SOME TALK ABOUT ENGLISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

IT is always interesting to compare the views of a former with those of a present generation, especially in regard to institutions which have survived earlier criticisms only to encounter fresh opposition from latter-day critics. We have lately renewed our acquaintance with some essays of Sydney Smith's,* which reflect in the witty mirror of that reverend gentleman's mind the dissatisfaction of his contemporaries with a very long-lived institution—the English system of education—and we propose now to consider shortly the form which this dissatisfaction has in later days assumed.

Two main points are attacked by Sydney Smith in the essays to which reference has been made—the neglect of female education, and the system of male education in public schools. The question of the higher education of women has been often fully discussed; and, though much yet remains to be done, practical steps in the right direction have already been taken, particularly in the United States. We shall confine our remarks to that system of public schools of which England is the sole possessor, and which in that country is hedged by all the high divinity of tradition.

It is now five hundred years ago that William of Wykeham founded the School of Winchester, thereby creating the first endowed institution for the encouragement of learning at a primary stage in direct and avowed connection with the university. Fifty years later Eton was built by Henry VI., in acknowledged imitation of Winchester, and subsequent important foundations mark the approbation with which these educational experiments were regarded by the most large-minded men of the times.

These schools differed obviously in important respects from the schools into which they have developed, or from those by which they have been imitated. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which five hundred years ago contained respectively seven and six colleges, halls, or houses, took largely the place at present taken by the public schools. A century after the founding of Winchester, Wolsey had taken his university degree at an age when many boys of the present day would scarcely find themselves well settled at school. The words "school" and "public school" were applied loosely, in England, possibly from the time of Alfred, and in France from the time of Charlemagne, to any institution for the study of letters, without reference to the age of the students. In the "schools" of Lyons, Fulda, Corvey, and Rheims were taught the trivium and quadrivium—the threefold and fourfold high-roads of monastic learning. In the "school" of Oxford, Ingulphus, Abbot of Croydon, "learned Aristotle and the first and second books of Tully's Rhetoric." The very number of "scholars," though doubtless much exaggerated, points to the general part played by the early university as school and college in one. In the thirteenth century there were 30,000 "scholars" at Oxford. At Bologna there were 10,000 in the thirteenth and 13,000 in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century there were 25,000 at Paris.

But from the beginning of the sixteenth century, in England at least, a subdivision of the work of education had already begun. The schools of Wykeham and of Henry VI. were already beginning to attract the younger scholars, passing them on to Oxford or to Cambridge for the ripening and completion of their studies. The first public school was founded in connection with a college at Oxford; and Winchester led as naturally to New College as Eton, later, led to King's College, Cambridge, and Westminster to Christ Church, Oxford.

This original link must not be lost sight of, for it gave the direction to the class of studies pursued at the schools. These, so long as they were recognized as but the initial stages of a university career, were inevitably compelled to adapt their instruction to the university requirements. What these requirements were, even at the end of the fifteenth century, may be seen from Erasmus's picture of Cambridge. "Scarcely thirty years ago nothing was taught here but the Parva Logicalia of Alexander, antiquated exercises from Aristotle, and the Quæstiones of Scotus." Even the new learning which came in by the influence of Colet, More, and Erasmus scarcely affected the predominant classical tendency, though it vastly improved the methods and means of study.

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* Professional Education (1809). Female Education (1810). Public Schools (1810).

The first point, then, which we have to observe with regard to these schools is their traditional leaning to classical education. A second point is their class tradition.

Doubtless in origin the public schools were mainly intended for the support of poor students, and this without respect of class distinctions. But the grammar-schools (of which that of St. Paul's, founded by Colet, was the principal example) multiplied so rapidly in the reigns of Edward VI. and of Elizabeth that they bore the main burden of middle-class education. Meanwhile the schools under royal patronage, still spoken of in the Prayer-book as "our colleges of Eton and Winchester," acquired a different social status, which they have never to this day lost.

