

Nebraska and Her Public Schools

WHEN the National Congress of Mothers offered me the privilege of working for its interests in Nebraska I was glad, remembering some pleasant acquaintances made in that state ten years ago.

Nebraska has changed in ten years. It is not so lonesome as it used to be. You can't look out of a car window quite so often and see nothing between earth and sky, or at most just a team and wagon crawling over the sands, making you wonder where it came from and where it could possibly be going. Trees have grown in Nebraska. Blessed be J. Sterling Morton! Houses have grown, cattle and hogs have been fruitful and multiplied and replenished the pocketbooks, so that the mortgages, which formerly made so much campaign capital, have given place to new issues.

There are tall sons and daughters of the morning who have wrestled successfully with the big winds which still have the right-of-way on these wide prairies. Plenty to eat, and good enough to wear, and work that has been worth while, has kept alive the "good as you are" spirit of the old cowboy days, and the ability to have a rollicking good time without a conscious loss of dignity. To be sure a few haven't got rested yet from the hard times, but the prevailing air of cheerfulness and satisfaction almost persuaded me to become a native. Honesty is a virtue taken for granted, judging from the number of hotel rooms that couldn't be locked. There is a small handful of men in the penitentiary, but I was solemnly assured that most of these were arrested in transit. The men are more courteous and kind than in some places I could name. I know, because I was foolish enough to carry two rather large size pieces of baggage in my hands. They were not as heavy as they looked, being mostly vanity, but there was always some man about good enough to carry them for me, to say nothing of the eagerness with which they gave up their seats in the street cars, or the good reports I heard from the legislature regarding the bills in which women were interested, or the attitude of the state university toward women.

In a certain city of another state a leading official answered my question as to whether the club women had ever undertaken any municipal reforms, by saying, "The women of — know enough to mind their own business." In Nebraska I have been told more than once by men in power, "The woman's club can have anything it wants." The women have more brains to the acre and more clubs to the town than is usual, even in these days of club reign, and they are well abreast with national club policies and politics. The prevalence of "kensingtons" puzzled me not a little at first, till I learned that it was a new way of spelling afternoon tea, a form of social life which dies hard among the women.

The Mothers' Congress aims to bring about closer and more helpful relations between the home and the schools, and so on reaching a town I headed straight for the school house. The "little red school house" of our daddies has grown to noble proportions in these days and there is nothing to indicate that it has stopped growing. Whatever criticism may be made of our public school system it is not a fixed and

rigid, nor dead, nor yet a dying institution, but very much alive and plastic enough to adjust itself to the changes in our social and industrial life. I was informed everywhere I went that Nebraska has the smallest per cent of illiteracy of any state in the union, and I surely didn't find anybody who was unable to read and write, except the babies, and they take to learning like ducks to water. It is fairly startling to one who has been out of school work ten or fifteen years to see the ease and understanding with which the little ones get to reading in that way which seems so much more like play than work. I couldn't help drawing a comparison with the dreary struggle of mastering the old New England primer. There are a gratifying number of first-class kindergartens in Nebraska and their influence has reached well on into the primary work.

The schools are mostly under the management of energetic, red-blooded young men who haven't forgotten how a boy feels. The state superintendent has a few gray hairs, but they evidently indicate wisdom and not age. The university ranks high in brains as well as foot ball and pays as much attention to life as to books, managing to keep in close touch with all the educational work of the state, giving and getting in good measure. The normal schools, too, are up-to-date in ideas and methods.

As elsewhere there is a big feminine majority among teachers and pupils. There are women who have been teaching twenty and even thirty years, and calmly tell you so, probably enjoying the involuntary exclamation, "You don't look it." No woman ever lived to grow old who didn't appreciate that kind of a compliment. Such brisk, trim, motherly-wise women they are. It is a fresh wonder every time I enter a school room how the care of children develops a woman. The trouble at home is that the house cares are often so exacting they fairly drive the children out of sight and out of mind.

I see these women in the primary rooms putting wraps and rubbers on the little ones, wiping away tears, sharing joys, settling difficulties, watching over health and personal habits, and so on up through the grades, encouraging and stimulating the dull pupils, directing and cheering the bright ones, thinking out special methods for special cases, teaching ethics, not out of a book, but by constant practice, and all with infinite patience and kindness.



CARRIE L. GROUT.

No wonder they are often deadly tired, when we reflect that mothers are sometimes distracted to ill-temper with three or four, while the teacher seldom has less than thirty or forty and often more. It is not surprising that such a teacher rules young men with ease. They worship the Madonna in her.

