

SICK DAYS

BY HERBERT S. GORMAN

WE come upon sick days:
The little room
That viewed your endless ways
Is like a tomb.

Lie still and do not move
And hold your breath
And be in life, poor love,
A hint of death.

CLIMBING THE BUSINESS LADDER

AN OPEN LETTER TO GIRLS CONTEMPLATING A BUSINESS CAREER

BY KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

WHEN a writer has been a sufficient number of years before the public, he or she attracts correspondence as a magnet attracts iron-filings, so that the daily mail is always regarded with combined repugnance, hope, and suspicion on its appearance at the morning meal.

It may now and then contain tributes of one sort or another (though these are rare), it may proffer requests for autographs, books for bazaars, manuscripts for an immediate opinion, subscriptions for the needy in all the arts; but it is sure to hold appeals for advice on a bewildering variety of subjects, ranging from choice of diets to unhappy marriages.

So when two requests drifted in last week for a message to several hundreds of young men and women studying in business high schools and colleges of the country I read them with calmness, tinged with some surprise that I had been approached on this especial topic.

Speaking dispassionately, I think I am safe in saying that I have less business capacity than any other prose writer of my acquaintance. Still, the subject kept recurring to my mind, and I began thinking just what I should say and just how I should say it were I to agree to the artless proposal of one of these institutions, that I should come and talk to the students and that my railway fare would be paid if necessary.

Accordingly I gradually accumulated a few scattered ideas, based entirely upon the apparent lack of social experience or the manifest indifference to ordinary social usage that I daily encounter in shops, professional and business offices, with clerks, maids, telephone and telegraph operators, and others; and now that I have marshaled them into line it appears to me that they

may be of some service to the young persons who have so innocently counted on my superior knowledge.

Were I forced into a business career myself (I certainly should never be invited!), these, I think, would be the articles of my creed:

First, I would cultivate good English speech, at any or all hazards, as a subject of paramount importance. The needs of business are best met by a liberal education. If you have not had it, no one can prevent your getting it in off hours. There is something called, probably for the sake of convenience, "Commercial English." I may be making myself disliked as well as misunderstood, but I protest that there is only one sort of good English. 'I know that there are certain "forms" to be followed in business correspondence, and am thankful that one need not, at least, begin letters to husbands, lovers, and friends, "Yours of the 15th at hand and contents noted." But all forms are capable of slight differentiation, and you will find some time that the members of a firm say, for instance, "Miss X writes an uncommonly good letter." What does that mean? Something more, certainly, than that she always follows a stereotyped form, whatever the occasion. Miss X, in learning how to write, probably first learned how and what to read. Perhaps Miss X knew the difference between literature and "reading matter" before she thought of a business career. Miss X may have had a vision of "style," and when in some crisis she was given a free hand by her superior officer may have used it in transmitting his messages and wishes, his thanks, or even his downright anger in being asked to do, or agree to, something or other. Business men undoubtedly exist who think that any statement of facts or conditions, however ex-

pressed, phrased, spelled, or punctuated, will serve, but I beg those of you who may soon be in supernumerary positions or in those of considerable responsibility to remember that the command of language is always a source of efficiency and power. Know as much as possible of mathematics, physiology, history, geography, or what not, as your position demands or your desire for general information dictates, but know how to speak and write *delightfully* (I refuse to limit you to the word "correctly") and you will never be unemployed or poorly paid.

Second, I would cultivate good manners. They cost next to nothing and anybody can acquire them—at least almost anybody. It is unfortunately true that manners refuse to grow on some people. Not all plants bloom; some run to foliage. If I couldn't be a "blooming plant" (the word in this connection means to me grace and distinction), I would try for "foliage." That would emphasize many things; for example, proper deference to elders and superiors. I use the word advisedly—superiors do exist, and it is discreet to recognize them when you see them; I think we are all a little near-sighted in this matter in America. It would include also patience and teachableness, adopting a happy attitude towards work, and a tendency to smile when saying, "Certainly," instead of remarking, "All right," and banging the door.

I should not chew gum (pardon the unpleasant suggestion!), no matter how much it added to the joy of life or the relief of boredom. If any one chances to ask what relation exists between gum-chewing and good manners, I will answer at once, "None at all," and leave the questioner to reach his own conclusions as to my meaning.

All these highly informal suggestions

include, it is true, only the dullest of the virtues, to be cultivated by fasting and prayer; they count most decidedly, but, after all, they do not embrace the asset of assets, a certain something we call "charm."

