

When 250 teachers were asked whether teacher's personal problems affect their teaching, 241 answered in the affirmative. Of interest is the fact that only 106 of these teachers thought that administrators are concerned with such problems. These same teachers rated the personal problems of teachers on a scale of 1 to 5 according to frequency. Those rated "1—most frequent" were financial problems, health problems, working conditions, and living conditions. Family relations and those with other educators had a rating of "2." Of surprise to some may be the fact that these teachers gave to community restrictions and demands a relatively low frequency as a source of personal problems.¹ Just how do these problems affect a teacher's work with pupils and fellow teachers? In a fictionalized account,² Edna Dorothy Baxter, Teachers College, Columbia University, discusses—

One Teacher's Problem

Edna Dorothy Baxter

ONE MORNING in the middle of the first period Mr. Cushman, the high school principal, appeared suddenly in the office of Molly McLane, their new director of guidance.

"Miss Anderson, one of our English teachers, has walked out of her class and gone home. Could you go up and take over until the end of this period? I'll make other arrangements after that," Cush said.

"Why, yes, I'll be glad to," Molly said.

"You might find out what's wrong up there while you're with the group," Cush added. He told her about the class, which was having more difficulty in Miss Anderson's room than anywhere else, and, although the group as a whole had had difficulty for some time, their behavior in Miss Anderson's class had been very non-conforming.

As Molly entered the room bedlam met her eyes. The class was in complete disorder. For a moment she stood and surveyed the scene. Most of the pupils went back to their seats, some of them stood by the opened windows, and one tall, overgrown boy made a remark. Molly knew that she was the subject.

She walked to the center of the room in front of the desks without saying a word, waiting for complete order in the room.

Finally she said in a deep, firm voice, "I

think that most people like for others to laugh with them, but not at them."

In a calm voice she told them that she wanted to get their point of view about the trouble in the class. No one responded. She called on John Wayne, the class president, and asked him why the group reacted as they did.

"Oh, I guess we've been wild in here ever since school began. We had Miss Anderson last year, and, well, we had some troubles then. Then when we had her again," . . . he paused.

"What has happened this year?" Little by little Molly pieced the story together.

They had begun shooting spit-wads out of the window the first week of school and evidently someone had said something to Miss Anderson about their being on the grounds, so after that she had closed the windows when this particular class had come in. This had made the pupils angry and then they had started shooting them around the room. Miss Anderson had become angry and had scolded severely. The situation had become worse and finally, when they began shooting them at her and she had been hit, she had left the room and had gone home.

Molly explained that the only way to understand a situation of this kind was to talk with them about the trouble as well as with the teacher. When the pupils realized that she was trying to be impartial and was really interested in their reactions, their storm of protest was unleashed. They complained of Miss Anderson's talking to the pupils with lit-

¹ Based on a survey by Edith E. Shufelt, Bloomington, Indiana.

² This incident has been quoted in full from a forthcoming book (D. Appleton-Century Co.) about teachers' personal and professional problems in the high school.

de respect for them, partiality toward certain individuals, nervous habits in moving around the room, her high-pitched voice, and other characteristics.

"But it wasn't all her fault, Miss McLane," John said. "We found that we could get the best of her and we took it too far."

Molly discussed the situation later with Mr. Cushman who told her that Miss Anderson had been, at one time, one of their best teachers and that problems in her home had recently become so great that they had affected her teaching.

She decided to visit Miss Anderson the next day and found a small house, set far back on a poorly-kept lawn, a few straggling flowers banked against it.

Miss Anderson was not cordial in her attitude toward Molly.

"I realize that you don't know me very well," Molly said, sitting down in the living room, "but I wonder if there is anything the school can do to be of help."

"The school! They're not interested in me. I've taught in the Hampton schools for fifteen years and each year has been worse."

"What has been the trouble?" Molly asked, kindly.

"Everything. There's no need to go into that. They'll have to release me from my contract. I'll get a letter from our doctor."

"Is that what you really want?"

