

The Profession of a Teacher.
V. Emrick.

Introduction	1.
Choice of a profession	2.
Knowledge of a teacher	3.
Some faults of teachers	4.
The teacher apprehends the objects of his work	5.
Should the teacher study	5.
Should study outside of school	6.
Ability to teach	6.
Why teachers fail	7.
Lack of Experience	7.
Wrong conceptions of work	8.
The pay of a teacher	8.
Short terms of schools	10.
Influence of teacher	11.
Is teaching easy work	12.
Why teachers do not follow their profession	12.
Conclusion	13.

The Profession of a Teacher

As I think of my boyhood days some of my most distinct and pleasant recollections, are those days spent in school. Well do I remember the little country-school-house with its dilapidated appearance without, and its gloomy walls within, of broken seats, torn maps, mischievous scholars, and especially the dull ones, and of the punishments inflicted; these are but a few of the many incidents that are remembered of those school days.

In the midst of this desolation and turmoil stood the teacher, and of these teachers well do I remember one who for forty years had held dominion in the school room. His hair was now white. Years of worry, work, and responsibilities had changed the color of those locks, while his wrinkled face and failing eye sight showed that one who handles the rule - and he could handle it skillfully - could grow old in the work.

He was a grand old man. He was a true teacher. We at times thought him severe in his punishments, yet we could not but admit that he was a good teacher. One day while engaged in conversation with him he said "my boy whatever vocation you choose in life let it not be that of a teacher". You will find said he that a "teacher's life is a dog's life", a life of drudgery, a profession where you will make few friends and many enemies, and pointing to his thread bare coat said "this is the fortune

a teacher will have after spending a life in the schoolroom, Enter some other business where there is less to do and more to make.

How many teachers do we find who are uttering these same words? I venture to say that an investigation will show that the average teachers life is one of drudgery and meagre pay. Yet when we see the great good that the teacher is accomplishing we must say that it is truly an honored profession and one which confers dignity upon all who enter it worthily. Yet how many teachers recognize the dignity of their calling and prepare themselves for the responsibilities that they will meet in their work.

A person in choosing a profession usually asks himself many questions as to his ability to carry out his work successfully. The Lawyer will test himself as to whether he has the material in him to make a Lawyer. The Minister feels that he is called to his work, The Doctor inquires of himself as to whether he is able to detect diseases and to administer the proper remedies, while the teacher usually enters his work without any conception of what it is, why he teaches or how long he will keep in the work. He usually commences young and does not stop to see whether he has the necessary qualifications that is to determine his success or failure in so grand a work. But as to the qualifications of a teacher.

The first and most important qualifications

of a teacher is a thorough knowledge of the subject he is to teach. A merchant entering into business sees that he has capital, the physician spends several years of study before he enters his profession, the lawyer has become acquainted with statute books; yet the teacher who is to do a grander work will commence with only the necessary qualifications of obtaining a certificate, which at the best is a poor criterion of the teachers ability to teach or a knowledge of the subjects to be taught. No amount of skill or even genius can compensate for a lack of a thorough acquaintance of the subject which is to be presented to his pupils. How often do we see a teacher offering to give instructions on subjects which at some period of their school days they claimed to have studied. Even worse than this I knew of a teacher in charge of a class in algebra who had no previous knowledge of the subject and depended each evening to prepare an unfamiliar lesson for the class the next day. What would we think of an instructor in French worrying along with a class, having never heard a French word spoken and consuming much time trying to pronounce words entirely unfamiliar to him. These teachers are a 'drug' in the school room. We would not say that he should know books only but he should have a comprehensive view of all branches relating to the subject ^{to be} presented, and be able to present the subject in its different relations, to solve all doubts

that may be brought up, and to make clear all difficulties that may arise, and must be able to so forcibly impress upon the mind of the pupil what is being presented that it will never be forgotten. It is often a deplorable fact that a teacher who fully understands his subject will allow the child to pass over a problem that is not clear to him and at times pass over a whole subject without the child's having acquired anything of the subject or worse yet to so present a lesson that succeeding teachers will have the child relearn something already learned. The last named condition once came under my observation. A boy, who after three winters in school, had learned his First Reader so as to be able to read each ~~selection~~ quite well and was able to recognize each word when pointed out to him but strange to say the same word was unfamiliar to him when met with outside of his reader. Investigation proved that the boy knew very few words and had acquired the ability to read and pronounce the words by associating them with the pictures above. In a selection in which he recognized each word he did not know one when a card was placed over the picture.