I do not say that this can be acquired, for undoubtedly charmers are born, not made, and when one makes a heroic effort to be charming it results in miserable failure. Self-forgetfulness, rather than self-consciousness, begets charm. Do not make the mistake of believing that it is born wholly of physical beauty or magnetism. Positive ugliness is quite capable of revealing it. Good speech, sincerity, gracious manners (natural, not artificial), all these combined, are a fair substitute for that mysterious quality that the fairies sometimes bring to the cradle of the newborn child. I don't know why this particular Charm Fairy is so negligent in her attendance at birthday parties, but that she is both indolent and indifferent is a deplorable fact. She is unprejudiced, however, for the cradles of employers are not visited by her any more regularly than those of employees. I am inclined to think, when all is said on this subject, that the old Negro was right when he prayed, "Lord, let me so lib dat when I die I may hab manners!" and when in pessimistic mood I am disposed to the conviction that only death will bring manners to some people.

Third, we must add *tact* to good speech and good manners, and analyze it sufficiently to realize that it need not mean flattery, hypocrisy, or evasion of the truth. One can be upright, honorable, and sincere, as well as tactful, if one is sufficiently intelligent to manage the combination. There is never any need of calling attention, for instance,

to a person's lack of hair if he or she has nice eyes and a good nose. Telling the whole truth means to many people a desire to be particularly disagreeable. Too wide a reputation for "frankness" often calls up a picture of a man or woman heartily disliked and consistently avoided. I am speaking of social tact, but if it is exercised in one sphere of life it is likely to be exercised in all.

Fourth, I should be ambitious to achieve all possible knowledge in my especial line; but in conveying it to my customers, clients, or patrons, and, for that matter, to my friends, I should endeavor to avoid arrogance, vanity, and undue self-complacency. There is a very delicate point involved here, although no thick-skinned person ever feels it. There is an astonishing amount of (recently acquired) information delivered in a pedantic, platform sort of manner to persons who were instructed before you were born. Assume that your audience knows as much as you do until it eagerly cries for more light on the particular subject. Do not tell anybody when America was discovered, or the Civil War was fought, or when Shakespeare was born, but recall the dates to the memory very casually in passing. I find myself constantly referring to social usages and forgetting business; but are not the faculties we cultivate in one sphere quite as effective in another? In business we are dealing with human beings, after all.

There are people in the world who can convince you and win your confidence in three minutes by voice, speech, manner, and by putting a case simply, effectively, modestly, yet with an evidently complete knowledge of the subject. I allow that this is magnetism, or genius, or

something resembling both; but there is no use in aiming at a blackberry bush when there are the trees for a target, to say nothing of the stars.

Fifth, I should certainly strive for success, but success might not necessarily mean an enormous income.

It would mean saying quietly to yourself (not shouting it from the rooftops): "I will not be a 'second' or 'third rater' in my own opinion or that of others, if I can help it. Perseverance and industry accompanied by a great desire will carry me somewhere near the top of the ladder, even if I never reach those last rounds which are mostly occupied by geniuses."

All the work of the world is not done by geniuses. Some of it is achieved by talent, persistence, courage, patience, fidelity, and endurance; and scarcely any of it can be traced to "luck." Very likely there is such a thing as luck, but it begins before one's birth, perhaps before the birth of one's grandfather. At any rate, we must not count upon it; indeed, we must discount it from the beginning. Believe from the very start that it will never be from the outside, but from within, that success, achievement, and happiness will come. Make the weak points strong, of course; try to find your real vocation in which you can work joyfully as well as usefully. Do not imitate anybody, however admirable. The world does not need "copies"—men and women covered with rubber stamps; it needs *you*, the real you, with all there is in you! If you go deep enough, you are always likely to find unsuspected "stuff" that belongs exclusively to you, modest as it may be. This is your birthright, and the best of it is that it grows, instead of diminishing, by use.

PALIMPSEST

BY BERNICE LESBIA KENYON

Is it not strange to think that you alone
 Could clear the page—renew the luster—find
 Under the obvious, the long unknown
 And secret perfect writings of the mind?
 Thus in an idle hour you can erase
 All blacker words, set broadly to obscure
 What lies beneath, whose substance has no place
 Among new ways that will not long endure.

I wonder, when you read the script aright,
 Untwist the intricate and complex theme
 To make it clear before your inner sight,
 If you will stand inscrutably; and dream
 (Vaguely perhaps, the thought unformed, unsaid)
 How it were better if you had not read?