

TWENTY TALKS
—TO—
TEACHERS

—BY—
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Table of Contents

PREFACE.

CHAPTER I. AM I FIT TO TEACH?

CHAPTER II. SHALL TEACHING BE MY LIFE WORK?

CHAPTER III. SECURING A POSITION.

CHAPTER IV. PASSING THE EXAMINATION.

CHAPTER V. PROBLEMS OF THE YOUNG TEACHER.

CHAPTER VI. GRADING THE SCHOOL.

CHAPTER VII. OPENING EXERCISES.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SPIRIT OF THE TEACHER.

CHAPTER IX. THE TEACHER'S LIBRARY.

CHAPTER X. THE TEACHER OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL-ROOM.

CHAPTER XI. GOOD TEACHING CONDITIONS.

CHAPTER XII. KEEPING GOOD CONDITIONS.

CHAPTER XIII. WHAT MAKES A GOOD SCHOOL?

CHAPTER XIV. TEN TIME KILLERS.

CHAPTER XV. THE VALUE OF A HIGH SCHOOL COURSE.

CHAPTER XVI. A TALK ABOUT SPELLING.

CHAPTER XVII. ARITHMETIC IN THE SCHOOL.

CHAPTER XVIII. TEACHING LITERATURE.

CHAPTER XIX. THE TEACHER'S VACATION.

CHAPTER XX. THE TEACHER'S VIEW OF LIFE.

PREFACE.

TWENTY TALKS TO TEACHERS is an epitome of some of the discussions used by the author in teachers' institutes. It is not a profound book. It was not intended to be. Its object is to call the attention of young teachers to some of the every day conditions and problems which they must solve for themselves. The average term of service of teachers is little over three years, hence the great mass of teachers are young in service. A number of these have expressed themselves as being pleased with the discussions in institutes, especially so because they were plain homely talks rather than learned discussions. Perhaps these and others may appreciate them as well in the printed form.

No one is expected to agree with all that is said. If the topics are suggestive to young teachers, if the book helps them over a few of the hard places, if it sets them thinking on some topics, if the advice that is given proves sound, and if it should encourage a few to deeper study, better preparation and broader reading, it will have done well. Trusting that it may form the basis of profitable discussions in teachers' institutes and meetings it is submitted to the great body of young teachers whose zeal, enthusiasm and optimism, has done so much in the past, is doing yet, and will continue to do so much for our schools and out of whose work must grow in the future a worthy profession of teaching.

CHAPTER I.

AM I FIT TO TEACH?

THE talks that follow are addressed to young teachers. They treat everyday problems in a homely way. I have tried to be plain and pointed. I have omitted long terms. I do not speak of correlation, apperception, spontaneity, etc., and I omit long psychological terms. You get enough of these in county institutes and educational journals.

You are a school teacher. You have taught but a short time, and you want to make a success of the work. You may not be even a professional teacher. You hold neither a normal school diploma nor a life license. Both of these are good, and a desire for one or both upon your part would be commendable, but neither is all that is required to teach a successful school. Some of the most impractical of visionary dreamers I have ever known possessed the first, and the most tiresome of moss-backs the second. Given a young man or a young woman of good character and fair scholarship, desiring to teach school, with little or no professional study or training, yet anxious to succeed, what may I say to help them? What are the problems which they must face? What advice and what cautions will they need, and how may I say this to be most effective? This is my task.

Perhaps a little self-catechising on your part will be helpful. In the daily hour of self-communion—and each teacher should have such an hour—when you turn your thoughts inward and

analyse your own motives and shortcomings, ask yourself in all seriousness: “Am I fit to teach?” You may not be a “born teacher.” Very few persons are. Few indeed have the inborn qualities so strong that teaching and teaching alone will satisfy. Few are so heavenly inspired that they may teach and succeed at it in defiance of all rules or regulations or accepted laws of pedagogy. There are some qualities that will help you and some qualities that you may cultivate—qualities that are essential to the person who would aspire to be leaders and models for young people. What are some of these?

1. Your character must be above reproach.—Whatever else you may lack, your character must be above suspicion. Character, unquestioned and unquestionable, first. Other things may be essential, but this is the one first essential. If you are to be the model after which the boys and the girls—the most priceless product of the state—will both consciously and unconsciously fashion their lives, you must be in all things a worthy model. Pure thoughts, pure words, sincerity, honesty, earnest and deep convictions must be habitual with you. The purity of your own thought, the sincerity of your own motives, flashing through your eyes, the windows of your soul, must call out and strengthen the purity and nobility of other minds. Your character and your reputation, too, must stand the search light of the X-ray without showing flaw or blemish. This, and this alone, is the character and reputation worthy the teacher, the builder and architect of immortal minds.

