

Aug. 27, 1872

ADDRESS TO PARENTS

BY

JAMES RICALTON

TEACHER IN THE

PUBLIC SCHOOL

AT

MAPLEWOOD, ESSEX COUNTY,

NEW JERSEY

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TO TEACHERS

In the following address we have endeavored to present as clearly and comprehensibly as the brevity of space devoted to the subject will permit, the more prominent and common duties of Parents and Teacher. We have also aimed at a suitableness for general distribution; and if we have succeeded in expressing a common sentiment of our fellow teachers, we offer for circulation amongst the parents of your pupils the facilities of our address; taking our reward in a hopefulness that it may contribute in a humble way to the cause of common school education.

JAMES RICALTON.

MAPLEWOOD, N. J.,
Aug. 27, 1872.

ADDRESS TO PARENTS.

The intimate relation which exists between us as parents and teacher, and conjointly as instructors of youth, has induced me to address you in relation to our mutual duties, which, in our respective capacities, are indeed numerous and very urgent. And in pursuing our subject, a free and unreserved expression of fact in regard to the oft-neglected duties of parents, will be necessary; therefore, in specifying delinquencies, if an appositeness of fact to any of the parents or guardians of our pupils should be presented, we trust it will be remedially applied, — remembering however, that no personal allusion is intended; and that our highest aspiration is to educe a greater and more general interest, and a more faithful co operation on the part of parents.

That the cause of education generally and particularly in our public schools, is greatly hindered by the general apathy and indifference of parents, is a regretful fact, which should stimulate every educationist to a counteracting exertion, commensurate with the detriment arising from such passivity on the side of those who should be most intimately concerned.

In some communities a few persons may be found who manifest that interest in their school, and the education of their children, which the importance of such obligations demands, and who practically recognize the utility and even indispensableness of a thorough rudimentary education -- acquirable in common schools, and not only acknowledge practically the utility of such education, but their divine obligation to educate their children to the extent of their ability; but such parents are far in the minority, although most might make such recognitions theoretically.

The spirit of acquisitiveness is allowed to supplant the more beneficent impulses of a sterling manhood. Selfishness and material aggrandizement preclude every just attention to moral and intellectual culture. A universal and

obsequious inclination to add to that perniciously vital *thing*, the purse, along with stolid ignorance, prevent much necessary concern in the educational interests of children. One thinks he cannot leave his farm to attend to school affairs; another thinks he cannot possibly leave his store to ascertain how his children succeed at school. Another has no children at school; therefore school is no concern of his. Others cannot leave their business or employment to give any direct attention to school matters, (unless by way of malevolent detraction or complaint); thereby giving practical subordination to a paramount interest, and one which only requires an occasional recognition by parents in the school-room, and an attention at home that would not unreasonably interfere with the pursuit of their various avocations.

Parents, remember that an education is the greatest heritage you can bequeath to your children. It is a debt you owe to them. It is a debt you owe to posterity. Remember, also, as your children grow up to be men and women, and go forth into the busy activities of life, they will, as a rule, occupy positions in business or in society according as they are educationally competent.

Servility accompanies ignorance, and independence knowledge. A worthy and intelligent citizenship on your part now, and on the part of your children here, after, alike demand that their initial education receives your most faithful consideration.

And in the bestowal of this invaluable tuitionary blessing upon your children, do not be governed by the extent of your own educational advantages, especially where such have been limited. We have not unfrequently heard parents say, that what learning had, by necessity or otherwise, been sufficient for themselves, they would *make* suffice their children. Surely such uncharitableness and illiberality from parents towards the dearest objects of their affections is most ungracious. Rather consider how much more successful and happy your own lives might have been rendered by the possession of higher literary attainments; then, impelled by broader instincts of humanity, you may be more active to prevent a similar source of regret with your children.

A child's education does not begin at school, but at home, and chiefly with the mother. The incipient maternal training does more towards moulding the moral status of manhood than all after-influences. We seldom have difficulty with a pupil's conduct whose training at home has been prudently attended to. By a child's behavior at *school* we have unmistakable evidence of what the *home* government is; indeed, the neglect of judicious parental discipline is nearly our entire hindrance to the easy attainment of necessary order at school.

"As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

Upon a consideration of the above facts, parents will perceive the necessity of performing wisely and seasonably these importunate duties.

Hoping that we may be humbly helpful in arousing some to a more practical view of the subject, we proceed to mention some of the more common and specific obligations of parents in reference to schools.

