

Literature, &c.

The American Magazines
FOR SEPTEMBER.

From the Columbian Magazine.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

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CHAPTER I.

SOME of my readers as are acquainted with life as it goes on in the villages of New England, particularly of Connecticut, can have no idea of the importance attached to that gentleman who, however high sounding and euphonical the name inherited from his family or bestowed by his sponsors, and despite the endeavors of some three or four very disinterested young ladies, is universally known throughout the place as the schoolmaster of the East, West, North or South district.

If the gentleman be a stranger in the place, his arrival awakens a thousand conjectures and inquiries. The mothers are anxious to know if he is fond of children and what kind of a person he will be to board, for that villainous custom which obliges the teacher to change his boarding house once in two or three days is still very prevalent. The men speculate on his politics and discuss the probability of his being in favor of tariff or anti-tariff, annexation or repudiation, or of anything else that may for the time be in vogue as a party Shibboleth. All the girls are very curious about his personal appearance; and last, but not least, the children wonder if he will be good natured and give them easy lessons and good long recesses.

And then his first appearance at meeting!

Ah! wo to him then, poor wight, if he be at all bashful or unaccustomed to the stare of a country congregation. Some years since the good people of the Centre district in the town of S—, manifested an unusual interest in schools. Some three or four men, capable of appreciating the advantages of a good school, were determined to have a thoroughly qualified teacher. As the more prominent and influential men their views were adopted by many, who perhaps did not fully appreciate their importance. Yet there was a strong party opposed to them.

Some, whose families consisted of young girls, objected to the expense, and insisted that it would be sufficient to hire a woman at four or five dollars per month, who could teach them to read, write, and cypher as far as the Rule of Three. A few were obstinately opposed to the introduction of new studies and new books. "They didn't know about these new plans. Daboll's arithmetic was good enough; it had done for their fathers, and would do for their children." These were the conservatives who lived in the past and deemed it heresy to think the world could grow wiser. They made it their boast that they walked diligently in the way of their fathers, which they found exceedingly barren, judging from their spirit and appearance.

Two or three candidates had already been examined and found deficient in the necessary qualifications. The district committee who, like the Gibonites of old, are hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole district, were in despair. Thanksgiving day was at hand, and still no schoolmaster.

One rainy Saturday afternoon these two unfortunate men were seated on a bench under the piazza of the village post office talking over their perplexities and canvassing the capabilities of several young men of their acquaintance. One of them often turned an anxious look towards the heavens while the other busily plied his knife on a pine block with something like an intent to whittle out a schoolmaster. The dexterity with which he carved out certain little rings and chains intimated that it was not beyond his skill to manufacture one, if he choose, that would not have suffered in comparison with some at least of that honorable fraternity.

The weather seer, whose figure very much resembled a pair of compasses, and whose face constantly reminded one of an unfinished sketch in which all those delicate and minute touches which give dignity and expression to the features were wanting, turned and addressed his companion.

"I'll tell you what, Mr Howd; I guess you had better ride over to G—'s to-night and see if you can't engage Mr Pierson."

Mr Howd did not reply, but deliberately closing his knife and brushing the shavings from his cane colored pantaloons, rose and looked earnestly down the street at a young man who, with a portmanteau in his hand, was rapidly approaching the house. At length he drew in his breath with a low whistle and replied:

"I reckon now, deacon Tyler, there's no use in travelling the country from Danto Beer-ahaba. Now I'll bet that that ere feller coming up the street is just the chap we want. I'll ask him any how."

"But, Mr Howd, he is a stranger and—"

"So much the better, deacon," interrupted Mr Howd, and as the young man came up the steps, he was greeted with: "Rather muddy walking in these parts, sir."

The stranger bowed and proceeded to shake the water from his umbrella, when Mr Howd again addressed him.

"Well, mister, this ere gentleman, deacon Tyler and I are in search of a schoolmaster. You wouldn't like to take a school, would you?"

The person addressed turned and faced his inquirer so suddenly as to make the circumspect deacon start.

He might have been twenty-five years old; he had a slender yet well developed form, a broad open brow and clear dark gray eyes, the

expression of which would have been grave and even severe, but for the shadow of a smile lurking around the full yet finely formed lips. He looked at Mr Howd steadily in the face for a second, and that smile gradually stole over his whole face as he replied:

"That will depend upon the place and circumstances."