Character is what you are; reputation is what others think you are. Character is essential to pure manhood and pure womanhood, but reputation also is essential to the teacher.

Reputation cannot exist long without character, but if from any cause however unjust your reputation is lost even though character remain, your best usefulness in that immediate community is gone. Then guard well your life if you are to teach. Avoid not only evil but the appearance of it. Be not prudish, but keep your reputation unsullied or seek not to stand as teacher to the young.

2. A thorough knowledge of the subject taught is essential to success.—You cannot be a successful teacher of the things you do not know. Clear-cut, definite, specific knowledge of a subject cannot be obtained in the pupils when the teacher does not have it. You cannot successfully teach up to the limit of your knowledge. There is a margin between your teaching limit and your knowing limit. As you reach your knowing limit in class, your questions become hazy, indefinite, crude. You hesitate, you stammer, you repeat yourself, you thresh over and over again the same thought. You lack proper perspective, and your teaching becomes dry and tiresome. A thorough and systematic knowledge of the subject you teach will give you teaching power.

Then, too, your teacher's knowledge of the subject must be broader and deeper and better organized than the pupil's. You must see each subject in its proper relation to other subjects. Each chapter must be seen in its relation to the chapters which precede and follow it in the development of the subject. The pupil's knowledge of a subject may end with the gathering and the understanding of facts, but the teacher's knowledge must include this and add to it the knowledge of its deeper relations to other subjects and to mind growth. To teach a subject is to

learn that subject anew, to see it in a new light, in a deeper and richer significance. You cannot as teacher reach your own highest success with but a student's knowledge and view of the subject you teach. You must have a connected and logical view of the subject as a whole, and also an intimate and accurate knowledge of the relations of the parts. This deeper and broader knowledge, properly focused and presented to pupils gives you strength as a teacher. The deeper, the broader, the more accurate the knowledge of the subject, the better the teaching, provided the teacher has tact to present it properly. You must focus your efforts and bring your teaching into the range of the pupil's mental capacity and in an organized form so that pupils may grasp it. You must stick to the subject, remembering that the minimum of your knowledge of the subject without review will probably be the pupil's maximum after study.

3. *You must keep your knowledge fresh by study.*—Growing minds alone are fit to teach. Stale mental stock does not create fresh mental appetites. Your attainments are of less importance than your mental habits. To teach well you must keep growing. Scholarly habits are more important than ripe scholarship with sluggish habits. Young teachers often do the best work. They are thinking, investigating, growing. They are full of life and enthusiasm, and the spirit is contagious with their pupils. The teacher who is accurate in details without being tiresome will train pupils to accuracy, unconsciously perhaps, but successfully. The young teacher faces the future with faith, and hope and enthusiasm. He is looking to the sunrise and not to the sunset. He is winning laurels, not resting upon laurels already won. He is losing his life in his work and

will find it again in the lives of his pupils. Should I choose an institution for myself or for others, I should choose an institution in which a majority of the faculty were yet young men, men making reputations rather than men who had made reputations. The hope and faith, the fire and enthusiasm, the energy and earnestness, which they bring to their work accomplishes more than men resting on their accomplishments can possibly accomplish.

You must carry on some line of study or investigation, or systematic reading, or else you must fossilize fast. This, when dealing with immature minds year after year, is your only hope. It may be mathematics, it may be history, it may be science, sociology, political economy, music or art, it matters very little what the subject is, but it must be something, and it must be pursued *regularly, systematically* and *persistently*. In no other way can you keep growing and not be lost in the educational ruts. When you cease to grow you begin to decay.

4. *You must love the work of teaching.*—If after a fair trial you do not love to teach and feel deep down in your own consciousness that you cannot learn to love it, quit by all means and do it at once. No one is fit to teach who finds the work thoroughly distasteful and who does not have a genuine love for children and young people. No sadder sight was ever seen than a long-faced pessimist in the school-room. It is cruelty personified to keep children in the school-room under the chilling, blighting influence of a sour-grained pessimistic teacher, long since dead, else never alive to the beauty of nature and the buoyancy of childhood—firmly convinced of the total depravity of all children. Teachers should be full of health,

beauty and good cheer. They must be able to enlist the goodwill, co-operation and sympathy of young people. Children should not look to teachers as masters to drive them to tasks and to exact penalties, but as friendly companions and leaders, with strength of character, and force enough to inspire, to guide, and to direct to higher and purer and nobler things. Teachers must be able to see the beauties and harmonies of nature all about them, and to lead pupils to feel and to appreciate the higher things of life, ever looking upward, lifting upward and pointing upward.