Oftentimes, when we are most faithfully striving to secure, by every devisable means, that necessary obedience at school which children have not

known at home, we are tried and condemned by a most unjust and biased family tribunal — precluding every opportunity for defence, and not even apprising us of its grievances. Parents will cavil and express a dissatisfaction with the proceedings of their school, without taking due pains to ascertain the competency of the teacher, or the efficiency of his management; and too generally assume the caprice of their children as a criterion of the school. If their children like to go to school and love their teacher, all must be right; if they dislike to attend school and entertain a disregard for their teacher, something must be vitally wrong and reprehensible in his management. Such a standard of judgment in some cases will prove a correct one, but by no means an unexceptional indication of a well-ordered school; for, where pupils are disinclined to be studious, and inclined to be idle and frolicsome, a lax discipline, small requirements in their studies, and a genial and playful sociability in the teacher, will enlist their enthusiastic approval; while such a course may be pernicious in the extreme. On the other hand, when children are thus disposed, a wise and kind, but rigid exaction of every duty, would quite probably incur their petulance and displeasure. Whence, according to the theory of *please children, please parents*, captious parents would have ample cause for complaint. But such a course of conduct as that, to which we have just alluded, on the part of parents, is an utter negation of those specific obligations which we wish to have positively and practically recognized.

Parents, *examine* your school. Ascertain the qualifications of your children's instructors. And if they are faithful in the discharge of their arduous duties, sustain them in their trying position; they need your heart-felt sympathies and encouragement in the laborious but honorable task of instructing your children. A faithful teacher is a public friend, but often made the splenic recipient of the community — the public target.

Parents and people generally show how little they understand the perplexities of the teacher's position, by presuming to dictate the proper course of a teacher. How often do we hear persons say a teacher should do this, and should not do that, and if *I* were teacher, *I* would do this, that and the other, etc.! While the same persons, in ordinary probability, are utterly incapable of either governing or teaching the commonest school, even, for a single day; and possibly unable to write legibly a single line, write grammatically a single sentence, or make with any degree of readiness the simplest arithmetical computation; yet will by such presumption assume to understand the very difficult art and theory of teaching. Ignorance, the source of all wrong, is the source of this. Where perfection is expected of finitude, a fool can be a critic. In school matters, as in other affairs, we invariably find the more intelligent persons most reluctant to make complaint, less difficult to please, being more reasonable in their expectations, and knowing if it is impossible to serve two masters, it will be relatively difficult to serve a score. Therefore, parents, before you criticise, cavil or condemn we urge upon you the importunacy of thorough investigation into the condition of your school, by frequent visitations to the school-room. If your children bring home unfavorable reports, and murmur against the teacher and the school, do not make such circumstances a point to judge from. Do not countenance the little antipathies which your children may contract at school. Their motives may be pure and truthful, but their judgment is immature and

unreliable. They are apt to give distorted and incorrect accounts of affairs. They are interested and *ex parte* witnesses. So, with due regard for your children, do not take *their* evidence either for or against the school. And we would further urge that any dissatisfaction arising from the perpetration of wrongs real or imaginary on the part of the instructor, be adjusted directly through him. But do not criticise or complain in the presence of your children, as you thereby only develop in them a disaffection towards their teacher, break the harmony of school government without correcting the cause of complaint.

From what we have said or may say, we do not wish to be understood as implying that pupils and parents are always wrong, and the teacher right, — for unworthies infest our profession; but surely, (although not infallible,) teachers should understand their own business best; especially should they understand their own peculiar work better than their pupils, or the parents, whose knowledge of the school affairs has assuredly not been acquired by a familiarity with the routine of the school-room. Another source of annoyance to the teacher is a family nepotism, that impels an inclination on the side of the parents to murmur against any unavoidable infliction of punishment for persistent violation of indispensable rules. Parents in this respect seem to be actuated by personal feelings similar to those of the boy, who, when asked how he wished to be punished, promptly replied, "*If you please, sir, according to the Italian system of penmanship — heavy strokes up, down ones light.*" Any competent instructor should know when it is prudent to administer punishment in a-i-y form; and parents should be ready to exercise implicit reliance in the discretion of the teacher, until incompetency is proven. Of late years it has almost become fashionable, in discussing the various methods of maintaining order in school, for a certain class of teachers, whom we might pertinently distinguish as *stereotyped*; to say they govern by "*moral suasion*," and who are unwilling to admit exceptional necessities for, *physical suasion*. We believe such an extreme theoretical position arises, oftener from an assumption to advanced ideas, than as the scrupulous conclusion of investigative experience. Yet we believe that government by love, by appealing affectionately to a pupil's better feeling, and their sense of duty, is decidedly the better course of government, under admissible circumstances; but that such a course is unexceptionably practicable, our experience is unwilling to concede.

