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**"THE ODYSSEY OF MRS. BROWN"**  
BY J. C. MATTHEWS  
State Department Director, P.-T.A.

(Continued from Last Week)

**Chapter II—The Quest**

Back home three weeks later, Anna Brown took stock of her family affairs as she lay, blissfully lazy, on the living room divan. After those weeks of constant attendance upon Clara, she had surrendered completely to the demands of her tired body. Rest and relaxation she was getting in abundance, but her mind was still busy. One question, like a catchy popular air, kept running through her brain. "Hasn't teaching changed at all since I was a child?"

Where would she find the answer? Ask Bobby? He would wonder if Mamma were not becoming a little "queer". And then came the startling relation that she hadn't visited Bobbie's school since — well, when was the last time? Anna Brown felt that she ought to blush for some of the thoughts she had entertained concerning Miss Robinson. Had she any right to criticize the teacher when she herself took so little interest in education as to leave her son's education entirely to the teachers?

An interesting thought occurred to Anna Brown. Were there many more parents exactly like her in that respect? Surely there must be. She rather prided herself on her modernity, her tolerance and her progressiveness. Well, if she, trying to keep abreast of the changing times, felt no obligation to the school, what about the scores and scores of other parents who were making less effort to keep up with this fast-moving world?

Mrs. Brown had no cause to worry over her son's progress in school. Regularly each six weeks he brought his report card to her for her signature, and a glance was enough to show her that he was doing well. His card was marked "satisfactory" on each item. Bobbie was not a scholar, his mother knew, for he was strong and healthy, and he had the normally active mind of a boy of eleven. Although she secretly

chided herself for selfishness, Anna Brown was glad he didn't give her any trouble. Her clubs — the Woman's Club, the Country Club, her bridge club, her church circle — all took time, and there were several evenings each week when she and Mr. Brown were not at home. Of course, Bobbie was well taken care of. Didn't she pay the maid extra to stay those evenings? Still —

What should she do? She switched on the radio, heard a bit of new jazz and half of a smoothly-worded admonition to use L-or-el toothpaste and "keep both health and husband." She turned off the radio, and caught up the paper to see whether there was a good show in town. While she pondered the relative merits of "Love's Command" and "The Desert Legion," she reached her decision. She would visit Bobbie's school that very afternoon.

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Quite by coincidence, she found Bobbie's fifth grade class working on a problem in social studies under the guidance of Miss Armstrong who greeted her visitor warmly and seated her comfortably by an open window. It was a lazy day in early October, but Anna Brown noted curiously that the children didn't appear to be the least bit restless. Such days as this, she mused, were the ones when the out-of-doors drew most strongly upon youngsters. Was Miss Armstrong a hypnotist?

Anna Brown soon discovered that there was much of the psychological in Miss Armstrong's handling of the class, but certainly nothing of the unnatural. In fact, it appeared to be the most natural procedure in the world.

Instead of being arranged in the room in the traditional manner, the pupils sat about tables upon which were blueprints of the city park. But what could they be doing with such blueprints in the social studies class? She was even more astonished to hear Miss Armstrong say very calmly:

"Now that we have the blueprints collected, what would you suggest as ways of improving our city park?"

"We oughta put in some furnaces," suggested Johnny.

"But why should we have furnaces in a park?"

"Well," began Anna Brown's own Bobbie, with a triumphant glance at his mother, "it's a good thing for families and neighbors to meet at the park in the summer, enjoy a visit, play some games, and furnaces make it possible for them to prepare food and destroy trash."

Nellie said there was a need for more provisions for games. Tommy added that the grown folks should play games also. Stephen appended the observation that the park needed some new drainage ditches to protect the health of the town.

As the children talked, Miss Armstrong wrote on the board: "Things our park needs." Some children objected to some items on the ground that they would cost too much. This caused the children to consider what they could do to improve the park. Miss Armstrong wrote: "Things we want to do."

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"Yes," said Miss Armstrong, when she and Anna Brown were comfortably seated in the ladies' lounge during the former's rest period, "That is what I suppose one would call a typical work period. Since we've been using the new State courses of study I've found that the problem of discipline has practically disappeared. After all, there is only one cause, usually, of such problems, and that is lack of interest on the part of the children. If you can get them interested in something, and keep them interested, you needn't worry about misbehavior."