5. *You must be sincere.*—You must love your work and believe in it. You must have a burning desire to help young people, and faith in your ability to do so. Gushing and lip service will not suffice. The sincere teacher is always ready to serve. Your actions will speak louder than words. You will as a rule be in no hurry to leave the building after school in the evening, but ready and willing and anxious to consult, to help, to advise, to be of service. The primary teacher's success may be judged by the group of children that circle about her at recess, or that wait to go home as she goes. The sincere teacher is found at teachers' meetings and associations, ready to help and on time. If you are genuinely sincere in your profession you will own a few professional books and add to them yearly. You will take and read educational journals and periodicals, and find pleasure in the reading. You will be found in the summer schools and colleges gaining help and inspiration for your work. You will have faith in the profession of teaching, and faith in yourself, and in your ability and worthiness to be one of the leaders of the youth of our land.

6. *You must possess a worthy ambition.*—You are a poor teacher if you have reached the height of your ambition, intellectually, professionally or successfully. If you are content or satisfied with your work, you will let things drag. You should be ambitious to do the best work of any teacher in your community. You ought to be ambitious enough also to desire better facilities for teaching and broader opportunities. We regret the itineracy and lack of stability in the teaching profession. It is one of the problems of the day. But all this is better than a body of teachers thoroughly content with conditions as they are. The teacher content to adjust himself to the conditions of a certain community and cloister himself there for life at a minimum salary is lacking in the ambition to do the best work for himself or others. The teacher who has ambition enough to improve and who seeks to do his best because it is right and because he desires to advance in his profession will kindle higher ambitions in his pupils and build higher types of men and women. A worthy ambition, a proper rating of your worth, pluck and stamina to stand for your rights, but to do it decorously and properly, is essential to your best work as a teacher.

Ask yourself, seriously and earnestly, “Am I fit to teach?”

CHAPTER II.

SHALL TEACHING BE MY LIFE WORK?

SHALL teaching be my life work? This question stares the sincere young teacher squarely in the face. He must answer it sooner or later. His answer means much to himself as well as to others. We speak of the profession of teaching, but in the truer sense we have none at present. Teaching may be "the noblest of professions and the sorriest of trades," but as long as our standards of entrance are so low and the number of exits so many, teaching cannot be in its strictest sense a profession. It is far behind medicine or law, and to a large number of persons it is only a trade or a temporary occupation.

There are professional teachers. There are persons who have spent time and money and mental energy studying the problems of the school and of education. There are persons who seek earnestly to formulate the truths and to reduce teaching to a science. Many of these truths are as clearly worked out, as reliable and as completely accepted as are many of the principles of law and medicine. The work is yet incomplete. Shall I make it a life work and give to it my life and the best that is in me? This is the question.

No man can answer this question for you. It is personal. The best that can be done, and this is worth while, is to weigh the good and the bad features and leave you to choose for yourself. So much depends upon the individual. Let me say also that it is never too late to mend. I am one who believes that there are

thousands of good teachers, persons who are teaching and doing it well, persons who are leaving their impress for good upon boys and girls, and young men and young women, and who will not make teaching their life-work, and have never intended to do so. They are teaching now, and they are, for the time being, putting their best self into the work. So long as they live in the work and get life out of it nothing is lost. When they begin to slight it, turning their energy to law or medicine or business, when their best self goes to something else while they become “school keepers” instead of teachers, it is time for them to quit.

And what about the lady teachers? Are they to make it a life work too? That is also a question for the individual. To this large and growing class of zealous, capable and untiring teachers the present and the future owes a debt which the world can scarcely pay. There is but one more sacred place—the wife and mother’s. The woman who quits teaching to become the center of the home—the purest, the noblest, the most sacred—she does not leave the profession. She is only promoted.

Let us look at the ugly side of the profession first.

1. It is itinerate.—The best teacher in the best school in the best county in the best state can hardly hope to live and die in the same position. He cannot depend entirely upon teaching and plan and build a home, plant his trees and feel confident he will rest beneath their shade and eat their fruit in years to come. He may be ever so conscientious, he may be ever so capable, and in time he must change. The position will outgrow him or he will outgrow the position. He will spank the wrong boy or

refuse to spank him—it matters not—sooner or later he will do what the powers that be at the time think is the wrong thing, and then he must go. To the real lover of the settled home, this is a serious drawback. Professionally it may not be so serious as it seems. If you expect to teach as a life work you must expect to change every few years either because you choose to change or because you must. From the standpoint of your own professional advancement I should advise you to move just awhile before it becomes necessary. There are always places open, and they are often more easily secured while things are pleasant in your present position.

