CONFERENCE ON RECENT EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS.

With Special reference to the New Education Code and the
Report of the Mosely Commission.

(Arranged by The Royal Sanitary Institute and the King Alfred
School Society.)

November 11th, 1904.

ADDRESS

By the Rev. H. B. GRAY, D.D.,
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I CONFESS to feeling a little out of place in the position of Chairman this afternoon, for, as responsible for one of the great boarding schools of England—those semi-monastic institutions which loom so large in the public eye, and do so much or, as some think, so little, in making or marring the future manhood of England,—I am by no means sure that I am a satisfactory representative of the ideals of The Sanitary Institute or of that most interesting and experimental School Society which has joined hands with the Institute in organising the meeting here to-day.

But I flatter myself you have asked me to preside on this occasion because I may have shown in my short and rough account of my experiences on the Mosely Commission that I am not one of those who think that we in England are living in the best of all educational worlds.

I am free to confess that not only have we much to learn, but also much to unlearn, to judge from what my twenty-five colleagues and myself on the Commission saw and heard on the great Continent of America.

Let me confess one thing more, that I am by no means persuaded that the boarding-school system as carried on in England in our great historic schools is *in every respect* the best that can be devised for the betterment of the physical, mental, and moral well-being of the English race.

It must be remembered that the great conceptions of William of Wykeham and his imitators were the conceptions of the 14th and 15th centuries, when learning was concentrated in close religious corporations, and not disseminated through the length and breadth of the land. Therefore it seems *a priori* extraordinary that, while other departments of life have suffered organic alteration, the principles and practices of the educational world alone of the institutions of England, in our upper and middle classes at any rate, have been preserved substantially unchanged for five centuries.

Practically the same limitation of studies, the same mode of viewing social life, with small concessions to the most imperative of modern requirements, are pursued in the cloisters and halls of our historic public schools, as were dominant in the Tudor period.

The same *vis inertiae* appears in even greater force at our ancient universities, and we rub our eyes to find that the same entrance bars—the quantum of Euripides, of Horace, and of elementary mathematics,—bar admission to Oxford and Cambridge as in the days of the Stuarts. Reflect for a moment that no scientist, however brilliant, can pass these adamant gates if he has not a nodding acquaintance, at least, with two ancient languages, and to force his entrance he has sometimes to degrade himself and these dead tongues by the vilest expedients.

I mention these facts as illustrations of the astounding conservatism which in England modifies and, as some of us think, impedes the progress of educational ideals in England.

Let me make my own confession of faith. Though a boarding-school headmaster for 25 years, and though I was brought up in the strictest sect of the Pharisees—that is in the school of William of Wykeham,—and was an assistant-master for four years at the ancient foundation of Westminster, I still hesitate to express my confidence that the boarding-school system as at present carried on in most of our public schools is the ideal system of educational training.

At the most critical period of the child's mental and moral history, when the character is being formed with startling rapidity for good or evil, when passion and emotion are often strong, and reason always weak, a young boy is taken away from the refining influence of home, and of mother and sister, and plunged, with 300 or 400 other immature minds, into artificial congeries of monastic tendency, where tradition reigns supreme, where individuality is more or less lost, where the whole life is lived so closely together in field and class-room and dormitory, that the fledgling becomes a mere creature of his environment, and he emerges the mere embodiment (to use a cant term), of the school "tone." Much has

been said, and said with sincerity if not with exactness, of the character-forming power of English schools, but I should bid defiance to truth if I did not admit that there is much loss and much risk in this process of mutual attrition which is the characteristic of English so-called public school life.

Reflect how large a proportion of those who attend our most fashionable institutions are sent there not with much hope that good mental gymnastic may be gained, certainly not that they may meet with the ideally best conditions of sanitary food and life, not even because the parent is persuaded that the institution or homes are guided and guarded by the best men, but mainly, or to some extent, in order to form fashionable friendships and acquire a social *cachet*.

My honest belief is that, given the possibility of an ideal home, or rather, to be more accurate, given the possibility of every home being ideal (for the deficiencies of one household react on every other), given good discipline, and punctuality of hours, with a parent at leisure to help in looking after the child, constant interchange of views between teacher and parent, with plenty of wholesome exercise, not necessarily continual athletic competition (in which there is too much absorption at the present day), the day-school would be—I do not say is—the ideal system of education.