But popular favor, constantly shifting, has had much to do with the assignment of the title public school. Sydney Smith's definition of the term is, "an endowed place of education of old standing, to which the sons of gentlemen resort in considerable numbers, and where they continue to reside from eight or nine to eighteen years of age." The nine public schools are generally taken to be Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Charterhouse, Westminster, Rugby, St. Paul's, Merchant Taylors', and Shrewsbury. It is of these that Sydney Smith wrote in 1810; it is on these that the Public School Commissioners reported in 1864. But socially the last two have fallen out of the first rank. Shrewsbury, in spite of its reputation for elegant scholarship, is now almost relegated to the inferior condition of grammar-school. Merchant Taylors', always socially inferior to Eton, Harrow, and Winchester, has suffered by its situation in London. Charterhouse has avoided the same fate by a politic remove to the hills of Surrey; and St. Paul's has taken a new lease of life by emigration from the City to the West End. But Westminster is still in its old home in Dean's Yard, its reputation resting upon the past rather than upon the present. Meanwhile, within the present century, other schools, at first looked upon as inferior, have gradually won their way into social and educational esteem. Of these we may instance Marlborough, Wellington, Clifton, Cheltenham, Repton, and Haileybury; though none of these has as yet acquired the social prestige of the more ancient foundations.

It is, then, of the six older schools and of the half-dozen modern imitations that we propose to write, under the general title of public schools. Some of these institutions are called schools, others are called colleges; but between college and school there is no essential difference of constitution. Eton, Marlborough, Clifton, Cheltenham, Wellington, and Haileybury are colleges; Harrow, Westminster, Charterhouse, Repton, and Rugby are schools. Winchester was originally founded as a "collegium," but was habitually spoken of as a school. It is now more generally called a college. One of the main features of these schools is the boarding system. Many do not admit day boys at all; some admit very few; in none is the day boy an important element. By the other boys he is generally regarded with prejudice, as standing outside the *esprit de corps* of their own more concentrated community. In grammar-schools, on the other hand, the day boy is a much more prominent feature. This fact in itself has some social influence.

Having thus limited the subject-matter of our inquiry, we shall first speak of the social character of these schools, and then of their educational value.

In England, while a boy is still in the unreasoning stage of childhood, good-natured people will ask him playfully what he is going to be. At a little later stage the inquiry takes another and more serious form—"What school are you going to?" There is no playfulness in the question now. Hereby hangs a whole social history. In one family the tradition is for Eton, in another for Rugby; and to these traditions father and son are, as a rule, absolutely loyal, except under especial emergencies of typhoid or scarlet fever. The true Englishman of the upper class is not more certainly born

"either a little Liberal,
Or else a little Conservative,"

than he is an embryo Harrow boy or Winchester "man." In after-life he meets with the question, "What school were you at?" And here again he is apt to feel at a disadvantage if he cannot fasten upon one of the important public schools the credit or blame of his youthful training. It matters nothing that he was only there for half a year, that he never rose above the lowest form, that he was flogged half a dozen times in as many weeks, that he was promptly expelled for outrageous insubordination—he was at a public school, he has the *cachet* of an English gentleman. To have been at the university is as nothing compared with this. Many a man is compelled by army examinations or by business opportunities to forego the pleasures of the *alma mater*. With the public school it is otherwise: to this they must all come.

There are some prevalent delusions with regard to the influence of public schools on a boy, some of which have been noticed, though only casually, by Sydney Smith. It is said by many people that he there gains a knowledge of the world; that he acquires a healthy moral tone; that he gets the conceit knocked out of him; that, in short, his loss is all from the bad, and his gain all to the good. These popular and loosely stated beliefs are very far from the truth. The public school is a large body of boys, whose ages range from twelve to nineteen, whose numbers may be anything from 350 to 950. There is an efficient staff of masters for educational but scarcely for moral supervision. The consequence is that except in the rare event of the presence of a strong master, who will enlighten the whole school with the reflection of his own spirit, school-boy honor and public opinion are apt to drift into the current which chance circumstances may determine, and a bad or good school-boy of power and popularity may affect the *morale* of the school more than any master can possibly do. The public school is a microcosm, but the minuteness of the copy causes many a feature of the larger cosmos to disappear from view. Sydney Smith puts the case as forcibly as it can be put: "The morality of boys is generally very imperfect, their notions of honor extremely mistaken, and their objects of ambition frequently very absurd." Let us take a single instance. It is the custom to speak of the public school boy as if by nature and education he abhorred a lie. It is no doubt true that school opinion *is* opposed to anything which is "sneakish" or dishonorable. But these terms require definition, and school-boy ethics are not always satisfactory in this respect. For example, to "crib," or to cheat in examination, is this dishonorable? The school-boy answer is, as regards your school-fellow, Yes; as regards your master, No.

