

## CHAPTER XIV

### SCHOOL

If you have read all these happenings, trivial and otherwise, perhaps you have wished to inquire: "Grandfather, did you ever study?" Oh, yes indeed! It is no doubt boastful to say it out loud, but let me whisper in your ear that Grandfather was usually at the head of his class. Perhaps it will sound less boastful if Grandfather records that there were only seven in his class who completed the course and that the intellectual competition among these seven was not very great. Perhaps it will sound like more of an accomplishment to record that Grandfather completed 7th and 8th grades in one year and high school in three years, enabling him to graduate at sixteen, which was younger than usual in Brodhead.

It seems necessary, although somewhat embarrassing, to add that there were two very important subjects in which Grandfather did not lead his class; namely, writing and spelling. Grandfather will refrain from stating just what rank he did hold in these subjects. One winter a fancy penman came to Brodhead and organized a class in penmanship. Grandfather and his mother were encouraged, I might almost say exhorted, by Grandfather's teachers to have Grandfather enrolled in this class. So Grandfather joined the class and won a prize. No, dearies, it was not the prize for being the best writer - it was the prize for showing the greatest improvement. That will appear more complimentary if you do not stop to reflect that the possibilities of improvement depend largely upon the point of view from which one starts.

One day the principal announced that the entire high school was to spell down - that is, all were to stand up and the teacher would pronounce a word for each in turn - as soon as a pupil misspelled a word he was to sit down and the winner was the last one standing. The announcement gave Grandfather a sort of chilly feeling. He had been accustomed to do well in all the intellectual contests of the school and now he had a premonition that he would meet his Nemesis. It is embarrassing to record that Grandfather did not remain standing long, but when it turned out that one of the star "dumb bunnies" spelled the whole school down, the contest ended in uproarious laughter and the experiment was never tried again. However, in after life Grandfather found that imperfect penmanship and spelling were handicaps to him and he enjoins it upon you to improve upon the family tradition in these important branches of learning.

Grandfather's greatest feat in school was history and literature, for he had read omnivorously and made such a display of miscellaneous and unsorted information that one of his teachers dubbed him in class one day - perhaps with some irritation - a "walking encyclopedia", an epithet Grandfather did not succeed in living down so long as he remained in school.

Grandfather had one serious mishap with his studies. When he took up Latin, he concluded (having many interesting books in English to read) that he could manage to get along without bothering to learn the declensions and conjugations. That was a grave mistake. At the end of the year the principal, quite perplexed by the utter failure in Latin of one

who had led the school in most of the subjects on the curriculum, advised Grandfather to drop the study, saying that evidently the study of Latin was not adapted to Grandfather's particular type of mind.

This was a rude jolt, especially in view of the general attainments of some who had passed. Grandfather decided that during the summer vacation, some time when the fish were not biting well, he would take a little time off and learn those declensions and conjugations and see what that might do for the situation.

Next year Grandfather received a mark of 100 per cent in second year Latin. Now this does not mean that Grandfather knew all there was to know about second year Latin - far from it. Marks in school are only relative and this mark only indicates how little those knew who had spent the summer forgetting their declensions and conjugations and what the teacher thought he needed to mark Grandfather in order to give the rest of the class a pass mark of 70. To this tale Grandfather cannot resist appending a bit of important advice - namely, when you begin the study of Latin, be sure to learn promptly and thoroughly every declension and conjugation as soon as you come to them. By doing so you will be saved much grief and loss of time in the future.

At a very tender age Grandfather became one of the speechmakers of the school. He can well recall, when a small boy in the grades, going up to the main assembly room on some occasion to declaim to older pupils and their parents and can remember how a kindly old attorney gave him a suggestion which, if universally adopted by public speakers, would do more to please their audiences than anything else could do. As Grandfather

was about to speak, Mr. Sprague said: "Pick out someone in the back of the room and make him hear. Then everybody will hear you."

Grandfather hopes that everyone of his grandchildren, both boys and girls, will become proficient in public speaking. Grandfather has found that ability in extemporaneous speech has been his most valuable asset. Besides it is a lot of fun - to look at a large audience and not to feel afraid, but to feel a confidence within yourself that even against their indifference you can win their plaudits - there is a real thrill to that.

I hope that every one of you throughout the period of childhood and youth will accept every chance to speak in public and will try each time to do well enough so that you will get another invitation soon. If you would become a good extempore speaker, read books written in excellent English, learn to think in full rounded sentences, acquire a large fund of accurate and useful information and practice in the back yard and in the woods, orating to the trees and birds. In speaking, never tell a smutty story - somebody will have told it before you. Develop your own individual line of anecdote and illustration and use them sparingly.

Make it your practice to talk sense. A shrewd judge of public speaking told Grandfather once: "Don't tell stories, everybody does that, talk sense and you will have a monopoly of your field." It was good advice which Grandfather followed throughout most of his career in speaking. If you would do well as a public speaker, learn to talk sense in an interesting manner.

Every winter the high school gave a play and what part do you

suppose the faculty was wont to assign to your grandfather? Would you not guess he might be the hero, or at least the villain? Not so - the faculty surmised that his special bent was for the comic role. This appeared in later years as less of an affront to his dignity when Grandfather ran high school plays and found that he needed a serious-minded chap to get a good job done on the comic part.

I must tell you just one story of one of our rehearsals. We had for a time a woman principal - tall, good looking, dignified - sort of queen like. In the play the heroine was to kiss the hero, but was a little shy and did not do the part to the satisfaction of the lady principal. After several unsatisfactory tries the hero suddenly blurted out: "Miss Salisbury, you take her place and show her just how it ought to be done." Amidst uproarious laughter the principal announced that she was already satisfied with the way the part was acted.