

The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham

ROB WILLIAMS COMES BACK

MISS MILLIE SMILED, pushed her bifocals up on her nose and settled back to enjoy the meeting. She agreed with everyone else, that



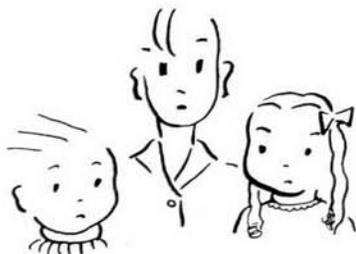
Miss Millie . . .

Center County was fortunate to have secured the services of this speaker for the County Institute. They said at the University that this young man was brilliant, and no doubt had a promising career ahead of him.

But Miss Millie was finding it a bit difficult to keep her attention on what he was saying.

After all, when one has been going to Institutes for forty-odd years, a bit of mind-wandering is understandable and permissible, perhaps. All she caught were phrases here and there.

"Understand the little pathetic ones . . ." the young man was saying earnestly. Isn't it funny, Miss Millie mused, how people always think of the pathetic ones as little? Often it isn't that way at all. It's apt to be the big and fat or the tall and gawky ones who are the most pathetic. For example, big, woe-begone Rob Williams had been one of the saddest youngsters she'd ever had. He certainly



Fat or gawky . . .

looked unpathetic, with that red hair standing up on end and his big clumsy hands and feet that he never knew what to do with, even as a little fellow. The pathetic part was all inside where people couldn't see it, but Miss Millie knew what a struggle it had been for him because he couldn't seem to be like the other boys.

"The new concept of readiness . . ." the young man on the platform was saying.



Yes, that was Rob. Never quite ready when other boys were. She'd seen it the very first day when he couldn't shinny up the swing ropes, although the others went up like monkeys. "Never mind," she'd said to him, "it'll come to you." And it had, finally, after days of blistered hands and futile trials and that sad, hopeless look in his eyes. By the time Rob could shinny up the rope, the other boys had gone in for football, and Rob was stumbling around trying, again, to catch up. And it was the same with reading. Miss Millie had thought he'd never learn. He'd just keep sticking his nose in the book and looking unhappy, while all the other young ones were reading stories. Until that day. . . . Miss Millie caught

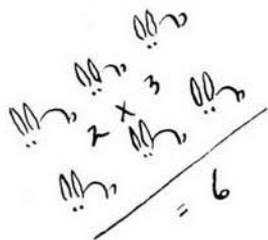
herself just in time. She had almost chuckled out loud, and just as the brilliant young man was about to say something important! But Rob *had* been amusing that day. Miss Millie had been discussing geography with the upper-grade boys and girls when all of a sudden there was a commotion among the 'lowers'. Rob had jumped to his feet and started yelling, "Miss Millie, Miss Millie, it's happenin'. I'm reading!" The look on his face had been something to see. Big, awkward, pathetic Rob Williams was catching up. "I'm very glad I'm a teacher," Miss Millie

said to herself.

And then there had been the matter of the multiplication tables. Again she checked herself in time, for a chuckle had almost broken through. Rob had struggled and struggled to memorize the tables but he wasn't too good at memorizing. Then suddenly

one day that look had come on his face and he'd burst forth with: "Why, it's just like rabbits, isn't it!" Miss Millie had been a bit fearful lest he was being somewhat too literal in his interpretation of the word "multiply," but he'd gone on: "If you have six rabbits and every one of them has six baby rabbits then there'll be thirty-six rabbits." It had been said in a tone of awed wonderment. Numbers had found meaning. He never missed on his tables after that. Several years later he'd confessed that he always saw rabbits when he said the multiplication table. Miss Millie took time out to wonder if he still did.

And there had been a host of other pathetic ones in those days. At least there were fewer since Rob, thank goodness,—fewer who looked unhappy with noses in their books and fewer who had to memorize multipli-



cation tables without knowing what it was all about. Rob's experience had taught her that. She supposed he should have known it earlier. Even shinning up the rope should have made it ob-



It's Happening!

that pushing before it's time is useless and futile,—no, worse than that, it's pathetic for both the youngster and the teacher.

And how interesting it had been to watch to see when the time to learn would come,—slowly for Rob, quickly for little Betsy,—and amazing to discover that the time doesn't necessarily show how far a youngster will go. Take little Betsy, now. She snapped up learning like a turtle when she was a wee thing. She'd married at seventeen and had a nice family. Sweet girl, but not one to set the world on fire. While slow lumbering Rob Williams—

"Goodness," thought Miss Millie, "here I go dreaming again instead of listening to all the modern ideas of this smart young man. I must pay attention."

"... and that is what is meant by rate of growth and the new concept of readiness," said the young man on the platform as he concluded his speech. As he sat down, there was applause throughout the room, and Miss Millie clapped as hard and fast as she was able.

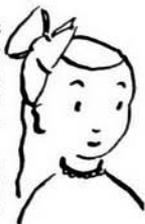
As they were leaving, the County Superintendent stopped Miss Millie and asked how she'd liked the talk. "Very helpful," said Miss Millie. "Very inspiring. These modern ideas are wonderful, aren't they?"



"Yes," said the County Superintendent, "very. And young Dr. R. S. Williams did well, too. They say he's a coming young man in the field of education. Do you remember, Miss Millie, when Rob Williams was in your room? Not too long ago, was it?"

"Yes," murmured Miss Millie. "Very helpful. Very inspiring."

The County Superintendent smiled politely. He figured Miss Millie didn't hear very well, but Miss Millie's hearing and vision are perfect.



Little Betsy...

Copyright © 1946 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.