

PROTECTION FOR SCHOOL MA'AMS

BY PARSON STYLES, LL. D.

I confess that when I attended the recent "Bird" and "Arbor" day exercises by our public schools and saw those bright, active, energetic and tactful lot of school ma'ams, some eight or ten in number, my interest awakened; in fact my sympathy as well as admiration was evoked. I found a soft spot in my "hard heart" for those charming, winsome creatures. What test and patience and skill they have in the art of preparing the children to go through those beautiful and sometimes intricate exercises, without a hitch or break. In the brief interludes, as I sat there, my memory ran back over my own pedagogical experiences. There was "Coniac street," my first venture in a community which, in the early years of the century had shoved more spurious coin than any other frontier locality, and "North Fairfield," whose big school house stood in the corner of the local cemetery, and less than 100 rods away was the house in which President Arthur was born, and not farther away, also, was the old double-decked brick meeting house, with galleries on three sides, square box pews, high-perched pulpit and sounding-board, where his father, with his broad Irish brogue and native Hibernian wit, preached to entranced rural audiences; and "Cook's Corner," since made famous as the place of rendezvous of the invading Fenians who thought to strike terror into the heart of the British lion by that frontier raid in 1864, and other schools. The work is hard, not always overpaid, often sharply and with undeserved severity criticised. But it has its compensations like all honest service. There is a real, enduring satisfaction in running over the list of one's pupils of those days who have turned out well; some on farms, some in mercantile life, others in business and the professions and many, also, have passed over to the majority. One of those old time "Coniac Street" pupils, stands out before my mind as I write, the most mischievous boy I ever had, but bright, alert and capable, and these many years he has been widely known as one of the most successful, acceptable and beloved pastors in the state. But this is wandering from these school ma'ams, the objects of my tender solicitude.

Will they ever marry, grace and guide homes of their own, I asked myself as I sat there. Why, yes, generally; for an old educator only told the truth when he said to me

once: "Our female teachers have only one failing—they can't decline matrimony." And this is where the peril comes in and the need of protection springs up. Here among us those lovely girls are practically safe; but alas! when the vacation comes and they roam over this broad land from the Alleghanies to the Rockies, no one knows what may happen. Will they come back safe, unshorn of Cupid's capers, as when they left in the fresh, sweet month of June? With their noble ambitions to succeed and shine among their contemporaries, they may safely mingle with ordinary young men. They may indeed be gracious, charming and even fascinating, and still come back to us with the golden rod, as sweet and fresh as of yore. But for some inscrutable reason the fairly young widower is a bird of evil omen to the average school ma'am. He is bright, very tender-hearted, his peculiar sorrow awakens unconscious sympathy, and then on the other practical side of things he has a good home all furnished and waiting for such as one of these to occupy and rule. Accepting him she steps at once into a well-defined and desirable social position. I confess to the seeming logic of the situation, but in it lurks a peril.

In the sixties I was town superintendent of schools, and my jurisdiction extended over some dozen or more districts, mostly rural, with two or three village graded institutions. Strong as I was then, I put lots of work into developing those schools. Of the dozen and a half teachers, most were young women; some ordinary enough in a few instances, and some were rarely bright and qualified for their work. Those I sought by all means to retain. One Miss Sanborn was my special pride, she was so capable and efficient; so full of love for and enthusiasm in her work; I did all in my power to encourage and help her, so as to make her stay in that school permanent. But alas, the wifeless pastor of the other church had discovered her worth, and I found him occasionally and then more frequently at the school house, and out for after-school walks. I ventured on a hint one day to her, but it was too late. There was that home, ready for her, the slight encumbrance of two motherless boys was not much, as the father was a strict disciplinarian of the Puritan type, and—yes, she married him. No one really blamed her; in fact so general was the sentiment that she had done right that I

was compelled to keep my protest in my own bosom, though like Mary of old, I pondered these things in my heart. By and by I moved from the town, and the whole matter naturally passed from my mind, till one day I received a marked copy of the old local paper—it was the obituary of my favorite teacher! She that might have made another Mary Lyon, or Miss Emma Willard or Maria Mitchell had missed it all, married a widower, graced his home for a few years, and then went to her grave in the inside village cemetery beside the first wife, has a plain marble headstone, name and date, and—half a column in the local paper; that was all!

Dear school ma'ams, Haec fabula docet, as Æsop says, beware of the guileful widower. As you scatter to the green hills of New England, the rocky fastnesses of the Alleghanies, or the prairies of the west, beware, beware! Return to us and to all the possibilities, rewards and deserved fame of your work as bright and fresh and free as when you leave and we will give you a double welcome!

AWHEEL TO WASHINGTON.

Col. Davidson's military academy has hit upon the most unique and striking advertising scheme we have yet heard of. His son, Major Davidson, is training about a dozen and a half of the cadets in the bicycle brigade, out of which number twelve of the best riders will be selected early in June to start on a bicycle trip to Washington, carrying a message from General Merritt of Chicago to General Miles in Washington, and bring back a reply. Already the leading papers of the country are writing the colonel to make arrangements to have his brigade reported to them every day, and all the wheel journals of the country are after the same news. Hence, the Northwestern Military academy, of Highland Park, will be one of the live daily topics of interest in every city, wheelman's club, and athletic organization, as well as in every academy and college of all the land and in Europe. Our city will be known as never before and the colonel's excellent school pushed to the front. The Sterling company furnish the wheels, a fact of which they will not be slow to make as prominent as possible.

The subject of Mr. Johnson's sermon at the Presbyterian church next Sunday, May 9th, will be, "The New Movement in our Church." A special musical program has been arranged.