And the abolishment of corporal punishment, -- precluding a discretionary exercise of penal power on the part of the teacher, we deem eminently impolitic. "School discipline, and indeed, , discipline everywhere, in order to be, thorough and efficient, must be based on authority. This implies a *right* to enforce and the power, to do so, even by the use of severe means, if necessary. The discipline of the school-room must be sustained, in some cases, by the infliction of punishment. This may be of various kinds. To some a mere look, or word of reproof, may be more severe and more efficacious than the severest personal chastisement to others. But, while we freely admit the undesirableness of corporal punishment, and feel that it need not often be resorted to, we still contend that the right to inflict it does, and should of necessity rest with the teacher, and the mere consciousness of this, on the part of the pupils, will have a controlling and salutary influence." [C. Northend]

The fickleness of some parents is oftentimes a source of unpleasantness to teachers. If their children should, by correct deportment or excellence in their studies, merit any special expression of approbation from their teacher, win a prize, or receive any just preference in the bestowment of any particular patronage amongst the pupils. the effect will be readily noticeable in the apparent and unusual friendliness of the parents, who are then ready to express their unqualified admiration of the teacher, and exhaust their whole resource of complimentary adjectives in commendation of the school. While, if it becomes necessary, under opposite circumstances, for the teacher to administer severe reproof, or inflict punishment, in the moral interests of the same children, he might expect at the next meeting of the same parents to find them strangely reserved, cold and disaffected. We desire a more *equable, dignified, and less capricious* bearing on the part of parents towards the instructor of their children, whether in a spirit of approval or disapproval. An irregular and unpunctual attendance is another thing detrimental both to individual pupils and the school generally, and annoying, to the teacher beyond any reasonable endurance. By absence pupils will miss the lessons of their class during the time of absence, and in all probability those lessons will involve rules and principles absolutely necessary to their subsequent progress; and upon the return of the absentees, the teacher must either allow them to commence along with their class, under a continual disadvantage from omission by absence, or require them to commence where they left off in their several studies, thereby forming separate recitations which would encroach unreasonably upon the time of the school, and impose an extra tax upon the teacher. Some parents often allow their children to absent themselves for the most trivial reasons, and thereby inculcate a disposition in their children to disregard the demands of their school and the importance of punctuality. *Tardy* pupils very much interrupt the orderly procedure of school exercises and take the teacher's time to record tardiness. Tardy pupils are apt to make tardy men and women; and surely punctuality is a cardinal virtue in business. Therefore, the welfare of the school imperatively behooves parents to enforce a steady and punctual attendance, without which, no, great or thorough progress can reasonably be expected, even from the aptest pupils. And we shall say here, that the indocility of some pupils makes their progress necessarily very slow, and their parents or guardians should not expect too much; remembering that it is impossible to make *first* rate scholars, out of *second* or *third* rate stock.

Parents, we trust that due reflection upon this synoptical presentation of your more prominent duties, will stimulate a greater interest and activity in the support of what has been fitly denominated, the " People's Colleges "-- our free schools. "In this great work, there should be no sluggards. Let no man cheat himself with the delusion that he is but one, and, therefore, it matters little whether he acts or not; of such units is the sum total of mankind made up. Let no man do himself the gross injustice to believe, and act upon the belief that he can exert no influence. Every member of the community can do something to advance the work, and is bound, by the most solemn obligations, to do what he can. It matters not what may be his condition or calling; whether the station he occupies is public or private; whether he is surrounded by the luxuries of civilized life or in want even of its necessaries; there is that in this cause which should excite his liveliest interest, and call forth his noblest efforts." [W.G.]

Crosby] And when you have fully discharged *your* duties, you have a right to expect much of us. Our responsibilities are great; and assuredly we will zealously endeavor to discharge them, in a manner that will enable us to enjoy that full reward, which a consciousness of a faithful stewardship always imparts. And in conclusion, allow us to repeat, consecutively, some of the more essential elements of parental duty, a practical recognition of which, will subserve the purposes of our brief petition; promote greatly the general and individual interest of your school satisfy the demands of society; entail a priceless boon to your children, and entitle you to the fruition of a more noble and worthy citizenship.

1. Send your children regularly and seasonably to school.
2. Furnish them promptly with, necessary text. books.
3. Require them to observe scrupulously the rules and regulations of the school.
4. Encourage in them ready and cheerful obedience to their teacher.
5. Encourage them to be orderly and systematic in everything they do.
6. Encourage them to be studious, diligent and persevering.
7. Manifest an interest in their studies at home.
8. Visit them frequently at school.
9. Do not allow your children to become addicted, too much, to light reading; but cultivate in them a love for *proper* books, and see that they read understandingly.
10. Cultivate in your children truthfulness, affection and forbearance.
11. Help us to cultivate in them habits of politeness and personal neatness.
12. Do not suffer your children to neglect the rudimentary English branches, by giving *precedence* to such fashionable acquirements as music, drawing, &c.
13. When absence or tardiness becomes absolutely unavoidable, promptly notify us by an exculpatory note.
14. Help us to cultivate every virtue and extirpate every vice in your children.

A faithful, performance of the above duties will secure for you a rich recompense in the advancement of your children in knowledge and virtue, and for us that much needed sympathy and co-operation which prompts our appeal.

With affectionate deference, your humble servant, and children's

TEACHER.