

ONLY A TEACHER

BY C. F. CASTLE

THE word *teacher* is tabooed in universities. The stigma is indicated in the question which one university man frequently asks of another: "Are you teaching or working this Quarter?" *Teaching* to such a questioner means only imparting some known information to others; almost anybody can do it. It is written down in books; anybody can read them and communicate the ideas to listeners. But *working* to him means a laboratory, some worm, animal, bone, or gas, on which to labor with the suitable appliances. *Working* is seeking to discover something new, especially in Nature. The *worker* does not want to be bothered with students. His thought is: "Oh, if it were not for the students, a university would be a nice place, and I could carry on my investigations undisturbed." To be an investigator is the thing!

But investigators are usually very poor hands at communicating what they know to others. They work in their laboratories in silence. Silence is best for their work. The creatures or materials they work on do not speak and interrupt their thoughts. Investigators do not like to be interrupted by human speech in the course of their research.

The teacher, however, works with more interesting material than bugs or worms, for example. He works with students, who do not have to be caught in April and kept in alcohol or an ice chest to preserve them, like the worm that lives in water near the freezing point. Moreover, they speak the language of the instructor, can ask questions, and talk back. No one should ever try to teach who does not like people and have a capacity for sociability. Silent people make good investigators, but not good teachers. Good investigators are often failures as teachers.

Not many years ago a fine investigator was called from the stock-room and tomes of lore to be the head of a department in a university. It was expected that because of his record as an investigator he would train up fine investigators in the university. But he could not interest students in his subject, and after a few years' trial he resigned his position in the university to return to his studies of books. The book-worm was back home, happy, in the silence of the library, among his friends, the books.

A story told by a man named Schaufler in a talk to the Y. M. C. A. at Yale on a Sunday afternoon well illustrates the difference between associating with human beings and with things that do not talk. Mr. Schaufler was engaged at one time in New York City in trying to improve the living conditions of poor people by removing them from miserable tenement houses to new homes in the country, out in Connecticut. A forest had been cut down and houses built among the stumps of the trees, which had, after being felled, been sawn into lumber.

He had found an old Irish washerwoman up in the top story of a house whose roof leaked badly; an umbrella had been put up through a hole in the roof to keep out the rain. He labored a long time to secure the consent of the woman to leave this ramshackle place and go to a new house in the country. He finally succeeded in his effort. He located her where there was sunshine and shade, in a new house, with a garden where she could grow flowers. He felt well repaid for all his labors. A few months later when he was in New York one day in the neighborhood of the place from which the Irishwoman had moved, out of curiosity he went up to the room in which she used to live, to see who was living there. To his amazement he found the identical Irishwoman there, engaged in washing clothes as before. In disgust and vexation he asked her what she was doing back there after he had placed her in such a comfortable home in the country. She replied: "Och, Mr. Schaufler, people is more company than stumps!" She had the right idea!

So in teaching, live students are more interesting than material things or creatures that speak not. There is a companionship which in some cases may last as long as life itself. Naturally, no such relationship can exist between an investigator and material objects or dumb creatures. To be sure, the dog and the horse are exceptions; they are companionable, but not to the

same extent as man, especially when they are mere subjects for laboratory study and experiment.

What every college graduate should be, the successful teacher must be—a good mixer. The perils of college life consist largely in idleness and aloofness. Aloofness was the trouble with President Wilson. If he had mixed more with his lieutenants in Congress he might have put over that which he most desired. Aloofness and conceit will ruin anyone who wants to guide others. A teacher must give and take; for the time he must be one of those he would teach or lead.

To illustrate: Many city people spend their summers in Michigan. One day a gang of country boys were engaged in play. They had a bottle in which a ground glass cork had become fast. They tried to pull the cork out, but failed. Just then a city college boy came along. In derision they called to him: "Here, you city feller; pull this cork out," thinking that he could not and so they would "take him down" a little. But he was sensible and knew a little physics; e.g., that heat expands and that friction causes heat. So he picked up a string, wound it around the bottle, pulled the string back and forth for a few minutes until the bottle was warmed a little, and then quietly and smilingly pulled out the cork! The country boys saw that they were beaten, for the city boy knew what they did not. They invited him to join them in their sport, and he had sense enough to do so. In fact, he kept on playing with these boys all summer, and became their leader. He was a good mixer and was qualified to be a wise leader.