"Why, as to the place, it is this ere district, and by circumstances, I suppose you mean farms, Mister—Mister—"

"Grey," replied the stranger.

"Eighteen dollars a month and your board, sir. Pretty handsome wages considering the times," said the hitherto silent deacon.

The stranger directed a searching glance to the deacon's meagre face, and then again resting his eye on the comical, good humoured visage of Mr Howd, he said, "You are fully authorized gentlemen to engage a teacher?"

"Sartainly, sir," replied the deacon drawing up his ladder-like figure to its full height.

The young man mused awhile, and said, "I agree to keep your school five months at these terms. I will meet the examining committee whenever you please. You will find me here."

He was about to enter the house, when Mr. Howd exclaimed:

"I'll tell you what, Mr Grey, you'll find this ere examination a pretty tough job, I reckon. I give you fair warning."

Mr Grey smiled and entered the house, which, as in most country towns, served for post office and tavern.

Mr Howd looked at his companion with a knowing smile and observed, "There, deacon, that is what I call doing business. A likely looking chap, that."

The deacon shook his head solemnly. "I don't know, I'm afeared we have been too hasty. We have a mighty trust committed to us, Mr Howd. The temporal and spiritual welfare of the rising generation. Who knows," he continued with a more portentous shake of the head, "what pernicious heresies this man may spread abroad. He may be an infidel, or something still worse."

"Or an orthodox minister," replied his companion with a good humoured smile. "He looks very much like one."

On Sunday evening Mr Grey was examined, and confirmed the high opinion which Mr Howd had conceived of him. Indeed, his simple manly bearing and ready intelligent answers won the respect of the whole board, save the doubting deacon, to whose impertinent queries concerning his religious creed and private history, he returned brief and evasive answers.

After the examination, there was some difficulty in deciding on whom the teacher should be quartered the ensuing week.

None were quite ready to receive him. Esq. Mulford's wife was "rather poorly;" another's women folks were cleaning house for Thanksgiving; deacon thought his wife would be a "good deal put out," as she did not expect any one.

"Well," at last said Mr Howd, "if you can't do any better, I guess you'll have to home with me to the old hive. Nothin' never puts Eunice out."

After a few moments walk across the fields they descried the light from the old 'bee hive,' as Mr Howd termed his old farm house.

"Come this way," he said to his guest, as they entered the gate. "We shall find them in the kitchen. Eunice is pretty generally a reasonable woman, but all the witches in the world couldn't make her move into the out room 'til arter Thanksgiving."

They entered a long old-fashioned kitchen, a bright fire was burning in the great fire place, and around it sat a pleasant motherly-looking woman and five or six children.

"Wife," said Mr Howd, as he motioned Mr Grey to approach the fire, "this is Mr Grey, our schoolmaster; he will board here this week. Joel, my boy, take the gentleman's hat and overcoat."

Mrs Howd welcomed him kindly and placed him a seat by the fire. He soon felt at home, and there was a pleasant smile on the mother's lip when she saw, after some little coaxing, her little four years old Harry seated on the schoolmaster's knee, giving him an account of the famous sled his brothers Bill and Joel were making, on which to draw him to school.

Howd, who had been busy about some necessary affair, now seated himself, and after looking round the circle, said, "I thought one head was missing. Where is Ruth?"

"Gone to Esq. Mulford's. Betsey came over here and nothing would do but Ruth must go and help her to make her new cloak."

CHAPTER II.

That evening nothing was thought of or talked of at the Esquire's but the schoolmaster. Mrs Tyler and her two daughters with two or three other ladies, dropped in with their knitting, and after a short eulogy of the sermon, they were soon engaged in relating to each other, all the "They says," which had reached their ears concerning him.

The girls were not less interested; and Miss Betsey, we beg her pardon, Miss Elizabeth Mulford, well nigh forgot the air of languid indifference which she had assumed in company ever since the last fashionable novel had taught her that it was considered the perfection of manners among the aristocracy of England.

Mrs Tyler, who was a complete echo of the deacon, entertained the company with an account of that gentleman's strong doubts of the schoolmaster's orthodoxy, which had been confirmed by his absence from meeting that day. She was interrupted by her youngest daughter Nancy, whose love of mischief often caused the deacon to groan in spirit, with, "But mother, you know Mr Meigs said that Mr Grey was reading the bible when he came home at noon."

"Yes, child; but when your father with his usual zeal inquired into the matter, Mr Meigs could not say whether it was the bible or the apocrypha."