The knowledge of the teacher should be so thorough and complete that his whole attention need not be directed to the subject at hand, since we know that much of the teachers success depends upon the order kept, on his power to recall past thoughts on the subject, and to

answer intelligently all questions that may be asked bearing upon the subject presented. He should be able to give to each individual student that attention which is necessary to develop the student's weak points, and further to be able to detect these weaknesses and give the best possible instructions and stimulus to the strengthening of the child's mind. Any teacher who will admit of slovenly recitations or let mistakes be passed unnoticed is not only committing a grievous fault; but is encouraging his pupils to be reckless and slovenly in their work.

The good teacher apprehends the objects of which he is to present. Like the blacksmith he knows the materials with which he works and holds in view some idea of usefulness and beauty to which they are to be fashioned. The teacher is building and molding the life that may move the world, or if wrongly fashioned may be a national injury. The work he is doing today may change the civilization of tomorrow. He is building character and giving these children precepts and ideas that are to make these boys and girls men and women in whose hands the destiny of our country is to be intrusted. Is it not then the teacher's duty to develop the intellect, the imagination, the capacity to be obedient and the love of truth?

But should the teacher study? Most assuredly he should. You say he is perfectly familiar with the branch taught; we will admit this; but the

teacher must study or he will not keep pace with his profession but retrograde in it and farther experience has proven that as soon as the teacher ceases to learn he ceases to teach successfully. He must ever be watchful to be to the front in the onward progress of Education. That teacher who is satisfied with his present state of knowledge, does not seek to increase his limited store of learning is "dishing out" as we may say mental food which has become stale and is not at all appetizing nor strengthening to the child's mind. In addition the teacher should be on the alert for fresh matter. A change in the manner of presenting a subject with ample illustrations is as essential in the school room as a change of food is to bodily wants.

But though a teacher's mind may be stored with knowledge, yet unless he has the ability of imparting it he is a failure in the school room. How often do we see some graduate from an University fail to impart to his pupils subjects most elementary in character, while another teacher with but limited education feasts his pupils with the richest of thought. The one we may liken to a mine of precious metals hidden in the bowels of the earth or "a candle hidden under a bushel" while the other is a bright and shining light which is fast dispelling from the child's mind the darkness of ignorance. Another quality a teacher should possess is that of being able to stimulate the

pupil to greater activity, and arouse interest, he must be able to present different parts of the subject in order to appreciate the difficulties under which he is to present it, and be able to observe whether the child grasps what is being said.

This naturally brings us to the subject why so many teachers do not make their work a success. One teacher steps into the school room with an idea that school is conducted in a military fashion, while another cannot govern at all. Another teacher cannot adapt himself to the condition of his scholars, which is often a difficult matter. One scholar is dull and sluggish, another bright and cheerful. Some are immoral who have parents that breed mischief into the child, and if the teacher is not equal to the situation he will fail.

Many fail from lack of experience. No general is placed in command of an army until he has studied all the sciences relating to war, nor do we allow him to learn this art until he has gained experience by acting as a subordinate; yet in the school room are thousands of teachers who know nothing of their profession, trying to learn this art by experiment alone and after many dismal failures, they give up their work.

A teacher once came into our school highly recommended as a scholar and teacher; but she had taught in no place for any length of time. She came

into our schoolroom wearing a costly dress, and manner distant. The impression made upon the pupils was that she was "stuck up". She did not stay long; but a teacher with a kind heart and plain dress took her place.

Another teacher has no conception of the work and is ready to follow any method she may hear about, and is equally ready to change when she sees a teacher getting along better than she without thinking whether such methods are applicable to herself.

In addition the teacher should be wise, firm, calm, patient, slow to anger, use judgment in fact he should have all the virtues of a saint and more too.

There are many things besides the qualifications which determine whether the teacher will follow his profession or soon go into other lines of work, and there is one thing especially that is on the mind of the teacher and that is, the salary he is to get.