"Yes! I'll have no more school work to do at night, no more committee meetings—," she broke off, quickly.

"How did you feel about teaching years ago?"

Miss Anderson was quiet for a few minutes and then said with restraint, "I was a starry-eyed idealist when I came out of college and I thought I should find security and peace in teaching. I did enjoy my work for many years, but lately it has become unbearable. I'm taking the only course left open."

"But you wish there were other courses which you might take!" Molly made the statement softly.

"I don't know. I don't know what I want. I'm too tired and too confused to know what I think."

Just then a rasping voice called from another room. Miss Anderson jumped nervously and said, "Will you excuse me, please? It's my mother."

"May I wait for you?" Molly asked.

"If you wish," Clara Anderson replied, with no warmth in her voice.

It was some time before she re-entered the room. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but my mother is ill," she said, closing the door softly behind her.

"That explains many things."

Clara Anderson was quiet for a moment, then she burst out, "It explains everything."

Molly leaned forward. "Miss Anderson, we need you at school. In fact, we need you very much."

"That's difficult for me to believe," she answered, with some restraint.

"Do you feel that the situation is hopeless?" Molly asked, sympathetically.

"Yes!" Clara answered stiffly, after a pause.

"Mr. Cushman feels that you were a good teacher and that if these emotional problems about your mother could be straightened out you could teach right through until retirement."

"There is nothing that can be done," Clara said, in a dead monotone. "I should have solved the problem long ago if it could have been solved. I hate my mother for the way she has ruined my life," she continued, calmly, "but there's nothing to be done about it now. It's an awful thing to say about your mother, but it's true."

"You must feel justified in your reactions to her." There was no answer and for a long moment there was silence. "She kept you from marrying?" Molly asked the question more as a statement.

"Yes, but the trouble started long before that. I was afraid of her when I was a child and she dominated my life completely. . . . I didn't have the courage to run away with Jim." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I'll always be chained to her, even after—." The doctor says she can't live more than a year. But she'll hold me to her even after she's gone."

"Do you want to be chained to her?"

"No," she replied, calmly, "but I wouldn't know how not to be."

"The main thing is whether or not you want to be free," Molly urged.

"I gave up hoping a long time ago, but it's what I've wanted all my life."

"And you have one year to work this out?"

"One year to undo thirty-six! Impossible!"

"That depends on you."

"I couldn't send her to a hospital as long as I can take care of her. That would be worse than anything else. She would never stop telling me then that I had neglected my duty to her. I'm afraid I would even dream about her."

"You are the only one who can determine what your life is to be. And you can still find happiness if you want it badly enough to build it."

"I've been trying so hard to find my way through this confusion." She paused for a moment. "I'm almost afraid to look forward to anything else."

"Don't you really want to come back to school?"

"I want to, yes, but—there are so many things I do that are wrong. I just can't seem to control myself. My pupils told me that my voice is terrible when I get excited."

"Have you ever heard your voice on a recording?"

"No."

"The radio stations in Austin make them. And in the Speech Department at Austin University they have some splendid recording equipment. You'll be surprised at your own voice, and, after hearing yourself, you can practice speaking more slowly and calmly and in a lower pitch. Occasionally you can go back and have recordings made to see if you're improving."

"I used to have a good voice, but maybe it's a little high now." There was quiet in the room for a few moments. "What does one say on those recordings?"

"Say the same things you would say in that first-period class."

"Oh, that would be terrible."

"You'll hear yourself as the children hear you. Of course the excitement in your voice is indicative of the way you feel inside."

"Yes, I know," Miss Anderson said, staring out of the window. "I must get some control of myself."

"Would you want to consult someone if these problems prove to be too disturbing for you to meet the school situation with our help?"

"I have to do something. It's been intolerable at home since my mother became bed-fast. But I believe that if I can have a little

help with that one class in particular until I can see my way through this, I'll be all right. Why, I feel better even talking with you about it."

"It frequently does help to discuss one's problems with someone, but of course talking it out has to be followed by constructive guidance at times. Suppose I discuss future plans with Mr. Cushman and you might stop in my office the first period in the morning."

