Wichita Eagle

FROM MRS. ASHTON DILKE

SHE TELLS OF HER LIFE AS MEMBER OF LONDON'S SCHOOL BOARD.

She Enjoys It Thoroughly, She Says—Its Duties Are Very Exacting and Leave Very Little Time for Social or Other Relaxation.

[Special Correspondence.]

LONDON, May 26.—We school board members are elected for a term of three years, and as we have just arrived midway in our present tenure of office I thought it a favorable opportunity a few weeks ago to review the work of the last eighteen months in a speech to my constituents, and generally sift out in my own mind the impressions I have found. It takes a new member a full year to master the ordinary routine of his work, to realize what he may and what he may not do, and to make himself acquainted with the whole "personnel" of the board officers. I enjoy my work fully as much as I anticipated, and that I look forward to the pleasure of standing again at the next election.

MRS. ASHTON DILKE.

As in the United States the school committees do not exactly correspond to our popularly elected school boards, it may be of interest to give a little sketch of what the duties of a school board member really are. Even in England people are often amusingly vague on the subject, and seem to imagine that attendance at the public meeting of the board held every Thursday afternoon, with an occasional participation in the debate, represents the main portion of one's functions. As a matter of fact, the best part of both one's time and one's energy is daily absorbed by the board, and I have found myself obliged to relinquish by degrees not only a large number of my political and lecturing engagements, but also a considerable proportion of my social duties as well.

The really arduous part of one's school board duties undoubtedly consists of attendance at committees. The whole work of the board is divided up among various committees, which meet either weekly or fortnightly in the numerous rooms provided for the purpose in the large and handsome school board offices overlooking the Thames Embankment. Every member is supposed to sit on three of these committees, and he is given his choice as to which three he may prefer. I selected for my share the works committee, which has charge of all the building plans and contracts, and which lately has suffered so much abuse for the sins of its predecessors in office, the finance and the school management committee. This latter, however, to which is entrusted all strictly educational questions, as well as the appointment of teachers, is divided up into numerous sub-committees, such as the drawing and pupil teachers, the promotion and the physical exercise sub-committees, on all of which I sit, and the needlework sub-committee, of which I am chairwoman. So I do not think I shall be guilty of exaggeration if I say that on an average fifteen hours a week, or three hours a day, exclusive of Saturdays and Sundays, are devoted to committeework alone. Sometimes, when there is a sudden rush of work, I may spend the whole day from 10 o'clock till 5 o'clock at the board offices, passing from one committee room to another, and filling up odd moments by signing some of the innumerable checks which the clerk of the finance committee always has on hand for any member whom he may chance to find at liberty.

Then there are the school inspections, a very important and a specially interesting part of one's board duties. In my own division of West Lambeth I am responsible for the personal supervision of nine schools, and as they are scattered over a considerable area, and are all very far away from my own home in Kensington, it is not easy to manage the thorough inspection of more than one school in the course of a morning. So one or two mornings a week are none too much to devote to this department and to the cultivation of friendly relations with the masters and mistresses. Very often, if they are in want of advice or information, the head teachers ask me to call. At other times I drop in unexpectedly in order to see for myself that everything is going on smoothly.

The head master eagerly explains that he is positively entitled to an extra assistant, while the head mistress may be equally anxious to get rid of one she has already got, and when I arrive at the infants' department I am told a long story of how the drainage of the playground is out of order, and the small infants wet their boots by persistently playing in the pools of water which are left by every shower of rain. Many of these little grievances, which, if they had to pass through the various channels of official red tape might take several weeks to rectify, can be settled at once by an order from the divisional member, and so one's appearance at a school is usually hailed by smiling faces. Then, too, it is very encouraging for the teachers to feel that their efforts to help on the children are really appreciated, and if a class of boys has just learnt a new song, or if the little girls display a happy aptitude for Swedish drill, teachers and pupils alike are only too delighted to be put through a performance for my benefit.

I am ready to confess that we are rather proud in London of our school houses. It is always a great pleasure to me to come across one of our big, handsome red brick buildings, with its gabled roofs and many windows and ample play grounds, rising from the midst of some squalid neighborhood. And once inside, when I go over the separate class rooms for every standard, the big central hall for drill and exercises, and the cheerful, airy passages, it is a comfort to know that however stuffy and unsanitary many of the children's homes may be, the best part of their day is nevertheless spent in healthy and happy surroundings. It is wonderful the moral effect that a well built, well lit school has on both teachers and scholars alike. The attendance is always better, and there is a briskness and smartness about the proceedings which is very encouraging after the listlessness and depression which is so often to be observed in an ill ventilated, overcrowded school room.