A good teacher may sometimes be recognized when seen in the school yard engaged in the games of the pupils. The intellectuals and aristocrats, the "high-brows," are most apt to fail as good mixers. The more they know, the greater the danger of failure in this particular. This is natural. They like their own sort best; they enjoy brilliancy. "What is the use," such an one says, "in trying to learn anything from those who are more ignorant than I?" They forget that the "high-brows" are only a small minority of the people they are likely to deal with. They forget also that there is a great deal of knowledge and wisdom in those not of the "high-brow" class. Preachers, especially, are apt to converse and associate with the aristocrats, the most influential members of their own and of other churches. Of course, they are the most interesting, from the preacher's standpoint;

the most interesting intellectually. But the majority of the people in the preacher's audience are not of that sort; to know them and to be able to win them the preacher needs to mingle much with those intellectually his inferiors. Otherwise he will never know his audience. The success of "The Great Commoner" as speaker and leader was in the fact that he was one of the common people; he understood masses of them, and spoke their thoughts and language. I use him as an illustration, by no means approving of most of his ideas. The point is that those of us who wish to instruct, to educate, to help the more ignorant people, young or old, to better ideas and ideals, must mix with them to get their point of view, and to combat it if it is wrong.

The teacher must look at things from the standpoint of his students, to ascertain the difficulties they have in undertsanding what he desires to impart, or that in which he desires to interest them. Even the investigator of the worm that lived in cold water had to look at things from the worm's standpoint. If the water had been warmed a little, as a human being would like it, the worm would have gone to pieces. The worm had to be fed certain food which it was necessary to ascertain by investigation. Then, too, it was discovered that the worm would not live in city drinking water as sterilized by man to prevent typhoid fever.

The teacher, likewise, has to be an investigator of the human animal that he is trying to instruct, but his investigations are much more interesting because of the comradeship that should exist between teacher and taught. He may interest the student in a certain subject and so induce him also to become a specialist in that line. Thus one great teacher, Clarence Herrick, in the small "Hill-top College," by his presentation of science induced a boy who later became one of the greatest of modern biologists to enter that field instead of the ancient classics, which had been presented to him in an uninteresting way.

The fact is that a good teacher has to be an investigator, not only of the subject he wishes to present, but also of the human beings whom he aspires to teach. He must be human, and know the minds and ways of thinking of many other humans. And the more he knows and the wiser he thinks he is, the more difficult is his problem. He may think that his views are the only correct ones and that all others are nonsense. So he may decide to ridicule all views but his own, and by brilliancy of speech and repartee preen himself before his students and win applause

for the moment. But he will not teach many, even though they applaud while under the spell of his eloquence and wit; nor will he ever win their affection, because he looks down upon them with condescension.

The teacher must adapt what he says to the understanding of his audience, just as the public lecturer has to do. Recently a distinguished preacher to student audience was reported as "firing over the heads" of the students he addressed at a certain college. He did not hit the mark; he shot too high. It would have been even worse to aim too low. He was right in attempting to inspire higher thinking, but he misjudged his audience, or perhaps his language was not such as to appeal to them.

The lecture method of teaching is faulty, in that it is difficult under this system to study individuals, which is essential for perfect companionship between the teacher and the student. As the father should be the companion of his son, and the mother the companion of her daughter, so to a certain extent should teachers be the companions of their pupils in these days when parents have given over their job of educating the children to nurses and teachers. The conception of Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and the boy on the other end had in it the idea of treating the boy as an individual—the idea of personal contact between teacher and pupil. There are great possibilities in it. For graduate students, of course, "research work" is largely individualistic, like the work of the student on the worm, as recorded in a previous chapter.

It is said that "teaching which consists merely in imparting information is not university teaching. The vital spark necessary for a true university is given by its research activities." A good deal depends upon the way in which the information is imparted; whether it clarifies thinking or beclouds it. Sometimes information thrown in chunks may stun for a moment and then set one to thinking; whereas if dry and fine as dust, like dust it simply beclouds. Who is responsible for the notion that research work must be recorded in dignified and judicial frigidity, and that obscurity is a sign of depth or wisdom? We know, of course, the dictum of the French writer who said that the use of language is to conceal our ideas. That, I fear, has been the trouble with some of our modern writers on philosophical and theological subjects. They nourish the notion that they are great authorities on what they profess to understand, and that they must show

it by profundity, as they probably consider it, but as others more properly dub it—obscurity to conceal a lack of ideas. Certainly President Jacob Gould Schurman had ideas, but he was not obscure; he spoke on psychological and philosophical subjects so clearly and delightfully at Chatauqua that he filled the Hall of Philosophy daily with interested auditors for weeks at a time. Other speakers on many university themes create no “vital spark” by what they say, but only smoke.

Teachers may learn from the business world, especially university teachers whose students are much sought for these days in the commercial and industrial field. Business men want salesmen who can sell their goods—bonds, automobiles, or what not. The dry-as-dust teacher will not produce that sort of individual. If he thinks his subject valuable, why not say so in a style that will convince or enthuse his students, and make them believe in him and his ideas? A teacher who cannot “sell” his own courses to his students would not be employed by a business man to sell goods.

