honor is all a curse!"

V.—In discussing the question of music in the public schools, one remarked blandly to me that he "should as soon think of sending a boy to dancing-school as his children to learn to sing in one of 'em!"

VI.—Another stood with his hat on his head and his two hands plunged to the depth of his pockets, while listening to the repeating of the beautiful 23rd Psalm by the children: and when they were through with it, remarked, with a pleased air, "*They spoke that piece pretty well!*"

VII.—At one time, during a long visit, the committee-man only removed his hat to show me, with a pat on his bald head, what he was pleased to call the "*result of cramming.*" He didn't believe in it,—*he had suffered so himself!*

VIII.—But better than all is the following anecdote, which is true to the minutest particular:

One of our grammar-school principals was in the habit of conducting his class in geography in what was then rather a novel way. He would suppose some compounded article of food,—as a loaf of bread or cake, a mince pie, etc.,—and have the pupils "go on a voyage for the ingredients, telling where each came from, and the