We devote naturally a large amount of trouble to the selection of our teachers, and apart from the actual teaching qualifications they may possess I always feel it to be a point of great importance to secure masters and mistresses who will take an interest in their pupils outside school hours—in their games and their swimming classes and their country holidays, etc. Often at the yearly distribution of prizes, a function at which I very willingly preside, the teachers get up quite a little entertainment.

All the preparatory work done in committee has to receive the assent of the board at its weekly public meeting before being finally adopted. But the recommendations of a committee, unless they raise some contentious point, are most frequently passed "en bloc" without debate. The most interesting discussions usually arise over notices of motions, which may be put down by any member, and are then taken in turn. It was in this manner that a motion in favor of free education was carried last winter by a large majority, thus greatly strengthening the hands of the advocates of this most necessary reform. It was also by a notice of motion the other day that Mrs. Besant and Mr. Stewart Headlam tried to re-raise the whole question of religious instruction by moving that Bible reading should be discontinued in all our schools, a motion which, being considered at the present moment inopportune, did not find a single supporter on the board.

Parties are very fairly divided on the present school board, which adds a great zest to the divisions. There are about twenty Clericals or Diggleites, as they are frequently termed, and an equal number of Progressives or Radicals, but between the two there stand about a dozen so called Moderates, who, on the whole, more frequently vote with the former than with the latter party. Mr. Diggle combines in his person functions analogous to those of speaker of the house of commons, a leader of the government. He acts both as chairman of the board and as leader of the Clericals, a combination which inevitably from time to time produces unfortunate results. As a chairman "pur et simple," Mr. Diggle is admirable, with an immense knowledge of business and a considerable sense of equity, but when party considerations happen to intervene his judicial impartiality is apt to fail him. On our side—for I fancy I need hardly inform my American friends that my place is among the Progressists—the Hon. Lyulph Stanley, a clever member of an exceptionally clever family, is one of the ablest educationalists and a very leading spirit, although he finds himself pretty frequently in antagonism to those members possessed of Socialistic leanings.

We four lady members of the school board form a very harmonious little quartet in spite of the various differences of opinion that naturally exist between us. Our senior member, Miss Davenport Hill, has for many years extended her special protection over the distinctively feminine branches of education, such as sewing, cooking and laundry work. Her influence has certainly been most beneficial in these departments, our methods of teaching sewing to large classes being so successful that we have been frequently applied to for advice on the subject from both America and Australia. Mrs. Maitland, who has had much local experience of schools in her own division of Marylebone, devotes her energies mainly to school management and the selection of teachers, while Mrs. Annie Besant diligently pushes forward all the labor questions and does her best to infuse the proceedings of the board with a Socialist spirit. It is mainly owing to her exertions that the board now declines to give contracts for schools to any employer who does not pay the trades union rate of wages, a change which was not effected without a fierce struggle. She is also an ardent supporter of free schools and free meals.

As for myself, I have so far abstained, intentionally, from taking up any special line of action as a woman. It seems to me far more important that women should learn to take their full and equal share of intellectual work side by side with men than that they should erect themselves into a body with separate and possibly antagonistic claims and interests. This in no way affects my very firm belief in the immense advantages to be gained by the presence of women on the board. In the ordinary routine of business there arise numerous little points respecting either the instruction of the girls or the comfort and well being of mistresses and pupil teachers which it is obviously a woman's province to decide. To me, personally, the whole work is full of a never failing interest; it is thoroughly practical in the best sense, and in working for the welfare of the rising generation we have a satisfactory conviction that we are at least beginning at the right end.

M M Dilke

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"Cracky! Didn't the crowd try to mob you?"

"Oh, no. They thought from my actions that I was a policeman in citizen's clothes."—New York Weekly.

ALL ABOUT THE MEMBERS

WALTER WELLMAN WIELDS A KEEN DISSECTING KNIFE.

Both Senators and Representatives Are Subjects—Legislators Who Scatter in Their Talk, Lie and Erroneously Think They Are Story Tellers.

[Special Correspondence.]

WASHINGTON, June 12.—When the business of the house of representatives is dull and uninteresting, as it often is, we who sit up in the gallery to watch for things worth writing about must turn our attention from legislation to legislators. For this there is a good precedent, furnished by the legislators themselves. No other topic interests the average member of congress as much as himself. The dangers of the country which he prates so much of in his speeches, the odious acts of the opposition party which he is so fond of denouncing, are quickly lost sight of when the conversation becomes personal. Statesmen love to talk of themselves, especially to newspaper ears. They like to be written about in a complimentary manner if possible, but in some way at any rate. Smart statesmen endeavor to make friends of newspaper men, but when they can't make friends the axiom is that they had better make enemies. Abuse sometimes does a man more good than praise. Your average congressman is a very conceited person. His bills and his reports and his speeches are the greatest things in the annals of congress. "What, you have not watched my efforts to do so and so? You don't know what I am doing? Young man, go read the history of your country." Some congressmen imagine the people of the provinces are thirsting for information concerning their health. One man, who has been sick, walked down to my office every day for a week during his convalescence to inform me, so that I might inform my readers, that he was gradually recovering.

