

In Memoriam : A. Yelland.

(From "Child Life." By kind permission.)

Since the last issue of THE LINK the cause of education has suffered a grave loss by the death, on April 1st, after a brief illness, of Miss A. Yelland, the Head Mistress of the School and Kindergarten at the Froebel Institute in Talgarth Road, West Kensington.

Miss Yelland had been a student at the Training College of the Institute for a year, from September, 1895, till July, 1896, but she came to the College considerably older in years than most students, and with much educational experience already acquired. After a short absence she returned to the Institute as Assistant Mistress in the Demonstration School early in 1898. Three years later, in January, 1901, she became Head Mistress, and so remained for fifteen years till her death.

I do not suppose that her name was very widely known, but her influence within her school was unusual and astonishing, and the effect of it may have radiated out far beyond the school walls. It would be much better—and perhaps later on it may be done—if an account were given of this remarkable woman by one of those who worked under her, and who were so immensely impressed by her powerful and striking personality. Yet it may be that the quality of the impression she made upon them was of too special and sacred a kind to be set down and given to the world. For this was its peculiar nature and combination: she was not only their leader intellectually by the strength and fullness of her mind, she was not only their leader morally by the power and resoluteness of her will, but she was also their leader spiritually in the things of the soul. And with all this she was—a most essential point—not only leader, but an intimate and a beloved friend.

It may also be said of this distinguished teacher that the children, in a less conscious manner and on a different scale, felt the same, or on the same lines, towards her as the members of her staff. Her mind, her will, her soul, all greatly—some might, perhaps, have said too greatly—affected them. And reverence for her was equalled by love.

Under Miss Yelland's headship the school attained a maximum of numbers and of efficiency. There is no doubt that, if we could have increased the number of rooms, Miss Yelland would soon have filled them. Regretfully she told me some weeks before the end that she had now frequently to refuse admissions. Every nook and corner were full.

For the welfare and well-being of these two hundred and twenty children—of these children of God, as she regarded them—Miss Yelland toiled unceasingly. It is to be feared that a good part of the vacations was spent in their service, as well as every moment of the term. It is to be feared—and yet she was happier so—that the frail body was unable to hold out against the ceaseless toil to which its mistress subjected it.

I believe it is true to say that she somehow managed to know each one of the two hundred and twenty children intimately, and tried to do, and find, the best for each individual child. She not only impressed herself upon them through her staff, but she helped them, cared for them, and directly, mind to mind, soul to soul, sought to influence them for good. How far this strong desire to influence may have been in accordance with some modern theories of education is a matter upon which opinions would differ. I am simply stating the fact. These direct relations with the individual child took up an immense amount of time, and, what is more, they necessitated the outflow and expenditure of an immense amount of thought and of emotional and spiritual force.

As the motto of all she did and tried to do, Miss Yelland might have taken that verse of the Scriptures: "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." She had a very high ideal in all departments and sides of school life and school work; she set this ideal first and foremost before herself, and then before her staff and before the children. She hated the slipshod; she loved efficiency. If any criticism of her methods were here in place, it would, I think, be true to say that the passion for perfectness sometimes, and in certain details, went further (as regards her own work and the work of the staff) than, for reasons of health and strength and proportion, was always desirable. She wanted every part and aspect of the work and of the school life to be perfect, and she herself set the example. She was anxious that her children, when they left her, should be as well equipped and trained as possible for the next stage and place in their careers, and it is gratifying to think that, in a very large proportion of instances, this desire of hers was fulfilled. Her children did, and are doing, well. There are very many of her old boys and girls who look back to their old school and to their old "Head" with deep gratitude and affection. They often wrote to her, they often came to see her. An old boy, home for a week's leave from the trenches, would make the school in Talgarth Road one of his first visits. And this leads me on to say that her boys held her dear, as well as her girls. The exigencies of space and other reasons bring it about that our boys leave us much earlier than our girls. They, therefore, had less of her continuous influence than the girls. Nevertheless, it was long and deep enough in many cases for a marked effect. Moreover, Miss Yelland, though very spiritual, was the reverse of namby-pamby. She was keen on sports, and she wanted games to be carried out as efficiently and as strenuously as "lessons." If we could have kept them till fifteen or sixteen, I believe the boys would have liked to be under her.

In addition to her knowledge of, and interest in, every individual child, a word may be fitly said as to her knowledge of, and interest in, a very large number of the parents. Them, too, she sought, and liked, to influence and help. And I believe it is barest truth to say that this influence and help were very deep and large. A very considerable proportion of parents looked up to her, trusted her, admired and honoured her in a singular and remarkable degree. They will grieve profoundly at her death.