A more serious matter, in fact if not in principle, is the consideration of how far positive immorality is encouraged by these large assemblages of boys, controlled rather by a public spirit of their own manufacture than by much authoritative supervision. Here again we must admit that the license is apt to be greater than should be the case; and we could, if we cared to enter upon the subject, name certain public schools which have in this respect acquired an unenviable notoriety.

We must, however, confess that these faults are inseparable from school life, and that our only charge against public schools in this matter is that we do not see in them much capacity for minimizing the evil. We turn now to some distinct advantages, as they seem to us, of the public-school system.

It rarely happens that the peculiar institutions of one country can with advantage be transferred to another, especially when these institutions have grown with the growth of the particular community. The observer will notice an intimate connection between the character of the English schools and the character of the society from which English schoolboys are chiefly taken. There is in the English mind a great love of personal freedom, as distinct from that national liberty which sometimes loses sight of the independence of the individual. The French *liberté* has little in common with the American "independence." The English spirit of independence is exactly satisfied by the authorized license of a public school. It is impossible, on the other hand, to conceive of a genuine Englishman tolerating the system of the *pion* as practised at a French *lycée*.

Again, the majority of young English gentlemen are educated to a love of sport and exercise at home, of which they find the most fitting counterpart in the games of a public school. This devotion to cricket and football, to fives and racquets, has often been urged as a disadvantage against the English system. Sydney Smith passes his jokes upon it, asking whether young lords and esquires are hereafter to wrestle in public, or the gentlemen of the bar to exhibit Olympic games in Hilary Term. But it is not fair to set the question in this light; it is not true to assert that an English gentleman "does nothing but ride and walk." In all classes of English society the fondness for active exercises and for those pursuits which require a good eye and a steady hand is remarkable. This is a matter of course in the case of the country squire. But it is not less true of a vast number of those who are attached to sedentary and urban professions. For hunting, cricket, football, racquets, athletic sports, volunteering, or cycling there are few who will not contrive to get an occasional holiday. Those who are blest with longer vacations will make for an Alpine climb or a tour in Brittany, will be found walking up a trout stream or a salmon river, shooting a moor in Scotland or a covert in Norfolk. This is as it should be. From Plato's combination of *μουσικὴ* with *γυμνα*[illegible]*ὴ* to Juvenal's *mens sana in corpo*[illegible]*no* the ancients recognized the value [illegible] bodily development as an element of the best education. The Admirable Crichton was not less a master of fence than a master of syllogism. Abuse of sport at public schools may in some cases occur; but in the majority of cases the popularity of games produces good effects, morally, physically, and by consequence intellectually.

Two more points in the English system we must allude to, which are intimately connected, which have been often attacked, but which we believe to be in the main advantageous—the system of prefects, prepositors, or monitors, and its almost necessary attendant, the system of fagging. Of these systems Winchester supplies the most perfect example; though even at that very conservative school great changes have been introduced within the last twenty years. It is not generally known that William of Wykeham was the originator not only of the principle, but even of some of the details of the system of prefects. He intended it to be partly disciplinary and partly paternal; and, when properly carried out, it checks to a great extent that tendency to bullying which is so difficult to banish from a school. If one boy must command another, it is better that the power should be vested in the possessor of the superior brain than in the possessor of the superior muscle.