Another thing which is most noticeable about these public men, particularly those who have been a long time in the harness, is their tendency to scatter in private conversation. Men who can get up in the house or senate and deliver impromptu speeches of force and good construction, wabble all about a subject in the ordinary casual conversation. They wander from one subject to another, and never wait to have anything settled or agreed upon. Probably this is the result of their training on the floor, where nothing ever is settled by argument. A man gets a few minutes and makes a sally at a topic and then drops it. Nothing is "talked out."

Five minutes later all hands turn to and talk over a new proposition, just as the layman is becoming interested in the first. Thus, in private conversation the statesman has a tendency to shift and tack, and cover a great deal of water. It keeps one busy to stay with him. For instance, there is Ben Butterworth, the brilliant member from Ohio. He is one of the best talkers in congress or out of it, but if you can keep him on one subject for five minutes you are more fortunate than most of the men who know him. In a walk from the senate chamber to the house of representatives I have heard the witty Butterworth discourse on such topics as the tariff bill, reciprocity with Canada, universal peace between nations, the new navy, the Farmers' Alliance movement, original packages and pension legislation. Here is a man worth following as the winds of his fancy waft him from subject to subject, for he rarely opens his mouth without saying something. But think of a stupid fellow, like the average congressman, wobbling about in this manner and asking you to go with him and try to be interested in all he is saying!

Joe Cannon, of Illinois, who is himself a sort of original package, is another man who scatters his fire in private conversation. Cannon in his quaint way likes to run the gamut of topics which are in the public mind. There appears to be a sort of procession of thoughts going through his brain, and he is never content till the whole troop has been brought up for review. In his work as chairman of the committee on appropriations he has constantly before him the whole United States, and it seems that his mind is equally geographical and comprehensive. Still, if you get the chance to accompany Mr. Cannon on one of his intellectual rambles you will not regret it. Here and there it will not be easy to keep pace with him, for on certain parts of the road he travels like a limited train, but he has a faculty of illumining his pathway so that even the dullest man may learn a little as he runs.

No one would suspect such a brainy and well organized intellectual giant as Speaker Reed of scattering. But, if the truth must be told—and I don't see why it shouldn't—he scatters like an old shotgun; or, to use a better illustration, he is like an amateur sportsman with a new breech loader—he sallies out and in his eagerness and fondness for shooting takes a crack at everything he sees. When Reed draws his long gun it is a good time to take to the woods.

Another thing which I have noticed about congressmen is that many of them are liars. This does not sound pleasant, but it is true. I make the assertion with a full realization of its import, and, as the members themselves sometimes say in warm debate, with willingness to assume responsibility therefor, that a large per cent. of the members of congress habitually tell falsehoods. Of course there are many honorable exceptions, and every reader has the right to include his friends in the latter category. But the liars are not much to be blamed. Lying is almost a necessity of public life. Members of congress are so beset by bores and borrowers and beggars that unless a man wants to make a bear of himself and get a reputation for meanness he must learn and practice the art of lying. I am convinced there are cases in which lying is a positive virtue, being merely a genteel and unoffending way of saying nay. If you were a member of congress, dear reader, and found it impossible to step outside the chamber without being approached by from one to a dozen persons begging favors of you—begging offices, signatures to petitions, public documents, half dollars, theatre tickets, railroad fare, chews of tobacco, letters of introduction — you, too, would learn how to gloss the refusal with the convenient white lie.

The trouble is that some of the practitioners in this art of lying become altogether too adept. Their tongues are so facile and their ingenuity so productive that lying becomes a habit. From lying as a convenience they get to lying for the fun of it, and utter falsehoods when the truth would serve them a great deal better. I have in mind one conspicuous example of this in the house of representatives. A very able man, you might say one of the leaders of the house, and at any rate the leader of his delegation, has this lying habit in a chronic and dangerous form. He is a member of an important committee, and his colleagues therein say he is amiable and able, industrious and useful—a thoroughly admirable man—if he wouldn't lie so much. Newspaper men who know him never depend upon anything he tells them without investigation. He tells lies about the most trivial things, where there is no earthly excuse for it.

