Greener Grows the Grass, by John B. Heath

The other day a banker, just passing through Exeter on a business trip to Portland, dropped in to find out from his son's English teacher whether there was any hope for the boy in *English 3*. There was. As he got up to put on his coat, he said "You know, I envy you. Teaching is a wonderful life. I almost went into it myself. When I retire I'd like to take up teaching – just to taper off."

The teacher said nothing. Whether the man had spoken insincerely, out of pity, or wistfully, out of envy, the meaning was clear. He knew as little about teaching as the teacher knew about banking. But his remark started the teacher thinking. What if he had the opportunity to explain, and the banker the will to listen?

He would not have to explain how he happened in the first place to take up teaching, or how he happened to land at Exeter; the banker would understand that background, personality and accident had made a teacher at Exeter just as they had made a banker in Ohio.

But he would have to show the banker what the teacher at Exeter does, and what he thinks and feels. He would have to show that he is human, though sometimes his students and those other preoccupations, his children, do not seem to realize it — human in the sense of needing, like everyone else, a reasonable compromise between work and play, routine and variety, job and family, frustration and achievement, obscurity and recognition. If you tickle him, he laughs; if you. Prick him, he bleeds.

On duty officially every third or fourth night in the dormitory, he checks the boys in and sees that they keep reasonably quiet, do a reasonable amount of studying, and go to bed reasonably early, so that he can too. During an evening on duty he will probably fetch one boy to the telephone for a call from home, try to solve one tank emptying algebra problem, ask one boy on the fourth floor to stop bouncing his lacrosse ball, give one boy library permission to study history and another boy late permission to finish his Latin, and tell one Lower Middler at ten-thirty-five to stop admiring himself in the bathroom mirror and go to bed. Sometimes when he has papers to correct starting at eight o'clock he goes from room to room around the dormitory in 15 minutes. But probably the next time he has the duty he makes a point of a leisurely check- in, and when he encounters a boy in an equally receptive mood, he enjoys listening to the boy's enthusiasms and perhaps expressing some of his own. The check-in, whether in his apartment or at the boy's room, is on the one hand a formality and on the other a regular, hence valuable, social opportunity.

Although dormitory duty brings regular contact with every boy in the building, each man has a particular responsibility to his baker's-dozen advisees. The term adviser defies definition. Advisers differ, and one advisor differs in his relationship from one boy to the next, and with the

same boy from one day to the next. Sometimes he finds himself friend, sometimes lawyer, sometimes preacher, sometimes confessor. He finds his efficiency sometimes impeded by the conflict between his role as disciplinarian and his role as confidant or by his own intrusive feelings.

Each year he probably has one chronic academic emotional or disciplinary advisee problem — a boy who can't pass French, or adjust to the death of his father, or resist his compulsion to play hockey in the corridors. And he probably has at the other extreme, one advisee whose social and academic performance is so smooth and efficient that as a parent himself the advisor envies the boy's parents and wonders what their formula is. His other advisees are a little of one and a little of the other.

It is inevitable that the more difficulty a boy has, the more attention his adviser gives him. Since he has to get after an advisee who needs a haircut, fails to clean up his room, misses school appointments, or forgets to hand in science homework, the adviser is apt to find himself more involved emotionally with a boy if he has a problem than if he hasn't. He often wonders whether his role is too negative, whether he is just a trouble-shooter.

So it is particularly important to him to be able occasionally, with his wife, to enjoy his advisees on a purely social basis — all of them at once, or a few at a time — for tea, for cider and donuts after the movies, for a birthday party, for waffles Sunday morning not too early. A few of the boys, especially the younger ones, find these parties difficult, and sometimes the parties are a little strained; but most of the boys welcome them, and on such occasions, with no axe to grind, the adviser cannot help making progress in dissolving the conflict in interests.

As an adviser he is constantly reminded of his responsibility to parents. He doesn't write them as often as he should, and for geographical reasons they don't often visit; but each letter or phone call or visit from a parent impresses him with the concern of the parent for his boy, and with the trust he places in his boy's adviser.