Of fagging generally even non-English readers can form some idea from the pages of Tom Brown; but the extent to which it is permitted is very different at different public schools. Sydney Smith was unfortunate in chancing upon Winchester when it was in a very neglected condition, and he cordially hated the life of the school. Even forty years ago a writer upon the Winchester of that day could say with truth that a fag might have been called upon to do anything in the world except to make beds and to black boots. He was at the beck and call of some twenty senior boys at the head of the school, in whom were vested the general government and punishment of the junior boys. This system, with modifications, prevails in all public schools; and though it has in particular cases been found to work badly, experience has, upon the whole, pronounced in its favor. Three distinct advantages—but there are many others—may here be noted. A little practical acquaintance with humbler duties, in which habits of carefulness and obedience must be exercised, is no bad commencement for a boy's life in the small world of school. A little experience of the duties and responsibilities of authority is no bad preparation for a boy's start into the larger world of life. And lastly, an open system of police on the part of the elder scholars is an admirable substitute for the vexatious interference of masters in the minor details of morals and behavior. In this way the senior boys secure the respect of their juniors and enjoy the confidence of their masters. And this further result follows—the public-school master is as far removed as possible from the conception of an usher; he is always, or at least with very rare exceptions, a gentleman, and often as well connected as any in the country. The effect of this upon the tone and style of the school is marked and beneficial.

Such are some of the advantages and disadvantages of public schools, viewed from a social and moral point of view. It now remains to consider their educational value.

Sydney Smith has, in the essay to which we have several times referred, made a lengthy collection of men remarkable in many lines of fame who have never been educated at public schools. That list might no doubt be indefinitely extended and indefinitely corrected, but would always give the impression of proving a more striking conclusion than it can really justify. It must remain as the curious composition of a Winchester boy, the greatest wit of his generation, in the days of an Eton boy's immortal triumphs upon the field of battle, in the days of the not less wonderful achievements of two public-school boys—one from Eton, the other from Harrow—in the world of poetry. It seems to us, however, to be but of little use to point out that Mr. Gladstone was at Eton and Christ Church, while Lord Beaconsfield was neither at public school nor college; or to remark that the late and present Archbishops of Canterbury were neither of them public-school men, but that, on the other hand, the late and present Deans of Westminster were both Rugbeians. The present editor of *Punch* is an old Etonian; the most popular comedy-writer of the present day in England was not, we believe, a public-school boy. Of the fourteen members of the last Liberal cabinet, only six were at public schools. But all, with the exception only of Mr. Chamberlain, were either at Oxford or Cambridge.

The fact is that in this connection, of a mere list of eminent persons, we must at once leave out of consideration (under the present and past systems) most of those who have made their fame in art, medicine, science, war, engineering, law, and politics, as well as most Scotchmen and Irishmen. Boys of the two last-mentioned nationalities have gone rather to the schools of their own country, which are not public schools. The lights of the first-mentioned professions would have found no particular encouragement for their particular pursuits at any existing school, public or private. They are, therefore, rather arguments for the abolition of all educational establishments, except those dedicated to the encouragement of a single pursuit. A Davy would have been a Davy even if he had had the misfortune to waste three years over the irregular verbs at Rugby; a Wellington would have been a Wellington—that famous saying about the Eton playing-fields notwithstanding—even had he slaved at home with a private tutor; and Sydney Smith was Sydney Smith in spite of the hard necessity which made him a Winchester boy. Given general conditions of intelligence, genius may be found in every branch of society in a proportion which will be pretty constant. A fraction only of the youthful public is educated at public schools; a fraction only of the nation's geniuses will be found to be public-school men. The province of the public school is to give an intelligent education to the young gentleman of the period, not to be a hot-house for the cultivation of Marlboroughs, Newtons, and Tennysons under impossible conditions of military, scientific, and poetical atmospheres. The problem of public schools is not one of the creation of genius, but of the education of mediocrity. Schools cannot create genius. What we require of a school to which a potential genius may go is merely that no difficulties be placed in the way of this potentiality becoming developed into a fruitful energy.

We shall, therefore, in the next place, advert to a fault in the public-school system, which we believe to be a very serious one; and in this matter we must not only endorse, but even go far beyond the strictures of Sydney Smith.