The Greeks began research work in nature and science, and later in literature. They were teachers and investigators in many subjects. Some of the greatest of them were Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates. These men had many followers who were devoted to their masters, because the latter were thinkers, who taught and spoke in an interesting way about their research. They were the foremost investigators and teachers of their day, and their written works which have come down to us are still among the world’s greatest literary and scientific treasures.

The marvelous Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter’s son, worked with people; he loved people and addressed them in language that they could understand. Too many learned teachers of to-day speak a technical language, understood perhaps only by specialists to whom their thoughts are addressed. They cannot popularize their subject by such means; or, to use once more the expressive commercial term, “sell it” to the people. Evolution might be better understood and cause less objection, if it were more simply expressed, so as to be more clearly comprehended.

The following remarks by F. C. S. Schiller, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in the little volume entitled “Tantalus, or The Future of Man,” offer much food for thought:

“Human institutions, like the human body, are ever tending to

get clogged with the waste products of their own working. Hence, so far from performing the functions for which they were intended, they are constantly becoming the most formidable instruments for their own frustration. Experience shows how easily churches become the most effective deadeners of religious zeal, how often law becomes the negation of justice, how deadly is the School to the inborn craving for knowledge which seemed to Aristotle so characteristic of man's nature.

"Accordingly, no one familiar with the actual working of academic institutions is likely to fall into the error of pinning his faith to them. They are of course designed for the purpose of preserving and promoting the highest and most advanced knowledge hitherto attained; but do they anywhere fulfil this purpose? Its execution must of necessity be left to professors not exempt from human frailty, always selected by more or less defective methods, whose interests by no means coincide with those of their subjects. The interest of the subject is to become more widely understood and so more influential. The interest of the professor is to become more unassailable, and so more authoritative. He achieves this by becoming more technical. For the more technical he gets, the fewer can comprehend him; the fewer are competent to criticize him, the more of an oracle he becomes; if therefore he wishes for an easy life of undisturbed academic leisure, the more he will indulge his natural tendency to grow more technical as his knowledge grows, the more he will turn away from those aspects of his subject which have any direct practical or human interest. He will wrap himself in mysteries of technical jargon, and become as nearly as possible unintelligible. Truly, as William James once exclaimed to me, apropos of the policy of certain philosophers, 'the natural enemy of any subject is the professor thereof!' It is clear that if these tendencies are allowed to prevail, every subject must in course of time become unteachable, and not worth learning.

"Thus educational systems become the chief enemies of education, and seats of learning the chief obstacles to the growth of knowledge, while in an otherwise stagnant or decadent society these tendencies sooner or later get the upper hand and utterly corrupt the social memory. The power of the professor is revealed not so much by the things he teaches, as by the things he fails or refuses to teach.

"History is full of examples. How many religions have not perished from ritual sclerosis, how many sciences have not been degraded into pseudo-sciences or games! Logic has been just examinable nonsense for over two thousand years.

"The present economic chaos in the world has been indirectly brought about by the policy adopted by the professors of economics forty or fifty years ago, to suit their own convenience. For they then decided that they must escape from the unwelcome attentions of the public by becoming more 'scientific'; i. e., they ceased to express themselves in plain language and took to mathematical

formulas and curves instead; with the result that the world promptly relapsed into its primitive depths of economic ignorance. So soon as the professors retired from it, every economic heresy and delusion, which had been exposed and uprooted by Adam Smith, at once revived and flourished. In one generation economics disappeared completely from the public ken and the political world, and the makers of the peace treaties of 1919 were so incapable of understanding an economic argument that not even the lucid intelligence of Mr. Keynes could dissuade them from enacting the most preposterous conditions which rendered impossible the realization of their aims."

W. R. Harper and E. Benj. Andrews, two of the greatest teachers that universities have produced, were both great investigators as well as great teachers. A teacher must, indeed, investigate, as already pointed out, to be worth much as a teacher; and investigation must be continued to the last. Whether the results of an investigation are published or delivered orally to students is another matter. The most impressive words of President Harper and President Andrews were not put into books but spoken with all their enthusiasm and magnetism to students seated before them, whom they wished to set to thinking. It is significant that both Socrates and Jesus never wrote out any of their great thoughts which have so mightily influenced the world; they taught exclusively through the spoken word. Even Shakespeare, whom we think of as a writer, *par excellence*, never wrote his great dramas for publication. The plays were intended for oral delivery. The few which were published during his lifetime were printed in pirated editions from players' manuscripts stolen or otherwise abstracted from the playhouse by interested persons, and were without his personal revision. The great majority of the plays did not appear in print until seven years after Shakespeare's death in an edition published by some of his friends, on their own responsibility, from imperfect manuscripts.