Her strong and pervasive personality made itself felt in every member of the staff. She received from them whole-hearted support and the most willing co-operation. A certain emphasized unity of purpose existed in the school, originating in its Head. And as the Head cared for the separate children, so, too, she thought of, and cared for, the individual members of the staff. In different ways and degrees, doubtless, all partook of her spirit; all felt her guiding hand, her high ethical ideals, her passion for thoroughness, her unselfish devotion to the children.

I would like to add a personal word as to my own relations with her. I always felt stimulated by her capacity, her powerful brain. Though her intellect was only one feature (and to those who knew her best not even the most predominating feature) in her character, it was exceedingly noticeable. I always felt glad that the Head of our school—the school of an institute which outsiders might think was the home of sentimentality or crankiness—was a woman, who, however “spiritual,” had lots of mind, lots of knowledge, and lots of common sense. She was conscious—how could she fail to be?—of her peculiar powers; she liked to exercise them, but she was without a particle of vanity. For that she was far too religious and far too anxious to grow. And so she would talk with me as if she were talking to an educational equal. Which, of course, was absurd; but it was none the less delightful. I always greatly enjoyed a talk with her, and, now that they are gone upon earth for ever, I only wish I had made more use of my opportunities.

I should like to add a word upon a subject upon which, nevertheless, I touch only with hesitancy and reserve. That subject is religion. No one who knew Miss Yelland at all intimately could fail to recognize that her religion, in the deepest and fullest sense of the word, was the centre of her character and the true source of all her work and all her aims. Her life was one long, dedicated service. Of herself and of her whole life she might have said, humbly but truthfully, what the supreme poet said of himself:

All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

But there is something more specific to be added, which it is, precisely for the present writer, incumbent and fitting to add. Miss Yelland was not only a deeply religious woman, but she belonged with passionate faith to a particular religious denomination. Nevertheless, she was able, with absolute sincerity, to be the Head of a school whose “undenominational” character stands in the forefront of its characteristics, and which draws its pupils from every sect. She took the religious “lesson” in every class. She did this, managing, so far as the New Testament as well as the Old Testament lessons were concerned, to satisfy the parents of every branch of Christianity. But, almost always, her school included a few pupils who came from beyond the limits of Christianity altogether. These few pupils were Jews. In the prayers and hymns which were sung at the opening of school, when all the children were assembled together, Miss Yelland was

always anxious that the wording should be broadly "catholic"; no expression was used which would be inappropriate even for the Jew. We were made to feel upon these occasions what united us all—our common brotherhood, our common dependence upon a common Father—never what separated us off. I believe that the Jewish pupils were able to join in her Old Testament lessons with much profit, and without their loyalty to their ancestral faith being in any way impaired. Indeed, I fancy that many persons are better Jews and Jewesses than they would have been had they never met Miss Yelland. At any rate, the fact remains—and it is not without its significance—that among the parents who honoured her most deeply, and who are most grateful for her wise counsel and loving care, are several Jewish fathers and Jewish mothers. I can recall the wedding of a Jewish pupil, where, amid a large and almost exclusively Jewish gathering, the most honoured and the most welcome guest was probably this fervid and passionate Christian, the large-hearted "guide, philosopher, and friend" of many Jews and Jewesses, who will profoundly deplore her loss and sadly cherish her memory.

Miss Yelland occasionally gave addresses on educational topics—touching, too, upon moral and spiritual matters—to gatherings of parents. She once allowed me to see a certain number of these which she had put together with the idea of possible publication. It is to be hoped that they may still be given to the world. They were full of ripe wisdom, acute observation, and deep spirituality. But, as is especially the case with great teachers, the woman herself was much more than any of her words. Her rich and powerful personality is withdrawn from us. We do not know to what tasks the ardent spirit, that was the tenant of that slight physical frame, is set. To those who knew her best and loved her most a memory remains for which they will always be grateful, till they, too, receive the summons that came to her so quickly, so suddenly, but for which she was so well and so dutifully prepared.

C. G. M.

A beautiful brass tablet has been placed in the School hall by the staff and children. It bears the words :

To the glory of God, in thankful remembrance of

ANNIE YELLAND.

Friend, Guide, and Helper.

Mistress in this School, 1898-1901.

Head Mistress, 1901-1916.

Whose life on earth, filled with the love of God, was
spent in serving His children.

April 18th, 1866.

1 April 1st, 1916.