In one of his essays on "Professional Education," the cry of the canon is throughout, "Too much Latin and Greek!" His was almost the first voice raised, in the days of classicalism, against the indiscriminate slavery of incapable youths to the hard bondage of the dead languages. Seventy years have passed away, and great changes have taken place in university and school. The old classical and mathematical curricula of the universities have been enlarged to half a dozen. "Modern sides" have sprung up in many public schools, and Greek has been discarded for botany and German. Sciences have made their appearance also. The school Scientific Society, which at first struggled on under the sobriquet of "The Bug and Snail Society," has grown into popularity, and publishes "Transactions." The laboratory has been supplemented by the workshop and smithy. This is much, but more yet remains to be done. The ghost of dead languages still exerts a weird and midnight influence over the counsels of the English educational leaders. The public schools are still cramped by the university regulations, and prevented from producing thoroughly satisfactory results. But already there are signs of a great and radical change.

What are the benefits obtained by a Latin and Greek education? In the first place, it affords an admirable intellectual training; in the second place, it opens up a magnificent literature; in the third place, it contributes very much to the right understanding of a language which is largely indebted to Greek and Latin. The first advantage is not of great importance. A modern language taught systematically may be made useful in much the same way, if not in the same degree. The second advantage is, for the vast majority of students, absolutely non-existent. The average school-boy or university man, when he closes for the last time his Virgil or Sophocles, is no whit the better acquainted with ancient literature than if he had spent a single year upon adequate translations of the famous originals, through which he has blindly blundered for a dozen years or more. The third advantage is one which, for general purposes, might be attained by a very short study in early life scientifically directed to word formation, rather than to the endless mysteries of inflection and syntax.

Our conception of an ideal system of education would consist of three stages of instruction, each directed to a particular end. The private school should take boys until about the age of twelve, the public school until the age of eighteen, the university until the age of twenty-one. Beyond this age we should be inclined not to permit a young man to take a degree at the university. Take the not unknown case of a young gentleman whose age is a quarter of a century, and who is a magistrate in his own county, occupied in the desultory pursuit of his bachelor's degree. Let us imagine him to be successful before the close of the present century, of what value is an honor thus obtained? To those who know the circumstances, it is worth nothing; upon those who do not, it is an imposition.

At a private school a boy should be taught the usual rudiments of knowledge. Upon his entry into a public school he should be examined to see how far he has gained a sufficient general acquaintance with the several departments of learning. Those departments of study in which he is found to be well grounded he should be allowed, if he pleases, to drop at once. He will then be free to continue some old study in which he may feel that his real interest lies, or pursue new ones with the view of discovering the true bent of his mind. In nine cases out of ten the classics would be dropped as soon as possible, and preference would be developed in the direction of science, engineering, literature, or mathematics. And for all practical purposes the average boy would be no loser by this defection from the classics. For we would have him taught in the early stage the history and general meaning of words, the way in which they group themselves into families, and pass from language to language—in short, all that is interesting, instructive, and useful in Latin and Greek, rather than that which has merely dry and disciplinary advantages. That peculiar insight into the structural and syntactical parts of language, that taste for the details of antiquity, which combine to form a scholar, will early make themselves apparent; and it is only scholars that we would wish to see seriously devoting years of study to the classics.

It is at a public school, on the other hand, that attention should be paid to matters which are among the most important of educational requirements, but which in England are either habitually postponed until a boy passes to the university, or are entirely neglected. At a public school a boy should be early trained to the science of logic, and to the arts of making a speech and writing an essay. Accuracy of thought and correctness of expression cannot be too soon insisted upon; they are rarely acquired in perfection if their pursuit be postponed to later years. As it is, in England debating societies exist in public schools, and essays are set to the elder boys; but the school as a whole is not educated to these practices. Logic, as a rule, is studied for the first time at the university, and thus, after nineteen years of life, a youth first begins to find that correct thought need not be a haphazard or God-given addition to man's ordinary faculties. By essays and by debates a most serviceable if perhaps superficial knowledge is acquired, and particularly a stimulus is offered to research into subjects of immediate interest—research which may be intelligent without being laboriously uninviting.

