

A SCHOOL EXAMINATION

HAVING been returned triumphantly Bailie, at the heid o' the *pole*—altho' there wis nae pole that I saw—as the working man's candidate (aye stick in wi' the working man, they hae maist votes) o' the Schule Brod, it wisna lang till I set aboot wark. At the first meeting I wis appointed principal examiner o' the schules, so I at once made it my business tae see that the schulemaisters under us were doing their duty. To this end I sent a note tae the heidmaister, Mr Broon, saying I wid ca' in an' see if I approved o' the way in which the bairns were eddicated.

On arriving, half an 'oor before the time—it's best tae tak' them unawares—the maister took me up tae his platform an' made me sit doon in his easy-chair, so that I could see the hale schule at once, as it were.

“Sit doon, yer honour,” says the maister, “while I show you my method of moulding their tender minds into a proper discrimination, so as to fit them to take their place in this busy and bustling world of ours,” an’ wi’ that he made a bow tae me.

“If ye wid jist haun me up the taws,” I says, “I wid feel mair at hame. Taws in the haun’s of the principal examiner o’ the Schule Brod’ll be like the sceptre in the haun’ o’ the king; it shows his position, an’ adds dignity. Thank ye. Noo proceed,” an’ I put a peppermint drap in my mooth an’ prepared tae listen patiently.

The schulemaister cries oot, “Dux in number four class begin.”

At this the laddie got up an’ read frae a book, “The travellers in five minutes were plunged into gross darkness, an’ in other five minutes they——”

“Stop! stop!” I cries. “Guid gracious, Mister Broon, d’ye no explain as ye go along? Noo, what is ‘gross darkness’?” I says to the laddie.

“Great darkness,” he replied.

“Weel, in a manner so it is,” I says, “but that’s no’ a scientific answer; that’s only a kin’ o’ guess. Work it out by the rule o’ three.”

The laddie couldna answer, an’ the maister seemed dumbfounded, so I says—

“Noo, I’ll let ye see hoo tae dae it. Listen. Darkness. Ye a’ ken what darkness is: it’s after the sun has disappeared an’ fore the lamps are lighted, an’ a’ is black an’ dark. That is darkness. Weel, ye a’ ken what a gross is? A gross is twelve dizzen—a huner an’ forty-fower—multiply darkness by 144 an’ ye have the answer—‘gross darkness.’”

Here a’ the bairns gied a cheer, an’ I says tae the maister, “That’s algebra for ye. Gang on wi’ the story.”

... “in ither five minutes the travellers rested an’ looked along the horizon——”

“What’s that?”

“The horizon, sir.”

“The horizon! Let me see. Ah, never mind that big word, we’ll mak’ that a pass-over. I suppose it’s the name o’ some French toon in the Heelan’s, an’ I’m sure nane o’ us’ll ever be there; but it’s your duty, Mr Broon, tae explain a’ thae things tae the bairns: that’s what we pay ye for. I doot ye’re no jist as weel up in your Latin derivations as ye should be. Weel, I wid like to try them wi’ a coont or twa, an’ alloo me tae say, Mr Broon, that if they’re no better up in the coontin’ than they are at the jography, it’ll be my duty tae report ye tae the Parochial Board tae get your government grant stopped, or at least made a hantle sma’er. It’s perfect nonsense to keep up sich gran’ schules if the weans are no kept better up tae the mark. Come ’ere, you wee fellow wi’ the red heid. Tak’ yer slate an’ mark this doon: ‘If a cannon ba’, going wi’ double its usual ferocity, wis fired aff at Jamaica Brig at seven o’clock at nicht, in the teeth o’ a strong north-west gale o’ win’, when micht it be expected (weather an’ ither circumstances permitting) tae arrive at Demerara?’ Noo try that.”

No ane in the hale schule could work it oot, an’ Mr Broon declared it wis a question only fit for professors in the college. So, as I mindit that I had forgot the way tae work it oot mysel’, I thocht it best tae say nae mair aboot it, an’ I cries, “Weel, weel, bairns, jist keep min’ o’t an’ try’t at your leisure; and noo maybe Mr Broon’ll gie us a recitation, and then I’ll gie ye a’ a hauf-holiday.”

Mr Broon declared he couldna recite, but I grippit the taws an’ says—

“Mr Broon, when I’m no here you’re maister, but when here *I’m* heid man, representing the ratepayers, an’ if ye dinna dae as I tell ye—recite or sing, aye,

or dance the Heelan' fling, if I order ye—I'll jist hae tae gae ye a taste o' yer ain taws."

Here a' the bairns gied a cheer, an' the approbation o' thae innocent minds nerved me tae a sense o' my duty, so I rises up and says—

"Mr Broon, come up at once. I'll gie ye five minutes tae decide on what ye'll recite. 'The Ruined Cottage,' or 'Young Lochinvar,' it's a' ane tae me, an' as this is my first official visit, an' I want it tae be a pleasant ane, I'll sing ye afterwards—

"My auld mither de'ed in the year auchty-nine,
An' I've never had peace in this worl' sin syne."

"Chorus, weans."

"For my auld mither de'ed in the year auchty-nine,
An' I've never had peace in this worl' sin syne."

The bairns a' began tae sing the chorus wi' me, throwing their bannets up intae the air, jumping ower the forms, an' hitting ane anither on the heid wi' their slates, an' it pleased me sae weel tae see their spirits sae happy that I says—

"Man, bairns, if I wisna sae auld an' stoot I wid gang oot tae the playgrun' an' hae a gemm at the bools or the rounders wi' ye in a minute. As it is, I'll let Mr Broon aff wi' his recitation for this time, and in the name o' the Queen I gie ye a' a hauf-holiday—aye, an' mair than that, here's tippence tae buy sweeties. It'll no be mony tae each o' ye, but that'll jist mak' ye the mair carefu' in the dividing; an' Mr Broon an' I'll awa' an' draw up a when new rules, for I see they're needit. Before I go, hooever, I wid like tae say a few words tae ye in the name o' the Brod whom I hae the honour tae represent. Weel, bairns, pay attention tae yer lessons an' tae what Mr Broon says; if he's no jist as clever as I wid like, still he does his best. Without eddication,

bairns, this worl' wid be like a howling wilderness tae ye. Look at what eddication has done for me—look at the proud position I occupy—an' ye may a' one day be raised tae the tap o' the very pinnacle I noo occupy if ye're diligent an' study the jography weel. Aye try tae be at the heid o' the class if possible. Still, as it staun's tae reason ye canna a' be the heid, I wid gie a word of consolation tae them that canna manage tae get up. If ye're at the bottom, never mind. In fac', I wis aye happier when I was there, for if you're at the tap ye hev an unco fecht tryin' tae keep up, but if ye're at the bottom your mind's easy. An' noo, bairns, we'll sing a verse o' 'Auld Langsyne,' an' then ye can rin awa' an' play yersel's, an' come back the morn, it is tae be hoped, wiser an' better weans."

JEEMS KAYE.

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