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# SCHOOL REFORM.

*THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE TEACHERS  
GUILD, OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND,  
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BY

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It is indeed a responsible task for me to address *ex cathedra* an assembly of practical teachers, and yet there are many things which I want to say, things which I believe to be true and which I hope may be useful, but no one in this audience can be more fully alive to the possibility that in some of my utterances I may be mistaken ; and, whereas preachers sometimes conclude their discourses by the prayer that what they have said of truth and wisdom, and that only, may sink into the minds of their hearers and bear fruit, so I, too, though I do not presume to express it in theological language, do most earnestly hope that whatever I say in error and misconception and mistake may be speedily obliterated and leave no trace behind. Truth and wisdom, whenever clearly uttered in this country at the present date, awaken so much sympathetic response that they can almost be trusted to take care of themselves, *i.e.*, to be taken care of by those to whose ears they come, unless they are killed by the active hostility of self-interest, or blighted by the frosty atmosphere of thoughtless tradition ; but error is a deadly weed which may flourish only too luxuriantly, and its dissemination is a curse to mankind.

With this responsibility clearly in mind I nevertheless wish to uphold one main thesis, and to support it by a number of minor ones which I will duly set forth so far as may seem timely and appropriate.

My main thesis is that *Reform is necessary in the schools of England, and not least in the great public schools.* I would even go so far as to say that there is no other ripe and feasible reform of greater magnitude and urgency ; because it is in the schools of England that our officials, our administrators, our rulers, our future teachers, our pastors and masters, are yearly being trained ; and any radical defect in their training operates through the whole body politic as a defective blood supply

operates in the individual. The heart may be right—the heart, thank Goodness, is right—the muscles and the lungs are in excellent trim, but the brain is defective ; and the cause appears to be that the organs which assimilate nourishment and elaborate it into pabulum fit for the brain—say the stomach and the liver—are sluggish and inactive, and as a result the brain has become idle and callous and inattentive. Yet after all I am not sure but that the stomach and liver are fairly right too, if they were given proper food, but either they are out of order or else they are supplied with material of too hard and indigestible a character ; so the result is the same—the supply of nutriment to the brain is insufficient, and that organ is accordingly dwarfed and poverty-stricken. It is as if one should live on over-preserved food, on antique food which had been kept for a long time by treatment with boracic acid or some other apparently harmless preservative. The preservative properties are only too powerful : they have arrested natural decomposition and putrefaction indeed, but they arrest also the action of the digestive juices themselves, and so, although it was originally good food in itself, it is now unfit for everyday consumption ; it is incapable of assimilation except by a few specially organized individuals.

The reform I speak of is, of course, intellectual reform ; the fault I have to find with the schools is that the majority of the boys turned out of them are ignorant ; they neither possess knowledge, nor do they know how to acquire it, nor do they as a rule feel any interest in it, nor do they respect it. They are not ashamed of their ignorance, they are usually not even aware of it ; they have been put through the traditional course of disciplinary study, they can hold their own in society, and are educated enough for a conventional Englishman.

I venture to say that the attention of English schools is too exclusively devoted to the development of a certain uniform type of character, by means of discipline ; the product at which they aim is a healthy, vigorous body, with the traditional culture which is expected of a gentleman. Now, undoubtedly, any institution which achieves this result is worthy of praise ; and certainly our schools expect and receive praise and admiration to the full.

Let it be granted them : if intellectual reform were necessarily hostile to our schools' great and good qualities, it would be too dearly purchased ; but I am convinced it is not so. As training places they could be improved. I do not, indeed, credit them