Meanwhile the more severe studies of the lad may be supposed to be proceeding, not, as now, diverted into a dozen channels, of which a large part is wholly without interest to him, but confined to some two or three selected subjects. The inevitable consequence of such a system would be that science, history, classics, modern languages, literature, mathematics, and law would be specialized to an immense extent, and gradually a particular school would become identified with successes in some particular study. Eton might become famous for its history, Harrow for its modern languages, Rugby for its scholarship, Winchester for its law. There would, we imagine, be no disadvantage in this result.

But no such change as this would be possible without a corresponding change in the third stage of education—the university. Many boys do not pass from the public school to the university; but many, on the other hand, do; and this remove must not be made impossible.

The universities ought in every case to be satisfied with receiving from the public school a certificate that a boy has at some time qualified himself in the rudiments of classics and mathematics, and they should then be prepared to allow him to continue the course of study which he has been pursuing at his school.

THE MYSTERY OF COLUMBUS.

BY EUGENE LAWRENCE.

THE four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the New World will be celebrated in Europe and America as it could never have been celebrated before. The interest in these decisive events in history deepens as knowledge spreads and the intellect becomes more eager for exact information.[1] We are no longer satisfied with historic fables; we labor more than ever for historic truth. And hence the story of the man who first unfolded a new page in human annals before his contemporaries, who decided the chief question of his time, and led on his race to high achievements, will be read and studied anew with unequalled interest. One man, it was said, gave a new world to Castile and Leon, or rather to Europe. It is to him that all eyes are once more turned. Columbus will rise before us more famous, more extraordinary, than when he sailed into the port of Palos in 1494 to relate his unparalleled discovery.[2]

What navigator ever accomplished so much? On him rests the history of a continent. Yet when we ask who was this Columbus, and what were his character and aims, we find that we know even less of his private life than of the lives of Shakespeare and of Dante. With him everything is lost in doubt. Even his name can scarcely be said to be known. If we can trust the latest researches, "Columbus" was only a borrowed title—a *nom de plume*, or rather *de la mer*—and Colombo (the Dove) a sea term that covered up some early mystery. It was a name probably borrowed by the great Columbus from the two pirates or corsairs under whose flag he sailed, whom he claimed as his relatives, and with whom he fought and plundered on the high seas. It was a name hated and feared as that of the most merciless sea-rovers of the time—a name with which mothers terrified their infants, and from which every honest trader shrank in fear.

We first hear of the name Colombo in 1468. The publication of the Venetian State Papers by Mr. Rawdon Brown has thrown some faint light upon its origin. It was the custom for Venice to send yearly three or four huge galleys laden with rich goods and spices to London, Bruges, or Sluys;[1] they were known as the Flemish galleys, were probably more than one thousand tons burden, and were moved by oars and sails.[2] They sailed

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[1] Vita di Cristoforo Colombo, per suo Figlio, tradotta da Alfonso Ulloa. London, 1867. Navarrete. Tom. i. Coleccion de los Viages, etc. Viages de Colon, almirante de Castilla. Madrid, 1827. Major Letters of Columbus. Hakluyt So. 1870. Venetian State Papers. R. Brown, Ed. 1874. Vol. i.

[2] See Istoria del Sig. Don Fernando Colombo —vera relazione della vita, & de' fatti dell' ammiraglio Don Cristoforo Colombo suo Padre. Milan (1614 ?). The first edition of the Vita was in 1571. The editor of the Milan edition, in some lines prefixed, addresses Genoa in terms very different from Dante, and celebrates Columbus:

> "Poichè *Colombo* fù vera tua prole,
> Prole in alto valore simile a Dei."

The Venetian edition of 1685 is small and poor. Harrisse's attack on the authenticity of this Vita, though inconclusive, should be consulted. See Fernando Colomb., savie. Paris, 1872.

[1] Venetian State Papers, 1414, August 9th. And in 1417 four galleys were sent so early. See Goodrich. History of the Character and Achievements of the so-called Christopher Columbus—a valuable work to which I have often been indebted. I can not join with the author in his low estimate of Columbus.

[2] Ibid., 1488, November. "At present there are no ships of upward of 1000 tons burden," the Senate complain, and they offer a bounty of 2000 ducats for ships of 1000 tons "below-deck,"