In an effort to make himself a better adviser, he participates in a faculty evening seminar on advising. But even the experienced adviser seldom knows whether with a given boy he has succeeded or failed. He has at least the illusion that as teacher he can measure his success by examination results, and as a coach by victories over traditional rivals; but as an adviser he often feels uncertain about the value of his contribution to a boy's welfare. Still, he usually finds that with or without or despite his efforts, most of his advisees hold their own. And sometimes he finds, ten years after, that once, perhaps without knowing it or remembering it, by sympathy or tea he did a boy some significant good.

The teacher at Exeter probably coaches. He may coach dramatics, for instance, or debating, or riflery. If he is interested in athletics — interest is more valuable than skill— he coaches, say,

club soccer in the fall, and club baseball in the spring. He finds that coaching four afternoons a week takes time, and occasionally he prays for rain; but ordinarily he finds that the time is well spent. It gives him a regular chance for exercise, or, if he is feeling old, at least for some fresh air. It gives him a chance to see the boys, and the boys a chance to see him, outside the classroom. It gives him a chance to do a different kind of teaching. Even if he takes his coaching very seriously it gives him a kind of comic relief from the pressures of his dormitory and classroom. Probably his worrying about how to break a three-game losing streak, or whether to use Strongarm as pitcher or shortstop, has the therapeutic value of relieving his anxiety about Hollowhead's chances of passing Latin.

A teacher at Exeter has additional responsibilities outside the classroom. He and his wife will be called on occasionally to chaperone a school dance. He may be asked to drive an outing club into the mountains, or a yachting group to the ocean. He takes his turn proctoring study-hall and the movies. He takes great pleasure in entertaining returning alumni, on the assumption that if they mean something to him, he probably means something to them. And asa member of the faculty at large, and as a member of at least one faculty committee —the Counseling Committee, for instance, whose specific concern is advising the adviser — he has a role in determining Academy policy.

And even though he is often accused of being almost by definition in an ivory tower, the teacher at Exeter, just like anyone else, has in addition to his faculty responsibilities a family, social and civic life. He never has time to do everything he wants. But he makes time to watch a varsity baseball game, or take his wife and children to the beach for a Sunday afternoon picnic; to be host at a dinner party, or go to a Boston Symphony concert or the theatre; to give an adult education course, or run for the local school board.

But after all, he was hired to *teach;* his main concern, of course, is his classroom teaching. Though an amateur coach, he is a professional teacher.

He has only sixteen to twenty classes each week, but these classes are of the iceberg but the part what shows. Beneath are his graduate work; his revision of old material and method, his search for new; his attempt, through reading, writing and attending conference, to keep up with the latest developments in his field. A English teacher is currently busy arranging "on reserve" at the Library a collection of short stories in an English I project, with a view toward selecting a number of stories for an anthology. During spring vacation he read a dozen assorted biographies in his serach for one new non-fiction book for close study in English III. And he has been more or less faithful in watching a winter series of weekly educational-television lectures on writing. He is planning to attend the spring meeting of the Secondary Education Board, and the June meeting of the College Entrance Examination Board. But these, though important, are spare time activities. He spends most of. His time in the routine of attending department meetings,

planning assignments, designing tests and theme topics, correcting and grading papers, and holding individual conferences with boys.

He is his own severest critic. He feels that he isn't making full use of the discussion potential of the Harkness small class around a large table. He has 9:20 class that just doesn't jell, and characteristically he exaggerates the difficulty, blames himself, and feels inadequate. After a particularly discouraging class, especially if one of his students has shown him up on a literary date, he feels that there must be some better way to make a living.

But sometimes, when a class is just right — the boys are attentive; no one, not even the teacher, looks surreptitiously at his wristwatch; even the silent member of the class has something to say; the illustrative joke gets more than a polite laugh; the bell rings unnoticed, the boys, excused, do not bolt, but leave slowly and perhaps reluctantly — he is sure that there is no better way to make a living.

Only, he thinks that when he retires from the Academy faculty at sixty-eight, he'd like to take up banking — just to taper off.