In books personality is not so effective as it is face to face. Teachers, like poets, are born, not made; but they may be helped greatly by the right sort of contact with the great masters of the craft.

Teaching is an art—the art of imparting knowledge so as to inspire a desire to know and to investigate for oneself. That is what the great teachers herein mentioned did.

The other day I met a student who will take the bachelor's

degree in June. She remarked: "My education will then begin at my home!" She lives in Kansas. She has acquired a desire to know and to investigate, and she has it all planned out how it is to be done. Her university course has been a start in the right direction, and has prepared her for further progress in what she desires to find out. Her preparation has been a great success.

The call for better teachers in universities is beginning to be heard, though only faintly as yet. The experience of those who gain the great desideratum—the Ph. D.—is somewhat disillusioning. They realize that they have to learn the art of teaching after they have gained the degree that is supposed to fit them for a university professorship. Their students do not enthuse over the coldly presented lectures of the learned professors with whom the young doctors have studied. Those lectures have to be revised and put into language that will appeal to a generation of lively youths. If the universities desire better teachers, they must train them by better teaching in their own halls. The schools of education will not supply them.

Moreover, the universities will have to recognize the better teachers as doing work as difficult as, if not more difficult than, mere research, and certainly as important. And the remuneration must be as great. The universities have it in their power to produce what they want, whether great research, or great teaching, if they will encourage those who are able to perform the work, and if they will pay the price in cash and honor.

It is sometimes difficult for a teacher to know whether he is a success or not. All he can do is to do his best—to throw himself into his work with all his might, unselfishly, hoping for the best. He may not accomplish what he desires, but something entirely unthought of and unsuspected. I once had a girl in my classes for some years; I was never sure whether she was really interested or not, though she was faithful in attendance and did fair work. But after she was graduated she wrote me from a distant State a note of thanks and appreciation for what she said I had done for her. There was, she said, "a certain atmosphere" in my classes. I do not quite know yet what she meant—I did try to keep the room well ventilated! But of course I think she meant something else.

Another girl who has now been teaching for twenty-five years happened to sit behind me in a large audience a while

ago. She bent over and spoke to me; she told me of a chance remark I had made one day in class which she had never forgotten. She said nothing about a half-dozen courses she had taken with me; this one remark, it seemed, had helped her more than all the rest, though to me it seemed trifling. She was a serious student and fine personality. One never can tell what one may accomplish unwittingly. One should just do one's best; or, to change the figures, keep shooting—something may hit the mark.

One day in a crowded street a man jumped out of the crowd, grabbed my hand and said: "I haven't seen you in twenty years; you don't remember me, but I do you. My name is Blank, and I want to tell you that I wish I had taken more Greek and Latin, for I made my best grades there, and I might have made Phi Beta Kappa." I had forgotten his existence!

Another student, now a writer of distinction, after ten years of literary work tells me that a certain Greek course was the most valuable course that he took in his four years of university preparation for journalism, and that he found it worth while more for what the teacher put into it than for what the textbooks gave him. Evidently the teacher, whoever he was, was a real one.

It is easy to get on pleasantly with students, but their parents may be a nuisance, especially if they chance to be university professors and their wives. I sometimes think that this class of persons should be prohibited by law from interfering in the scholastic education of their offspring. Of course, this is an exaggerated statement, but in all seriousness I could name some who have been the ruin of their children in this respect. Educationally the children were a disgrace to their brilliant parents, as I frankly told some of them. They were so "smart" that the parents thought they didn't need to be taught. The students of extraordinary natural ability are the hardest to deal with; and, as a great business man has truly said, they rarely achieve lasting success. It is true that great ability should be a help to students, if they are blessed with it, but far more is due to the habit of never doing anything less well than one can; in other words, of doing one's best. It is the person who "keeps at it" and is always striving to do better that really achieves. The brilliant ones are likely to degenerate into loafers, if not worse.

In the "Hill-top College" the dullest man that I knew in a

certain class was the first of all to reach real distinction. His examination papers were always better than his term grades, because a week intervened in which he *kept on working*. He took a divinity course, went to a small town in New York State to preach, and when he died, after ten years' work, he was so beloved by the people of that town that the other ministers in the town filled his pulpit on successive Sundays for the rest of the year.

If one likes to deal with pleasant young people, there is no more enjoyable occupation than university or college teaching. One keeps young and up to date; one has to be on the alert and always learning. "Only a teacher," instead of being a reproach, is a real distinction, the more so if one can be numbered among the superlatively great teachers—with Arnold of Rugby, with E. Benjamin Andrews, and with William Rainey Harper. Greatest, perhaps, among the rewards of teaching is the abiding friendship of many who consider that they owe much to a teacher's influence.