"Well," whispered Nancy in the ear of Ruth Lindsay, "I don't care if he is the Pope. I hope he is, for then father will have some one else to lecture, and then I shall have some peace."

The deacon and Esquire Mulford soon entered, and gave an account of the examination.

"Grey," said the esquire, "there is a family of that name in F—; I bought my red oxen of a Mr Grey there. But his only son is in college, and if he wasn't, wouldn't be round looking up a school."

"Why not, pa," said Miss Mulford, "it would be so romantic."

"Fiddlesticks end Betsey. The Greys of F—, are no fools."

"There is a mystery about the man," said the deacon pompously. "As one of the committee, and one not unmindful I hope and trust of the great responsibilities resting on me, I thought it my duty to ask him some questions; he was loth to answer me, sir. I'm afeared we have introduced into our little flock, a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"Poh!" said the frank hearted esquire, "You are always finding wolves, deacon. Every young fellow don't want to give a history of his grandmother. He has referred us to Mr D—, who is connected with the seminary in W—, if we wish for farther information. I rather think he is a theological student, some charity scholar perhaps."

Miss Phebe Tyler and Miss Elizabeth Mulford separately, yet by a similar process of reasoning, came to the same conclusion, namely, that the young ladies' sewing society, which of late had been somewhat neglected, must be reorganized, and the avails thereof appropriated exclusively to the benefit of indigent students.

The two younger girls, Nancy and Ruth, looked at each other sadly, for they foresaw that parties and sleigh-rides would be out of fashion that winter. Well might they look sad; they had anticipated so much pleasure, and now how should they, to whom God had given such an irrepressible spirit of joyousness, confine their lives to the strict letter of the law for five long winter months!

CHAPTER III.

After the various reports to which she had listened at Esquire Mulford's, it is not surprising if Ruth Lindsay's heart did beat rather faster than usual as she crossed her so-called father's threshold; for the Howds were not her parents though they had lavished on her a full measure of paternal love ever since they took her to their hearts, a babe of two weeks old, to fill the place of their own little girl, whom God had taken to Heaven; and she, like her namesake, the gentle Moabitess, "clave unto them."

She was—but no—my pen is no Daguerreo-type. I cannot describe her. But if you are at all curious, dear lady, let me tell you that you beautiful fountain in the Park, on whose changeable grace your eye lingers so lovingly in your walks on fragrant June mornings, is not more fresh, more pure, or more gladsome than the heart of little Ruth Lindsay. As the glittering spray keeps bright and green the belt of the verdure around it, and fills the air with dewy freshness, while the song of the water sprite fills your soul with dim and indescribable longings for that land of perfect and eternal harmony, even so did the loving nature of Ruth keep bright and fresh those delicate flowers, the household affections around their humble hearth; even so did the music of her daily life seem but a prelude to that anthem of joy with which the angels greet the soul returning to its native heaven.

But the timidity which she felt at first, in the presence of the strange schoolmaster, soon wore off. She found he was neither proud nor reserved and could laugh as heartily as her father Howd himself. They soon became excellent friends, and when she timidly ventured a question about his books he willingly spoke to her of their beauties and explained the difficult passages, for he felt that she possessed a mind on which his teachings would not be lost, though hitherto, her only library had been the flowers.

CHAPTER IV.

Soon after the school commenced, it was visited as usual by the committee, consisting of Scoville, the minister, Doctor Meredith and the deacon. While Scoville and the doctor listened to the recitations, the deacon was intently poring over the writing books with a perturbed and lengthened countenance.

After a few words of encouragement to the children from the first named gentleman, and a long dissertation on the deacon on the frailty of this earthly tabernacle and the sublunary things of this world, they took leave.

As they left the house, the doctor remarked, "This man is evidently both a scholar and a gentleman. Do you know anything of his history, Scoville?"

"No, he seems somewhat reserved on that point. I thought there might be something unpleasant or painful connected with it, and have therefore refrained from making inquiries."

"Very likely. Is he not a beautiful writer, deacon?"

"Ay, the hand-writing is well enough, but the copies, gentlemen; I'm afeared you did not notice the vain, sinful nature of the copies!"

"Why, I must confess that I did not notice, them particularly; did you, doctor, replied Scoville."

"No; I merely looked at the penmanship. What were they deacon?"

"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, and who can calculate the dreadful evils that may result from placing before children such pernicious and abominable doctrines as these."