The pay of a teacher is small compared with the income of men in other professions. Forty dollars a month is more than the average salary of our American Teachers. Strange it may seem that he who is to do so much in forming the life work of men and women is to receive so small a remuneration for his work, a doctor, merchant or lawyer with an income not more than that of a teacher would quit his profession as not paying. It is strange that a man or woman

possessed of all the qualities that a teacher must possess should be given starvation wages, wages not to be compared with those of men of far less abilities. To illustrate I once knew a member of a school board to throw back his head in a dignified manner state to the applicant who was asking a position in the schools "you teachers ask too much, too much. He wanted to pay thirty-five dollars a month for a teacher to instruct about fifty scholars, and had an idea that it was too much money to pay out for the training of these young minds for good and usefulness, while behind his bar he paid a man seventy-five dollars a month to destroy the lives the teacher was building up. In this case the bar tender with no other qualities than a brutal nature was getting for each month work over twice that of the teacher, and received this pay twelve months in the year. Some time ago I read of a base ball player who received eight-thousand dollars a year for his services, yet who ever heard of a teacher getting that salary? A foreman in a foundry often gets from five to ten thousand dollars a year, while in the same city the teacher gets less than two thousand per annum. A lawyer often receives fifty thousand a year for his practise and a physician a like amount, and supposing these were exceptional cases, where can we find the exceptional case of a teacher realizing

one fifth of that amount. Now supposing that the average teacher gets forty dollars a month and we may say that seven months to be an average term of school, what will the teacher make during the year? Out of this forty dollars he must pay board, take educational papers, attend teachers associations, pay out little sums of money for school room purposes, and at the end of the term attend a teachers institute consuming one month of time and more than the net gain of one months pay, besides paying one to five dollars for a certificate entitling him to teach. Then there are short vacations for Christmas, or when diseases break out in school in which the pay is stopped while the expenses go on. To those who say that a teacher is well paid I would say that only the poor ones are. What encouragement is there for a teacher to qualify himself for better work when he will receive ^{but} little for his services than the poor teacher and run a risk of being underbid by him.

Another drawback found in teaching other than the short term and small pay is that a teacher does not stay long in one place. It is seldom that we find a teacher in our public schools that can teach more than three years in the same school and especially is it true that they are seldom successful the third or fourth term with the same

pupils. Parents gets dissatisfied and the teacher must go; and farther the teacher will often fail to get a school throwing him out of one years work.

"But you will say 'a teacher is a man of influence and social position'. A teacher is respected; but when you have stated this you have said all that the people will allow concerning him. He is respected as a good book is respected good for what it contains but to be used only as a convenience and as far as social position is concerned it is not seldom the case that the parent would as soon welcome to his home a book agent, or a tax collector as the teacher.

Yet he is a man of influence and it has been the teachers influence that has made it possible to enjoy the richness of our literary growth. It is our teacher that makes the heart of the Frenchman leap with joy when he is told of the deeds of Napoleon.

The mind of the child is likely to incline to the teachings of his master. The teachings of the Catholics will ordinary make believers in their religion. The

Episcopalists have Episcopal teachers and what is true along the line of religion is also true along that of politics. If the teacher teaches patriotism our children will love our flag. If he teaches anarchy, turmoil will reign. If the teacher is sickly and cross he has no place in the schoolroom since the children

will be rebellious, if on the contrary the teacher is happy under all circumstances we would not expect to find a sour school. A teacher with life is the teacher to raise enthusiasm in his work, while the teacher without this life is a "dead fly" and has no more place in the schoolroom than a horse with a broken leg has on a race track. The teacher is a model and should be as near perfect as possible. Every act he makes and every word spoken makes an impression upon the child's mind. An uncultured teacher will be imitated by the pupil, the untidy teacher will naturally give some of this habit to the child. Besides having a child like nature, he should have unbounded zeal, and a force to draw children towards him.

Is teaching easy work? No. Far from it. He must work not only in his class room but at home. His work is light and lasts but a few hours a day; but he who stands before a class all day, takes care of his schoolroom, brings in water and coal, looks over the lessons for the next day, and then studies enough to keep posted on his work will find at the close of the day that his labors have been long and tiresome.

The question is often asked, why our teachers are as a rule quite young. You will say that the

women marry and the men go into other business; but why is this so? If more encouragement was given to the teacher, paying him better wages, and making it so that he would not be at the mercy of school boards to find steady employment many of those who start out to teach would follow it, and if such was the state of affairs I suppose no one would doubt that there would be better teachers and better schools.

While there are many discouragements to encounter it is yet one of the most pleasant of occupations. It is a stepping stone to something higher. The teacher is determining what these children will do and how they will live. Looking over his little flock he sees beyond the present. In the not distant future he sees when these boys and girls will be men and women some one perhaps controlling the "rudder of state". He may have before him a Webster, a Lincoln, a Longfellow, or a Napoleon.