

LETTER-WRITING FOR BUSY PEOPLE

By Emma M. Hale

WRITING and receiving letters are two very pleasant things. What grievous heartaches and homesickness may be cured by interesting, pleasant letters most of us have an opportunity of finding out. But many who agree with me in this will say the trouble is to find the necessary time for writing such letters ; that we think enough of those to whom we would like to write, but every day brings its duties, and when they are completed we are often too tired to do anything which requires thought. Now let me give my "system of letter-writing made easy for busy people," assuring you that it is practical, for I have used it for many years, during which I have had business cares, added to the care of a home and children, and yet have found time to write hundreds of letters.

The idea is a very simple one. It consists merely in always having at hand a little tablet upon which to jot down topics for prospective letters, and with it a pencil ready for instant use whenever a thought occurs to you. And this is how the idea is to be applied :

Your husband, perhaps, leaves home on Monday for a week's absence. Even after "good-by" comes the request, "write soon." As you go back to your work you stop a moment to put his name at the top of a page of your tablet, and then, as ideas come to you, you jot down here a few words to serve as cues—something concerning his business, perhaps, or only a bright speech of the baby, too good for papa to miss. Only one line of topics must be avoided, the unpleasant things which cannot be helped. The quiet hour in which you expect to write your letter is consumed by the visit of a friend, who imagines you must be lonely, so your letter must be written in the evening, with the children noisily playing in the room. Ordinarily under such circumstances you could do nothing, but the little page before you with its dozen of suggestions makes it possible for you to write a letter which would make any man imagine that your whole mind was upon him.

One of the best of all times to hold imaginary conversation with absent friends is when one is doing work commonly called tedious, because it is almost purely mechanical. When one's fingers are occupied and the conscience is easy, your thoughts should be at their brightest. I have never seen any inconsistency in reading a chapter from Herbert Spencer in the evening and thinking it over next day while paring potatoes for dinner.

Do not think a letter written from topics jotted down at long intervals will necessarily be a cold, unnatural one, for, on the contrary, it will be burning with what you have really had time to think—far better than anything you could write without such assistance.

Letter-writing may be the only literary work you ever do, so do not be afraid of obeying one or two fundamental rules necessary to success. It is well known that the best things you read have not been written once, but many times over, before they meet your eye on the printed page ; but I have premised that you have only time to write your letters once, so try the plan of having good thoughts collected and classified for your absent friends, and you will gradually find that you have no longer cause for thoughts of regret that you are neglecting those you love, nor they for reproaching you with forgetfulness.