So saying he drew from his pocket a scrap of paper and read: "Be true to the dreams of thy youth." To think, gentlemen, that our tender offspring should be taught to believe in such vain, sinful things as dreams. "Open thy heart to the influences of Nature." Alas! my brethren, who does not know how utterly wicked and carnal minded is the human heart; how vile its natural influences. Are we not all sinners by nature, and more so by practice? Here is another. "Life is a festival, but a festival only to the wise." Have we not reason to tremble for the rising generation when they are taught to look upon this poor miserable state of probation as a festival! And the girls copies was all about violets and daisies and such like airy vanities."

The doctor was seized with a sudden fit of coughing as the deacon concluded, and Scoville struggled hard to repress a smile, as he replied: "Perhaps you do not fully comprehend the meaning of his quotations. They are rather unusual, but I do not think we need apprehend anything very evil."

The deacon's lamentations were interrupted by the unwelcome intelligence from a neighbor that widow Catlin's cow had broke into his field and was quietly making her supper from one of his goodly number of haystacks. Wandering, for the thousandth time in his life, why widows did not keep better fences, he left his companions and descended to the sublunary things of this world.

CHAPTER V.

Though Mr. Grey found it very unpleasant to change his boarding house so often, yet by this means he became acquainted with some whose society he highly prized. His history was still a sore puzzle to most of the good people. There was an air of independence and dignity in his manners that silenced the most invertebrate questioners, and they solaced themselves by pronouncing him a "curious critter."

As the rumor of his being a charity student was the most plausible, it was generally accepted. The young ladies discussed the subject warmly. Miss Mulford was astonished that any one at all acquainted with the world should doubt it for a moment.

"Certainly," she observed, "she ought to know, for she was acquainted with several students of old Yale, who visited at her aunt's in New Haven, and Mr. Grey very much resembled them in his dress and manner."

There was one thing however in the conduct of Mr. Grey that perplexed even Miss Mulford. Notwithstanding he had received an urgent invitation to attend the sewing society, now in active operation, and had been duly notified of the time and place of each meeting, he rarely attended, and Miss Phebe Tyler was very certain that he had passed several of those idealical evenings at Mr. Howd's.

"Why, I really believe he fancies Ruth," observed one of the girls, as they were discussing the subject. "What else can take him there so often?"

"Business of course," replied Miss Mulford, with a dignified air. "Mr. Howd engaged him, you know."

Miss Mulford spoke as she thought, for it never occurred to her that there could be any sympathy of thought or feeling between Mr. Grey, the student, and one who, notwithstanding she had been her playmate in the days of childhood, she had of late began to consider as Mrs. Howd's *hulp*, and consequently her inferior.

Mr. Grey in the meantime, unconscious of the interest he excited, was busy in his school, and the children who troubled themselves little about creeds of any kind, pronounced him "first rate."

It did indeed occur to him that Miss Mulford and her friend Miss Tyler, manifested an unusual degree of interest in the cause of the "Education Society," and that they invariably appealed to him for information and advice, yet he gave no farther thought to the matter.

One evening however when he was boarding at Esq. Mulford's he was surprised to find a package on the table in his chamber directed to himself. He opened it and found a large supply of stockings, cravats, collars and buttons. He stood for a moment in perfect astonishment. What could it mean? Where did they come from? At length he espied the corner of a note peeping out from between the folds of a cravat. He took it up, ran his eye over its contents, and burst into a hearty laugh.

It was from Miss Mulford, the secretary of the young ladies sewing society, requesting him in the name of the society, to accept of the contents of the package as a slight mark of their esteem, with many kind wishes for his future happiness and usefulness.

There was some mistake. It was evident that they supposed him to be a charity student. He soon regained his usual thoughtful expression, for he appreciated kindness in any form, and highly esteemed many of that class of men who, in their persevering efforts in the pursuit of knowledge have gladly received aid from the benevolent. He carefully replaced the articles in the package, and the next morning gave them to Miss Mulford, saying:

"There is some mistake, Miss Mulford! The society, I presume, has presented me with the inclosed articles in the belief that I am a theological student, but as I have no claims on their kindness in that character I cannot conscientiously accept them."

"Not a charity—a theological student, I mean?" exclaimed Miss Mulford, for in her mind these terms were synonymous. "Why, Mr. Grey, everybody says you are! Mrs. Tyler