"I notice that you permit the children to take the lead in class work quite frequently. That isn't a general practice in the schools, is it?"

"No," said the teacher, "the older theory of teaching was that the children were just so many sacks to be stuffed full of facts of every kind and description. Then, periodically, when an examination was given, the little sacks were to open their mouths and pour out whatever was called for, in exactly the same size and shape in which it was stuffed into them. I went through a canning factory once, and after that I could never think of those long rows of shining cans moving up to the 'feeder' on endless belts without thinking about school children. I still think there was a great similarity. All of them got exactly the same thing in exactly the same quantity. I am sure that it has occurred to you, Mrs. Brown, that all children are not alike, and that, being unlike, they need different things."

"How true that is!" she said with a reminiscent smile. "When I was in high school — which was many more years ago than I wish to think about — I wanted to study art. Not that I wanted to become an artist — a professional, I mean — but simply because I liked beautiful things and I wanted to find out something about how they are drawn and painted. But did I? I did not, simply because the school had no art course, and the principal thoroughly squelched me with the remark that I would be wasting my time. It would be much better spent, he said, studying Latin or geometry."

"That," said Miss Armstrong, "is one of the principal points of the philosophy of the new curriculum; the meeting of the individual needs of the pupils. If a child likes to draw, we see that he has the opportunity to develop his talent. If he like mathematics, we give him all the mathematics we can without neglecting his development as a well-rounded personality. After all, even an engineer, who must know mathematics or starve, should be a good citizen and be able to enjoy the creative and recreative arts."

"And," said Anna Brown, "you let the children direct themselves quite largely? Don't they waste a lot of time playing?"

"Of course, we must direct their activities, but already I've discovered that if you give a child 'this head' so to speak, it doesn't require a great deal of suggestion to guide him in the worth-while paths of learning. That is where expert teaching comes in — Miss Armstrong colored slightly and smiled. "Not that I'm an expert teacher, you know, but I'm impressed every day with the importance of knowing how to guide the children without making them conscious that you are directing them."

"You would be surprised to know how little time the children waste, even when turned loose completely on a problem. You've seen already that we have abandoned the formal recitation and that the children are free to move about and talk with others who are working on the same problem. We teachers, of course, must see that freedom doesn't become license, but I've found that the children react to self-responsibility very much as older people do. If you show them that you have confidence in them, they rarely abuse privileges; but if you let them know that you are watching them and that you expect them to disobey, they'll not disappoint you."

"What kind of a physical and health education program do you have?"

"One of the first principles of the new curriculum," replied Miss Armstrong, "is the complete development of the individual, physically as well as mentally. A sound mind is of little value without a sound body. Every child engages in some form of physical education, and all study personal as well as mental hygiene. Health, until now, has been largely neglected and the result is that many children come to us in a pitiable condition, simply because of lack of knowledge on the part of their parents. Many children have bad teeth; many are suffering from malnutrition, and such children don't come always from poor families, either. The school does all it can to correct such conditions, but it can't solve this problem without the co-operation of the home. Parents need help in understanding and solving health problems. That is where a strong Parent-Teacher group can be of great service to the community."

"You have such a group here, I suppose?" asked Mrs. Brown, a bit uncomfortably.

"Certainly," was the instant reply.

"Many parents want to help, but they don't quite know what to do. Good leadership is just as important as energy and enthusiasm."

Anna Brown knew that she wasn't fooling Miss Armstrong, so she made her confession.

"It never occurred to me before," she said, "how important the parents' part is in educating our children. Like many others, I suppose, I've always taken it for granted that the school, having been created to perform the task of educating the young, can do the job without assistance from the parents. Not only that, but I'm sure that many of us have a feeling of relief in being able to send our children off to school so that we'll be free to do the things we like to do and not have to worry about them. It's pure selfishness on our part, isn't it? We don't consider that education is a mutual job for the home as well as the school, and that the school can't accomplish its aims if the parents neglect their part of the work. There isn't a parent worthy of the name who can't devote more time than he or she does to the education of the children. I'm just a guilty in that respect as anyone, but I shan't continue to be guilty. I'm going to join the P.-T.A. and do my part!"

(Continued Next Week.)  
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