I am not here to-day (I hope you will not think it) to set before you the deficiency of the boarding-school system. Were it not at the present time, and had it not been in the past, productive of a good type of Englishmen, it would have been swept away like all other shams by the overwhelming tide of public sentiment. I am not here to foul the nest which I have had a share in building, but I am fain to confess that there are many changes, more or less organic in themselves, which I should, if I were a despot, or had to reconstitute English education, be forward to bring about.

It would seem, for instance, to the ordinary observer that the hotel-keeping principle of boarding houses, on which most, I may say all, of our historic foundations are organised, is theoretically indefensible. I mean that we should put into the hands of gentlemen whose primary duty is to develop the mental and moral characters of their flock, and for which alone they ought to be paid—and far more richly paid than they are—outside this legitimate emolument any temptation towards material advantage derived from the profits of food and lodging, though to their credit (be it said) it is a temptation which they often resist.

In the school over which I preside, and which can only boast of a little more than fifty years of existence, I have resolved that as long as I have

control of its destinies as chairman of its governing body, as well as its headmaster, no such hotel-keeping principle shall be suffered to exist.

In every boarding house of ours the housemaster obtains a fixed honorarium as a teacher, and he is paid a capitation fee for the responsibility over the moral and physical well-being of those in his house, but he takes no profits. Every cheque is paid into the coffers of the governing body, and every cheque for every article of food or household purchased is paid for out of the same chest.

Thus there is no temptation possible to any of the several housemasters to make money out of the eating and drinking and lodging of those entrusted to their charge.

Then again, speaking as a lifelong athlete, I should effect a forcible revolution in the encroaching demands which in season and out of season athletic competitions of a semi-professional and gladiatorial character make on the time and thoughts, not only of those who *attend*, but also on many of those who *would* the great scholastic seminaries scattered up and down England.

I verily hope and believe that the tide has turned, and there is a reaction against this glorification of men's legs, which reminds us only too forcibly of the "*paues et circenses*" of imperial Rome.

But I am not alone in thinking that this absorption in the petty details of sport, originally no doubt inculcated as a safeguard against the evils of loafing, has had a seriously narrowing influence on the characters of grown-up English men and women.

Perhaps I may be allowed to quote words which I once wrote on this subject in the columns of the "*Navy League Journal*," and which I have seen this month quoted by Dr. Miller Maguire in his incisive article in "*Broad Views*."

What I am more immediately concerned about in the matter is that the cult of athletics has lowered and limited the ideals which might otherwise animate the minds of the young. Patriotism has become for them, quite unconsciously, limited to the four walls of the Public Schools of which they are for a few brief years members. Except in times of public stir and national peril, such as that through which we passed in the closing months of 1899, boys are bored rather than moved by appeals to patriotism in a wider sense. Such, at least, has been the experience of many schoolmasters.

And a sentiment which is not stirred during the impressionable time of youth, when the character is plastic and all generous impulses are easily moved, is not likely to form a lodgment in the more prosaic days of man-

hood, when the mind is fully formed, the principles fixed, and the routine of the business of life has taken the edge off unselfish ideals.

Many more points I might urge, if time and your patience allowed, to prove that in some respects the public school education of England requires readjustment, if not organic change, at any rate so far as the upper classes are concerned. It is and was very interesting to me as a member of the Mosely Commission to compare the American public school, properly so named, with its misnamed English namesake; for across the Atlantic, schools are public as you know in the best sense of the word, that is, they are open to all, irrespective of creed and class, while with us, if there be any real definition possible of the epithet, they are public only in the sense (and as I have said to a very limited degree) that not the individual but a corporation secures the profits of the institution which it governs.

With most interesting addresses awaiting us, I forbear to dwell on more than one point of contrast, but I willingly accede to the appeal which has been made to me to express my views briefly on the subject of co-education, which forms one of the characteristic features of American education.