He has been beaten once or twice for congress by the men in his district to whom he has lied about offices. It is in this way that the chronic and reckless liar in public life is sure to come to grief. He makes promises which he has no intention of keeping, he invents excuses which are in time discovered, he leads five or six men to think they are going to have a certain office, and somehow they sooner or later become acquainted with this over issue of collateral and turn against him. The man I have in mind could probably be senator from his state, speaker of the national house of representatives, or even president, if it were not for his weakness in this direction. Another conspicuous statesman, a senator and an aspirant for the presidency, is similarly afflicted. He is not so much given to unnecessary lying as he is to making promises which he does not mean to keep. It is said his state is plastered over with unredeemed pledges, and peopled with men who are just waiting for an opportunity to take revenge for broken promises. There are many such men in public life.

Your average congressman is very fond of play. In this, as in every other big school, we have workers and shirkers. Industry and laziness are characteristics here seen in striking contrast. There are men too lazy even to dictate letters to their constituents, much less to write them with their own hands. The laziest congressman I know of wants an electric railway built from the senate to the house, so that when he goes over to the senate restaurant for his oysters and beer he need not walk. Some of these able statesmen are never to be found in their seats. I have in mind one who will do as a type for a large class. He appears in his seat about five minutes each day, and then only to get his mail. This done, he disappears and is no more to be found in the Capitol. Constituents and friends send in cards by the score, knock at the doors of his committee rooms, watch the restaurants and the corridors, and are lucky if they find him once in a week. Where he spends his time is one of the mysteries of congress which not a few people have in a quiet way endeavored to solve.

One theory is that he is engaged upon some great literary work in a secluded and secret nook of the congressional library. Others do not think him literary enough for that. A number of men are always in their seats, and make it a point of pride to be constantly at their posts. The most conspicuous example of this sort of industry is Mr. Ezra B. Taylor, of Ohio, the successor of Garfield in the house. Mr. Taylor boasts that he has not missed a roll call in ten years, and without doubt he is the only man that ever served in congress who can wear that feather in his cap. There are four Taylors in the house, two from Ohio, one from Illinois and one from Tennessee, and it happens that they are all men who believe in attending to business. The result is that on nearly every roll call the clerk sings out, "Taylor of Illinois," "Taylor of Tennessee," "Ezra B. Taylor" and, finally, "Joseph D. Taylor," and as all are Republicans the four names are followed by four lusty "yeas" or "nays," according as the majority side of the house is voting.

A few members of congress refuse to publish their city addresses in the congressional directory. Obviously they do not want to be bothered by the bores which infest the capital city and which seem to be fond of bothering members of congress. For the same reason a number of statesmen rent houses in the outskirts of the city, where after nightfall they are not likely to be disturbed. Some years ago a member of the house from New York state lost his election by failing to print his address in the directory. A prominent and influential citizen of his district came to town late one afternoon on pressing and important business, and sought his representative. No one knew where the congressman lived. His address was not in the directory of congress, nor in the city directory. The telegraph officials refused, under instructions from the gentleman himself, they said, to give any information. The natural result was a very indignant prominent and influential citizen. Next day he finished up his business without the help of the leisure loving statesman, and then went back home and began setting up the pins for this worthy's defeat at the ensuing election.

Story telling is a distinctively congressional weakness. It is one of the fads of statesmen. Of four hundred and odd men in the present congress, I verily believe three hundred and fifty imagine themselves born story tellers. The worst of it is that only five or six of them are. Glum old chaps who never had the faintest conception of humor lay in a stock of stories, generally stale ones, and tell them over and over whenever opportunity offers. Their colleagues know them from bitter experience and are able to avoid them, but the poor stranger is likely to be sadly bored.

WALTER WELLMAN.

Professor Rucker's Magnetic Needle.

Geologists are always ready to use work done by laborers in other branches of science, and of late a most interesting work has been going on which shows the bearing one branch of knowledge may have on another. Professors Rucker and Thorpe have been carefully noting the behavior of the magnetic needle in various parts of England, and have found that it is deflected at times in a most inexplicable manner. The deflection was at first charged to great masses of basaltic or like rocks, the mineral of which contains a large amount of iron.

Finding, however, that this peculiar behavior of the magnetic needle occurred also in tracts where no such rocks were at the surface, but which consisted of such formation as chalk and tertiary beds, these observers were led to conclude that deep underground in those tracts there was a mass of basaltic or other highly ferruginous rock that affected the needle. It seems, therefore, likely that Professor Rucker's elaborate and scientific divining rod will come into use for the purpose of indicating what places are to be avoided in searching for coal measures underground.—New York Commercial Advertiser.

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