"That would be fine."

"Shall I see you in the morning?"

There was a pause and then, "I'll be in your office a few minutes before school begins."

Molly and Mr. Cushman talked for a long time that afternoon about Clara Anderson.

"She was one of our best teachers some years ago," Cush said, "and I wish she could get back on her feet again."

"I'm not sure about what I should do, Mr. Cushman," Molly said thoughtfully. "She will have to get these hate feelings expressed and get a better perspective before she'll change very much and she may even need professional counseling."

"What does she think about it?" Cush asked.

"She's willing to do whatever the school feels is necessary, but she believes that, with some help with this one class in particular, she may be able to go on."

"Why don't we have someone else take that class for a few days or at least until she feels she can meet the situation?"

"That would help tremendously."

"Could you visit some of her classes and make suggestions?"

"Yes, and we might plan to meet together occasionally. It may be that having a good listener is all she needs to relieve the emotionality."

"Why don't you talk with her the first period for a few days and you can find out much more about the situation?"

"I usually see some of the truant cases from the preceding day the first thing in the morning, but I can see them later."

"You know, Miss McLane, I don't believe that this *whole* problem is the mother's fault. Miss Anderson should have stood on her own feet and made the kind of life she wanted. Teachers should have well-rounded ways of

living, with many interests and activities out of school."

"It's difficult to understand and it's also very easy to blame someone else for all of one's troubles. I hope that Miss Anderson realizes that some day. Right now she blames her mother for everything."

"What do you think is the heart of her problem?"

"Well, unquestionably the mother has dominated her life and subjected her daughter to every whim and wish. I hope that Miss Anderson will plan to have someone care for her mother so that she can be released for enough time to find relaxation and pleasure for herself. I hope that she develops some social life, that she gets back into studying and progressing in her professional work, and that she regains some of her old skill in working with children."

"Those are worth-while objectives and I wonder if she can meet them."

"I believe there's a chance," Molly said, as she started for the door.

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Clara Anderson returned to school and began to meet some of the problems which had confused her. "I had begun to think that I was different, that there was something very wrong with me because I have felt as I have," she said to Molly one day, "but you have helped me realize that everyone has frustrations and difficulties and that the important thing is not what happens to us, but rather how we *meet* what happens to us." New understanding of herself and her feelings and insight into her difficulties had come to Clara Anderson through Molly's friendly, personal interest.

Clara Anderson's personal problem was recognized by her principal when she walked out on a class of high school students. She could take it no longer. Like the good child who sits too quietly in the corner, the teacher who fails to exhibit such or similar behavior is frequently presumed to have no problems of personal adjustment. That such is not always true is revealed by Howard Y. McClusky, professor of educational psychology, University of Michigan, in his brief study of the personality of a teacher. Meet—

Mary Swanson—Teacher

Howard Y. McClusky

MARY SWANSON was a much better than acceptable teacher in a junior high school of suburban Grand City. She was already in her thirties and like most single women of her age viewed the passing years with apprehension. No one in her circle of associates knows her exact age, and many will tell you how adroitly she avoided the subject whenever it came up. She had enough insight to admit to herself and enough candor to confide in her friends that she wanted to marry and have a family. For several years she had been teaching other women's children and now she wanted a home and children of her own.

Before coming to Grand City in 1943 she had taught with much success in Mooreville. About two years before she gave up her position there she met and fell in love with

a young man who lived in the community. After several months of satisfying courtship they were engaged to be married. She was close to the fulfillment of her ambition of establishing a home—an ambition just as normal and plausible for teachers as it is for the members of any other occupation. But for some reason unknown to the writer's sources of information Mary Swanson's relationship to her fiancé ran into stormy weather and the engagement was broken.

She was doing a good job of teaching at Mooreville and as far as the school authorities and the community were concerned could have remained there indefinitely. But the breaking of her engagement disturbed her so deeply that she decided to leave the town of her disappointment. This decision led her

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