As I said in my remarks in my Mosely Commission reports I approached the study of that system with an absolutely unbiassed mind. I examined minutely into its working in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Boston, Buffalo, Ann Arbor, Chicago, and again in some of the large towns of Canada, and was unable to trace any foundation whatever for the criticisms which might be made, and of course have been made, on *a priori* hypotheses by those who, without practical experience of its working, have condemned it, or at least opposed it on moral considerations. On the contrary, I unhesitatingly express my conviction that even when the system of co-education is carried on up to the age of 18 and 19, not only in day schools, but where there is a boarding element, and where the young people are separated only by different blocks of dormitories, even in all these (what we should regard as) extreme conditions, the moral and social effect is gratifying in the extreme.

There is, as I ventured to say in my report, a noticeable and absolute absence, or rather disappearance of sexual strain. The boys are humanized and rendered better social animals than is observable in many English homes—they are easy and free, instead of being free and easy (an alternative collocation of epithets which I think you will understand); the hobbledchovyism common to English boyhood seems to be non-existent—not to speak of the entire absence in American and Canadian schools of those darker forms of moral evil, which have from time to time haunted some of our semi-monastic institutions.

I observed more "sensibility" on both sides, *i.e.*, with both sexes—more mutual appreciation, if you will, and I can also declare emphatically (what I was not prepared to expect), there was an absence of sentimentalism. In my capacity of inspector of those schools in the United States where co-education had been established as a system I used often to take up the lesson from the teacher, sometimes a lesson in English literature, Burke, or Racine, or Virgil, and I never in my somewhat lengthy investigation saw any sign of what I may call levity of conduct occasioned by the mixture of the sexes. There was much camaraderie, and no awkwardness, and I make bold to say that, in my judgment, if the system of co-education were carried on in our own country, not only in day schools, but also in ordinary boarding schools, I believe that none but good results would result to the mental and moral development of young English men and women.

On one other point I will but shortly dwell before yielding my place to the first speaker on our programme to-day.

I observe that The King Alfred School Society lays special stress on co-operation between teachers and parents. This also, in many respects, was a satisfactory feature of American education. There, as in this interesting society, frequent evening meetings or conversaziones were arranged where the character and progress of the pupil could be thoroughly sifted and discussed.

In our English boarding schools this co-operation unfortunately either exists imperfectly through the medium of written reports or disappears altogether, and there arises instead thereof in some schools a feeling amounting even to mutual distrust, so that it has become almost a fashion with schoolmasters to quote with approbation the cynical dictum of a great headmaster: "I have found boys always reasonable, assistant-masters sometimes, but parents never."

All this is very bad. First of all, the parent only becomes unreasonable because he or she is given no opportunity of consultation, and everybody knows that the scanty food of information doled out by the two or three words of a written report mean little or nothing to the anxious parental mind. A smart young master of mine some years ago, commenting on the want of progress in a pupil, and mightily pleased with himself, wrote in his report: "I can teach this boy nothing." On which the parent wrote enclosing the criticism, and saying: "Of course, after this confession of weakness, the assistant-master in question will not expect you to keep him on your staff any longer."

Personally (if I may interpose a personal note) I have instituted at my college, besides written reports, a system of Open Days which take place

every month, when parents are expected and invited to come down and to discuss the progress and prospects of their boys with the headmaster and his colleagues.

Allow me, therefore, in conclusion, to congratulate The King Alfred School Society on the most excellent and reproductive provision which they have made in their scheme for this important collaboration of parent and teacher in the development of the children, for whose mental and moral well-being they are jointly and severally responsible.

On many other points I long to touch, but want of time and want of patience, I fear, alike forbid. May I, therefore, thank you for the most kind and attentive hearing which you have accorded me, and allow me to become now a listener instead of a lecturer, for in a meeting like this I know there is much to hear and to profit by; for, said Chaucer of old,

“Gladly would I learn, and gladly teach.”

The former rôle suits my position and nature even better than the latter.

ALFRED GREENWOOD, M.D., D.P.H.,

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(MEMBER.)

THE Sanitary Institute have honoured me by asking me to open a discussion on the above subject, which cannot be over-estimated in its importance to all classes, inasmuch as the prosperity of a nation, individually and collectively, is associated with the efficiency of its general education.

Recent educational developments include the passing of the Education Act of 1902, and the administrative measures which have followed upon it, together with a general awakening of an interest in educational questions which preceded and accompanied this event.

Special reference will be made to the light which has been thrown upon educational questions by the recent report of the Mosely Commission to America, and to the recent modifications which have been introduced in the Whitehall code.

The educational position which these developments have created in