2. The money returns from teaching is less than in law, medicine, or business.—The same amount of energy and ability used in teaching would frequently bring many times its money returns in other things. The successful lawyer or physician often makes several times the amount in a year that the superintendent of his schools makes. So far as I know the highest salaried educational position in the United States is only ten thousand a year. It is a very common thing to find a physician whose income is more than that. Hundreds of attorneys may be found receiving many times this amount as salary, and ten thousand a year is not now considered a large salary for the heads of business firms.

3. The energy used is great.—Probably few other positions require a greater amount of energy constantly. It is the little things which sap the life of the teacher—the constant strain, the nervous tension, the magnetism going out continuously, the half fear it may be that something will go wrong.

4. *It is narrowing mentally.*—Except in the highest college or university positions the teacher is dealing with persons less mature, less intellectual, and in one sense inferior. This is apt to cause him to grow dictatorial, pedantic and conceited. It is often an excellent thing for the teacher to come in contact with superiors, to run against business men in a business manner, and learn other people's estimate of himself. To have some minor occupation—something besides teaching, interesting but not all-absorbing, is often a boon to the teacher. It keeps him from ruts and grooves and from fossilizing professionally. The lawyer, the business man and the physician are often rubbing against their equals and superiors, and this is a thought-awakener to them which the teacher often misses.

5. *Teaching is for the young.*—Teaching is a young man's profession. With a number of notable exceptions, the great mass of teachers are under fifty. The teacher who has not made more than a local reputation before he is fifty years old will find it hard to advance if he must change. Hard as it may be upon the earnest, conscientious, hard-working teacher, most of us if compelled to choose between a man of fifty and a man of thirty would, if other things were equal, choose the man of thirty. The successful physician at fifty may have shorter office hours, charge larger fees and have cases coming to him for consultation because of his age and experience. The lawyer at fifty is in his prime. To him his clients come to consult upon important cases. Minor and unimportant cases he turns over "to the boys." But it is different with the teacher at fifty. Every one is then trying to put him on the shelf, and the chances are they will succeed.

These are the things which make against teaching as a life work, but the picture has a brighter side—a side too often overlooked in this day of dollar chasing.

1. Teaching pays at least a comfortable living from the very first.—Hundreds of persons enter it because of this fact, and many remain for life because of their love for the work. The doctor and the lawyer must go through a starvation period, and many of them do not survive it. The lawyer that pays his necessary expenses and lives comfortably from his fees during the first five years is on the high road to success. The same is equally true of the physician. To tide over this starvation period many take up side lines which prove fatal to their real success, while others find subordinate salaried places in firms and incorporations. The salary in teaching may be low, but it is specific and certain, and meets present needs.

2. Teaching keeps you in close touch with the best people.—Nothing is more conducive to pure thoughts and upright conduct—not even the ministry. To be looked at as a model and as a guide by the boys and girls of a community day after day—if that does not inspire to noble thoughts and actions, what will? A father and mother can see their son or daughter leave home to teach with every assurance that no other occupation will be a higher incentive to pure thinking and perfect living. The best people of the community welcome them to their home, the churches invite them to take part, and simple, trusting childhood in its purity, looks to them for guidance. If this does not keep them in paths of virtue they must show signs of total depravity. Do not overlook the fact when choosing a life work, that for personal purity, high ideals

and constant inspiration to the highest, the purest and the best of our natures, teaching is unsurpassed.

3. Hours are shorter than in many occupations.—While the nerve strain is great and worry and fear often intrude, the teacher has more time than many other occupations. Exercise and recreation in the open air an hour a day or more is always possible. If one likes to garden, to raise chickens, or to tend flowers, they can find the time, and the recreation will be beneficial. Teachers complain of the long hours and hard work partly from habit and partly because they do not know the long hours and real hardships of other occupations. To the person who is prepared to teach and who has the gift or power to govern and control without worrying about it, or having to continually fight for it, teaching is not exhaustive drudgery. It is true, lessons must be looked over and work planned outside of school, but even then there is some time for relaxation and recreation.

4. The rewards are many.—In a sense, most teachers teach for the money—that is, if they were not paid for it very few could afford to give their time to the work. The laborer is worthy of his hire, and yet may the Lord pity the person and his pupils if he teaches for money alone. The money will enable him to continue the work, and it should be ample enough to give a comfortable living with all of the necessities of life and a few of the luxuries. It should be ample also to provide for improvement and for necessary accessories to carry on the work and to lay by enough for old age or a rainy day. But the money received from teaching sinks into insignificance with the real teacher when compared with the real pleasure one can

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