

Why Clea Can't Write

By GORDON FOSTER, *who is pursuing a doctoral program in educational administration at a large state university in the Midwest.*

IN HIS "Bookshelf" column of September 15, 1962, *Saturday Review's* education editor wondered why teachers don't seem to be writing books these days. "Of course they are busy people," he said, "but all writers are busy people."

And, of course, all farmers are busy people and so are all baseball pitchers. Louis Bromfield had time to write because he was a gentleman farmer and Jim Brosnan has come out with an occasional book inspired by those long, dreamy periods in the Cincinnati bullpen; but the point is that for the most part baseball pitchers pitch, farmers farm, writers write, and teachers teach. If we really wonder why teachers are not speaking up, let's visit one and see for ourselves.

The scene before us is the modest residence of Clea and Darley Pursewarden and their small family of thriving adolescents. Their house, which has recently been covered with a homogeneous stucco to hide its decaying clapboards, is functionally convenient to Midwest State, well known by now for its colleges of agriculture, dentistry, and education. It is at the latter that Darley is attempting to complete his doctoral studies while Clea runs the household, wards off the relatives, and drives the children to the city for their weekly rounds with the orthodontist. Clea finances these assorted activities—and her husband's insatiable thirst for knowledge—by teaching the sixth grade at the Gestalt Elementary School. She has just returned from Gestalt.

CLEA: You wrote a sweet introduction for me, darling, but you make it all sound so darned unprofessional—sort of like I was just teaching for the money. After all, I belong to the NEA, the OEA, the AFT, the NCTE, and the Department of Classroom Teachers, not to mention the AAUW, Pi Lambda Theta, and the National Curriculum Committee for Protestant Sunday School Teachers. And by next spring I'll be eligible for the local AA group. How professional can one get?

DARLEY: Okay, I get the message.

Do all professional people handle as much money as you do?

CLEA: They handle more than I do, silly, but the big difference is they get to keep most of theirs. I had another big day financially—\$62 for workbooks, \$32.50 for lunches, \$47.25 for the Arrow Book Club, \$22 for next week's field trip to the museum, \$38 for high school football tickets, and \$13 for flowers for that junior high teacher whose husband shot himself yesterday.

DARLEY: What happens if you lose some of it?

CLEA: You raise such interesting questions. It so happens that today I pulled a "Dewey" and had the children set up a little bank to handle all the money themselves. This left me free to help the school nurse with our monthly classroom check for eyes and ears. The children were able to get experience in handling real money and in keeping accurate financial records. You know, Darley, the sort of motivation for learning that they always blast about in teachers' colleges. The little darlings looked so sweet and businesslike, and they only came up \$42 short.

DARLEY: That means I'll have to type the dissertation myself. I thought the Fund for the Advancement of Education sponsored some research in Bay City, Michigan, about ten years ago which indicated that it made sense for schools to employ teachers' aides to do this sort of work so you could teach.

CLEA: Right! The Bay City Plan encouraged many schools to have their essential but nonprofessional chores handled by teachers' aides. Jobs like keeping attendance records, supervising the lunchroom and playground, collecting money from the students, and even grading papers were taken care of in this manner. But it takes decades for most schools to adapt to new educational ideas or inventions, and unfortunately Gestalt Elementary is not what Paul Mort would have called a "pioneer."

DARLEY: Just like Midwest State. What made you so late tonight? Teachers' meetings usually don't endure past five o'clock.

CLEA: We had another orgy of rhetoric. We were inspired by an unexpected visit from the superintendent, Mr. Scroggs, who presented a plan adopted by the board of education for all classroom teachers to help pass the

new school tax levy. He was real enthused over an article he had just read in the *Ladies Home Post* by Admiral Onceover suggesting that we wouldn't be behind Russia in the space race. All teachers had really lived up to their school pledge. Gestalt didn't even have a pledge so Scroggs and the principal got together in a hurry and came up with one which we are now reciting before every teachers' meeting.

DARLEY: This should be good!

CLEA: Judge for yourself. I repeat from memory: "I pledge allegiance to the spirit of the Gestalt Elementary School and to the philosophy for which it stands. One policy, indisputable, with social adjustment and freedom of discussion for all."

DARLEY: Superb! And what was the board's plan to pass the tax levy?

CLEA: Scroggs compared it all to a football game. He said that to score a victory in the election we would have to get the tax levy over the taxpayer's goal line. He hoped we would field a team that was exceptionally rugged in public relations. As superintendent he would call the plays, he and the principals would carry the ball, and the teachers would make up the front line. Close games are usually won in the line, Scroggs said.

DARLEY: Block that metaphor! What constitutes a good performance by guard or tackle?

CLEA: We have to sign up for a quota of so many votes. If we can each guarantee to convince thirty or more citizens to vote for the levy, Scroggs says we'll win. The curriculum supervisor has developed a clever social studies unit entitled "Gestalt Builds Better Citizens," which cuts across all subjects and is calculated to agitate many parents into voting. The only drawback is that I have to drop the regular curriculum for three weeks, and this will crowd me in the spring. We never get through half our material as it is.

DARLEY: Speaking of parents, Mrs. Binet called and asked if you would bake a cake and five dozen doughnuts for the PTA carnival next week. I told her I would be doing the cooking since you were scheduled to go to the hospital for three days to have some varicose veins deflated and an accumulation of chalk dust drained from your sinus. She suggested I just buy the stuff at the bakery and have one of the kids bring it to school.

CLEA: That was sweet of her, wasn't it? Mrs. Binet is so considerate.

