

Gaskell's Magazine - Editorial Reflection (Cast and Caught While Engaged in Thought), 1887.

BLUSTERING BLASTS FROM HIS BOISTEROUS BAZOO

A prominent college man echoes the sentiments expressed in the November magazine concerning the qualifications demanded in a teacher of penmanship. It seems that he, as well as hundreds of other honest teachers, has been yearning for a revolution in this matter. We print an extract from his letter, which exhibits his views on the subject, and may incite others to express themselves on the subject of half-fledged teachers. Here is what he says:

"I wish to offer you many thanks for the sensible article in the last magazine, entitled 'The Demand for Active Teachers.' That is the best advice I have seen given the young men, and I hope they will appreciate it enough to follow its teachings, for a short while at least. I need a penman now, but am unable to find an idle one who knows the first principles of bookkeeping, and mathematics seems to be an unknown quantity in their scholarship. You would be surprised to see to what an alarming extent this deficiency prevails among the younger class of penmen, yet many of them can produce very flattering letters of recommendation from instructors and employers. How under the sun is a man to know whether he is getting a teacher or a 'chump,' unless he carries him through the test mill before employing him? If the Business College men would use a little more discrimination in issuing these letters of eulogistic 'taffy,' it would be a great blessing to the fraternity, and we would soon see the Business College rising more rapidly in the estimation of the public. I should like to see another letter from you on this subject in the next number of the magazine."

Young penmen, you can readily see by the foregoing mass of hard, cold facts, that this principal of a wide-awake training school is harping on the same string we clawed over in the November number. What do you think of it? You, perhaps, think him a trifle rabid and dyspeptic on the subject, but we assure you every business college man in creation coincides with his views on this point. They don't want to strangle the profession of penmanship, not by any means, but they would have every teacher of writing be a practical man - a man who can handle figures with dexterity - a man who can write a copy at one desk and explain a complicated entry at another; a man who can straighten an awkward fellow up into a writing posture at one end of the room and answer a question in 'equation of payments' at the other. They don't want a man who is exhibiting ignorance of the common branches every time a question is asked outside the bounds of penmanship.

[...] We ought to understand the rules of percentage as well as the construction of a symbolical dodo. We need to know as much about a trial balance as we do of the number of tail feathers necessary to give a 'whangdoodle' structural balance. You ought to be able to lick a business letter into shape as easily as you would poise the eyelashes of a flourished potato bug, or depict the yawning gulch over which the sad-eyed elk is going to jump, and alight on the conventional rock which has done duty as a goal since the days of John D. Williams. Put as much earnestness and enthusiasm into the study of interest methods, as you use in sketching St. George and the Dragon, with St. George astride a steed which looks more like a jackass than the traditional charger which we are wont to associate with this legend, and a perfect swarm of modern birds with bills open at the same angle, drawn up in military order, apparently endeavoring to pluck a worm from St. George's ear. You may say you don't find time to learn these prosy branches. You may say your mind is wholly occupied in incubating composite designs for flourishing, and a thought on so commonplace a science as accounts couldn't crowd in edgewise. You may claim that such a diversion from the fantastic course of your soaring genius would nip your destiny in the bud, and cause chirographic fame to slip from your grasp like a flickering sunbeam. We have all basked in these utopian dreams and browsed on the ambrosia of frantic art and sipped the nectar from cups held by transitory idols, until our minds were filled with imagery more delicate and sensitive than the petal of the most fragile flower. But, alas, the stern calls of necessity have perforated this gaseous bag of fancies, and caused it to sink into the background. Alas, how our self-esteem wilted when we were put to the test in a real business college, and found ourselves unfit to steer an infant class in arithmetic! Willingly would we have kicked the upholstering out

of our gaudy swan which looked down from an oak frame on the wall like a stern judge who was going to sentence us to kindergarten six months for being a double rectified 'chump.' No doubt every penman whose success was due to an intense love for the art, can remember how harshly practical and commonplace themes grated on his highly sensitive nerves when he was wrought up to the delirious stage of the mania, and wrapt up body and soul in curves and coils. The brain-puzzling drudgery incident to trial balances, partnership settlement, partial payment, ratio and proportion, profit and loss, detecting errors in a complicated and jumbled set of books, and a score of other duties which fall to the diligent teacher's lot, naturally twang harshly on the highly picturesque mind of the rhythmical scribe. But you who are good writers but have not yet entered the field of teaching are no doubt dreaming to the notes of one thousand a year, and perhaps some of you are just adding another thousand to that, mentally, to see how it would sound in the open air. Do you think the sole ability to erect a brazen eagle on a black background will bring this sum, or even a fourth of it? Do you suppose that a sane business college man wants you at a boodler's salary to flourish day in and day out the stereotyped warbler who hasn't had a moulting season since he was first hatched in the fertile brain of the original scribe? Well, if such wild ideas have been crossing the corridors of your brain, let us frighten them back into the cells of reason by telling you in a paternal key that you have been endeavoring to fashion a silk purse out of a sow's ear, so to speak. Your ideas have been contrary to all reasonable expectations. You will apply for a situation which looks to be easily filled, from a distance, but when the exacting principal propounds about four leading questions to you regarding the mathematical and legal sides of a business education, your plumes will drop, and you will feel a cold lump in your craw, which may be likened unto the sensation produced by a frost-bitten cucumber. Young penmen, investigate the sentiments of college men on this question. We may be wrong, and suggest that each one looks over the field and sees how many branches the well-paid penman is capable of teaching. This matter is of vital importance to every young penman, either in the field of teaching or out.

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