

January 1911



Headteacher's log

Monday 9

Some staff turbulence surfaced today. My Deputy, Ms Oakenstaff confided to me that she had been at the school too long. In career terms she is right, but we would be lost without her. She is a superb professional. Moreover, her militant feminism seems to have mellowed. Last week she allowed me to hold a door open while she carried a heavy desk along the corridor. Mr Peel apologised for low teaching performance due to depression. His old school, Eton College, is proposing to abolish the birch. Melinda Cartwright, Media Studies Co-ordinator, told me she needs higher pay and is considering becoming a film actress.

Tuesday 10

Norman Tykeswater in Y4 was in the sickroom this morning feeling faint before a reading test. My secretary, Mrs Lamplady, diagnosed blood sugar deficiency. The new healthy food regime is suspected of causing the lower test results noted and deplored in primary schools last year. When breakfast has been celery and water there seems to be an unusual lassitude in the school. Nevertheless, the purge of unhealthy eating goes on. Two neighbouring schools have been visited by the food police. Apparently, PCs Jamie and Oliver were tipped off by moles among the pupils. Heads are watching out for thin children who, they suspect, are taking food phobias to the authorities.

Wednesday 11

I am hopeful that more money might be coming to cheer up my staff. Last evening I heard a speech by junior education minister Lord Hermes to Loamshire heads. He reviewed the gloomy prophecies about 1911 given by academics and tea-leaf readers. Widespread strikes, continuing gender conflicts and troubles about Ireland, and the threat of a general European war are all on people's minds, together with political uncertainty following two close general elections. Also, earthquakes (like San Francisco), volcanic eruptions (like Krakatoa), meteorite catastrophes (like Siberia) and 'flu pandemics, are among the forecast natural hazards causing widespread fear. The only answer, said Lord Hermes, was education, education, education. Teachers are the saviours of the world. How much, I wondered, are world saviours paid?

Thursday 12

Ms Oakenstaff suggested to me that the slight drop in truancy in the last quarter of 1910 could be attributed to the Government's healthy food policy. She thought the children might have a more strenuous approach to learning, while also lacking the mental energy to devise ways of bunking off. So she really is preparing for headship interviews.

Friday 13

Canon Thunderton-Armstrong, our Chair of Governors, asked my advice about a letter he'd received from an organisation calling itself 'Quiet End, the militant wing of the Society of Friends'. It warned him that he could be a target in the armed struggle against the Book of Common Prayer. He hoped it was a hoax, perhaps staged by our children, but wondered if he should take it seriously. I assured him that our children were not involved. The new diet left them no mental energy to devise such japes. He'd better inform the police.

■ Leonard Bookman

Ello, ello! What's all
this then? A bowl
of celery soup
and a bread roll?