After visiting schools for several years, in several states, the feeling deepens that with all our loyalty to our free schools we do not yet half realize the value of this crucible into which our children are poured, that the elements which make for character may be fused in them in the right proportions to fit them for the world's uses. The book work may sometimes get monotonous, but the children never do, and it is most interesting to watch the change which takes place in the children from the beginning to the end of school life. Entering as different as the racial elements of the world can make them, with widely varying environments, "mother's little darling," rubbing up against the child who is nobody's darling, we find here the nearest approach to equality outside the Declaration of Independence. It is a true democracy of ideals, and day by day, little by little, the plastic natures are wrought upon by these ideals till in the high school we get a fair average of excellence. The standards fixed by common consent on the play grounds, the wear and tear of constant association, the habits of regularity, punctuality, attention, self-control and regard for the common welfare obtained, not through fear of punishment, but by suggestion and the cultivation of a genuine interest in the work in hand, go quite as

for as the knowledge of the Rs or Xs toward making good, useful, happy American citizens. Good as our schools are, they will be vastly better when we properly appreciate their value to our civilization, and this will come about only by keeping better informed about their work.

Some day the millionaires will give to the common schools as they are now giving to the universities, realizing that if we are to have a worthy superstructure we must first have a fine and strong foundation.

I have seen quite a bit of social settlement work in different sections of the country, but have seen nothing to compare with the efficiency of what is doing in the Cass and Pacific schools of Omaha, and the Hayward school of Lincoln, year in and year out, not only for the children themselves, but for the neighborhoods, and this could be multiplied indefinitely by the addition of gymnasiums, baths, manual training and domestic science, as the teachers will tell you. Too many children, especially boys, escape from the schools for lack of an equipment suited to their needs, which the home cannot furnish, either, and so the lads graduate from the streets into the reformatories and prisons. But the community in such a case does not escape from the expense or responsibility.

I have often asked the children how many liked to go to school. It is always unanimously "Yes" in the first, second and third grades; from the fourth to the seventh there are apt to be doubters, and it is from these grades that truancy is most common. In the High School the survival of the fittest shows again in the pleasure taken in the work.

In the old times, when there were only a few occupations for anybody to choose from, only a few studies were needed. Now when there is such a variety of industries a wider preparation is demanded, and it must come from the school, for the home has less and less to offer in the way of industrial training. Now, the elective studies, the sciences, business courses, manual training, drawing and even music are no longer fads—for a day—but necessities.

The children of the primary grade, who made a doll's house that I saw, designing and painting the wall paper, making the wooden bedsteads, tables and chairs, wearing the matting and rugs for the floors and the little towels, hemming the sheets and spreads and pillow slips, modeling of clay the dishes, were laying a good and wide foundation for future usefulness.

The school which prepared for patron's day an exhibit of polished woods, reeds of grains and grasses, botanical specimens, insects, fungus growths and even quite a respectable display of stuffed birds and small animals, all obtained in the vicinity, had made an acquaintance of their environment, which would afford a lasting pleasure and profit.

The Indian village, in a bank of sand, with wigwams, canoes, bows and arrows, blankets and moccasins, gave a vividness to the reading of "Hawthay" impossible without it. The illustrative drawing in connection with the English work was a pleasing contrast to the old-time "compositions."

In a few cases I found cooking and sewing

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Occupation of Ping-Yang by the Japanese, March 1



JAPANESE INFANTRY BREAKFASTING OPPOSITE PING-YANG.—Copyright, 1904, by Collier's Weekly.

THESE pictures were made by R. L. Dunn, Collier's special photographer with the Japanese army in Corea, after the pontoon bridge over the Tai Tong river had been completed and the infantry began to pass over it into the city. The Japanese made Ping Yang one of their principal military bases in Corea and pushed on toward the Yalu from there. Mr. Dunn was about to start with this advance when he wrote from Ping Yang, March 5, as follows: "Expecting to leave tonight for the north, so pictures for a few days will be delayed, as they have to come back here (Ping

Yang) by messenger on foot, then travel to Seoul on foot, a distance of 250 miles or more. Half the messengers leaving us are turned back by the soldiers, or rather put to work to carry their luggage. It almost drives one to distraction to figure how to get stuff out from here. Money transactions are worse than anything. The Korean money is now taken exclusively, even at a higher value than the Japanese yen; every day there is a change in value; and money worth \$500 one day is worth in another city the next day only \$400—sometimes less. My expenses are very high. I have to have four horses in order to get



FIELD ARTILLERY WAITING TO CROSS THE BRIDGE OVER THE TAI-TONG RIVER.—Copyright, 1904, by Collier's Weekly.

about—two saddle and two pack—one saddle horse for my interpreter and two coolies to see to the horses. The feed for the horses costs a lot, as everything is at war prices. One bar of soap yesterday cost 50 cents gold. Traveling ahead as I do in order to get good pictures, and of scenes not to be made by other photographers for several weeks yet, is very trying. All the roads are completely blocked and there is no place to sleep. We travel over frozen rice fields and ice-covered mountains, sleeping anywhere we may happen to be, nearly freezing every night, but I am getting the

stuff ahead of others and am willing to keep pushing on. The Japanese army does not know what to think of my pushing ahead with them without any credentials; but I understand there are many press men in Tokio doing no work and unable to get away. I am going to keep ahead and get results of the first land fighting." The first detachment of American and European newspaper correspondents to be officially allowed to enter Ping Yang was landed there April 15, six weeks after Collier's photographs of the Japanese occupation were made.