DARLEY: She also wanted to come over and talk with you some night this week about Rodney's school work. It seems that Scroggs told Mr. Binet at a lodge meeting that Rodney's I.Q.

score on the kindergarten "Draw-a-Man" test was only 110, and they were beginning to worry about Rodney's getting into Yardarm. All the Binets have graduated from Yardarm. I told her not to worry—that I was sure Midwest would welcome Rodney if his score was only 100. She apparently got mad because she hung up on me.

CLEA: You have always been so clever at counseling with people.

DARLEY: I almost forgot that Mrs. Phonics called, too. She wanted to ask your advice even though you aren't Percy's teacher. She has been reading all the nasty things that have been said lately about the Dick and Jane stories, and she is worried because she remembers Percy just loved the Dick and Jane stories. Did this mean that there was something wrong with Percy? I suggested that he probably hadn't resolved the Oedipus complex satisfactorily and that she should make an appointment with our analyst. She asked, "For Percy?" and I said, "No, for you." At this point the conversation got rather confused and I don't remember just how it ended. You're looking very tired all of a sudden. Did anything else happen today?

CLEA: Just the regular miscellany. The daily teachers' bulletin announced that for the month of October we would be responsible for parent conferences at the school two nights a week. At morning recess Jimmy Sumpson came in with a bloody nose and it took twenty minutes to get it stopped. Three of the poorer kids turned up without any lunch money and I gave up another dollar rather than see them go hungry.

DARLEY: Won't the school pay for that?

CLEA: Theoretically, but it takes at least three weeks and several forms have to be filled out which the parents never return. The kids still come in without any food. After lunch the guidance director told us that we had to give group intelligence and achievement tests to our pupils, score them ourselves, and interpret the results to the parents as best we could. I had to arrange for two girls to go home early because of upset stomachs, and the bookmobile arrived just before bus time. Is dinner ready? I hear the kids.

DARLEY: Nearly ready. But aren't you forgetting that you registered at Midwest for an evening class in children's literature so you could renew your certificate next fall? The class starts in fifteen minutes.

CLEA: Oh God! And I was just thinking about starting to write a good book tonight. *Saturday Review's* education editor said a few weeks ago that he wondered why public school teachers were not speaking up.

Report Card



DRUDGERY DEHUMIDIFIED. Dr. J. B. Johnson, superintendent of schools in Alton, Illinois, discussing the benefits of air-conditioned classrooms at a school facilities conference in Atlanta recently, said they result in happier students and teachers, more original thinking, better decisions, and fewer disciplinary problems. "One barrier that must be overcome," he observed, "is the notion that students must sweat to get an education."

IT WAS INEVITABLE. The superintendent of schools in Nashua, New Hampshire, moving swiftly to eliminate the latest in classroom distractions, has told his high school girls that they'll have to stop wearing wigs. And in London, the student leader of a boys' school warned his charges that winkle-pickers must go. They're pointed shoes.

QUITE. The Educational Supplement of the *Times* of London recently published the following excerpt from the Nyasaland Education Ordinance of 1962: "The Registrar of Teachers may order the removal from the Register of Teachers of the name of and may withdraw or suspend for a specified period not exceeding twelve months the authority to teach of any teacher who—(a) dies."

EXCUSES, EXCUSES! In Wickenburg, Arizona, a high school student who commutes from a ranch northeast of town recently explained to the principal why he was late: "The stage was delayed." And in Richmond, Virginia, when the Henrico County school board sent out a questionnaire to find out why students drove to high school instead of taking the bus, it received this reply: "Because I have to take my wife to work."

"'TWAS BRILLIG, AND THE SLITHY TOVES . . ." A foreign student at the University of Oklahoma, asked recently if he was having a language problem, replied: "Actually, I have no trouble with English. It's just the idiotisms."

THE PRICE WAS RIGHT. A 25-year-old schoolmistress recently resigned her post in Kingsbridge, England, to become a bookmaker. For the past four years she has been teaching school by day and working as a clerk-accountant

in a bookmaking establishment by night. Now she's decided to open her own shop—on Winner Street.

. . . AND TWIRL THOSE PHI BETA KAPPA KEYS! In response to a student's plea for a cheer "demonstrating sophistication, specificity, and intelligence," the cheerleaders at the University of Kentucky came up with this one just before the game with Louisiana State:

Activate your biceps
Exercise your triceps
Hit 'em with your metacarpals
Kick 'em with your metatarsals
Catapult them back to LSU
Decapitate just a few
Oh, peregrinate to victory, UK
Liquidate those "Tigers" right away!

(Contributed by Harvey Sherer, Vice President, Business Administration, University of Kentucky.)

THE HEMINGWAY TOUCH. When the new Dundee elementary school in Greenwich, Connecticut, was dedicated recently, parents strolling through the corridors on a tour of inspection were struck by this student theme posted on the bulletin board: "I have a guinea pig. His name is Chatter. My friend has two hamsters. One hamster killed the other hamster."

ENROLLMENT FORECAST. The University of Miami's experimental school, where student teachers put into practice theories they have learned in class, is so popular with parents that some women rush to the registrar's office as soon as they discover they are about to become mothers. A secretary at the school said recently that 20 per cent of the 400 children on the waiting list haven't been born yet.

CHRISTMAS STORY. Bryan High School in Yellow Springs, Ohio, maintains an experimental forest as part of its science program, and once a year at this time the Student Council stages a Christmas tree festival. Trees are sold to stores, schools, and householders in the surrounding area, and the ancient custom of finding and cutting your own tree is observed. Hot chocolate and cookies are served to customers around a blazing campfire, and Christmas carols are sung.

—JOHN SCANLON.