

Sussex High School
(N. B.) June 25/34.

The Schoolmaster!

Sometimes I daresay you think you work too hard. Sometimes you may even wish that your teachers left the ordering of your lives more to yourselves. Will you let me tell you what I am chiefly grateful for at this time of my life? It is that my teachers, when I was about your age, never asked my precious opinion about any of these things. None of them ever came to me and said: "Wouldn't you like to defer doing Latin for a year?" Or, "Since you are doing both Greek and Latin, wouldn't you like to drop German, or mathematics, or science?" Nothing of the kind. So far indeed were they from making such suggestions that they conceived that a few of us might be allowed to go on at all these subjects much faster than we were going, with the result that a few, a very few, were encouraged to do four years work in two. Then when we had matriculated they didn't wash their hands of us, and let us go our

ways. They suggested that three of the class come back to school for another two years. And in those years they gave us work that wasn't on the curriculum at all. They watched our health carefully - indeed more carefully than our parents did - and after that the curriculum for each one of us was what each one of us could absorb. And to those teachers I feel to-day that I owe an incalculable debt.

Now I don't wish to convey the impression that boys and girls in my time were cleverer than you are to-day. The anthropologists tell us that man's brain is just about the same to-day as it was 20,000 years ago, so you can see it doesn't change much in 25 or 30 years. Still a greater change has come over our schools in the last generation than has ever taken place in any similar period. The change has come about because of changes outside the schools.

School means a place where you learn far more than it means a place where you are taught. And you can only learn for yourself, by applying yourself to a problem, a task; by setting your wits to a thing. Now, we, - I mean men and women of my generation, and those older than we, - are so afraid that you can't learn for yourselves, that we have filled your schools with books about books. Instead of Shakespeare we put into your hands books about Shakespeare, instead of history we give you text-books about history, instead of chemical laboratories we give you a book which claims to tell you in pleasant story-book form how you can study chemistry without a laboratory. May we are so afraid that you will not know how to laugh that we destroy forests to make "comic strips", as I think they are called. Any moment of the day you could perhaps make better jokes about your teachers than

you could read in any comic strip. But still we are afraid that you might not laugh, and so we spend millions of dollars on mechanical means to make you laugh. And in the same way we force you, all your waking hours, and some of the hours you might be asleep, to look at illustrated papers, and movies, and accounts of games that other people play; and we force you to listen to people who are talking (it matters not about what) a thousand miles away.

Now, the thought has been growing on me, for many a long day, that some of you, at least, are more than tired of these so-called amusements. I know, positively, from asking many young people about them, that you are sick and tired of the comic strips. I know for certain that many of you are bored to death with some of the text-books. I make a suggestion to you: that you tell your teachers

about it. They know about things far more interesting than you have ever dreamed. Some of you like poetry: I know because of things I have heard about you. Well, ask your teachers about Greek poetry. When I was at school I read a long, long poem in Greek called the Iliad. It was written by Homer. It's far too long a story for me to tell you about it now; but let me tell you what was said about it by one of the wisest men who lived in the last century. (I know you will agree that he was wise when I tell you it was he that made that joke about the schoolmaster I began with): "A man who has never read Homer is like a man who has never seen the ocean: there is a great experience he has missed". Now you know, you couldn't tell a girl who lived all her life on the prairies what the ocean was like at Duck Cove. You would have to bring her to Duck Cove, and show it to her. And so it is with the Seven Seas of Greek poetry.

But you may be bored, and casting about for something to do, and yet not like poetry. But perhaps you have that peculiar quality of mind which makes a boy like algebra. Very well, there lies before you one of the most fascinating fields that human thought has ever strayed over. Get your mathematics teacher to introduce you to more of that, to trigonometry and Euclid. In itself a most amusing and charming game, but more than that, in playing the game you will find in your hands the key to the universe. As one of the Greeks said: "God himself never ceases to be a geometer". That saying grows truer with every new scientific discovery.

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