

THE
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—ETON MASTERS FORTY YEARS AGO.

“SHALL I always be a hearer only? shall I never retaliate?” S says Juvenal. Something of this sort have I felt when reading of schools and schoolmasters. Much has been written of late years about schools. Stories of school-life by former boys, a week or a day at school by present boys, criticisms of schools in magazines and newspapers, advice tendered by parents, by masters, by some who have some knowledge of the subject, by many who have none—all this we have had in plenty. Writers have given their opinions freely about the schoolmasters of their own school and time.

But their tone appears to me to have been too fault-finding. Out of the whole, truth might be gathered; but many may fail to gather it. For, though a sensible reader will discount the opinions of the schoolboy author who, proud to find himself in print, will rush in where older persons would hesitate, will decide questions trenchantly and pass judgment on his masters confidently, the general public is apt to forget that these boy-writers are commonly not among the best of the school; nay, sometimes not even average boys, but, by their own confession, indolent and careless. So that a great and important part of the boys have never been heard—the wiser part, who have been, probably, too modest to write and criticize their elders. And of the older chroniclers and critics too many write chiefly to grumble and to air their own pet theories; their remarks about their schoolmasters are often needlessly severe and unfair; they make no allowance for time, and often blame their masters where they should blame themselves. Especially in my own public school—Eton—has this been the case. Its masters of some forty years since have hardly received fair measure. From some accounts readers

might be left under the impression that they were mostly harsh, unenlightened, narrow, indolent, and self-indulgent: the reverse of which I hold to be the truth.

There are, we know, historians who draw a line and say, "English history begins here; there was none before." In like manner as to public schools, their system and teaching: some seem to believe that before Arnold public schools were not, or were not worth anything. No one wishes to deny the great good that Arnold did; but why need we think that there were no sensible and conscientious schoolmasters before him, or where his influence had not penetrated? *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona multi.* Arnold's influence cannot have been great (if it was felt at all) in modifying our system in my school-days, which began before his death. No doubt many of our masters knew of the work he was doing, and honoured him; but there were reasons which would make them, as a body, rather anti-Arnoldian in theology and politics; and little that we had could have radiated from that Warwickshire centre. Yet, in spite of this, our Eton masters were conscientious men, deservedly liked by their pupils, for whose good they worked to the best of their powers—nor were these powers contemptible. Such was my opinion of them as a boy (though, of course, I did not formulate it thus); such has been my maturer opinion in looking back upon my school-life; and such is my opinion still, after thirty years' experience of teaching and of other public schools and masters. In this opinion I do not suppose I stand alone; but more are found to blame than to defend those times and teachers: the middle-aged writer about a school nowadays is often the reverse of Horace's old man, being *Culpator temporis acti se puero, censor castigatorem seniorum.* So, out of gratitude to dear old Eton and the preceptors of my youth, I am moved to be not only a reader, but a writer, on these matters, and to jot down a few memories of those to whom I owe much. Though I name no names, those of my own time, or nearly so, will know of whom I speak; but I feel sure my remarks will neither outrage the memory of any dead nor offend any living.

King Henry's School was my only one. Preparatory schools were then rare: boys went to public schools younger, and so were in them longer. I myself entered Eton well prepared by my father, and had good home advice and encouragement all the time I was there. No doubt this saved me from some difficulties and temptations, and might have led me as a boy or as a young man to underestimate evils from which I myself was exceptionally guarded. But it does not follow that one possessing these advantages, who afterwards has much ex-

perience of schools and teaching, is in advanced middle age an incompetent judge of the general merits of his school and schoolmasters. The industrious old boys have at least as good a claim to be heard as the average or idle. And as we then spent a longer time at our public school, and passed under many masters—perhaps through nearly all the classical staff—we became more imbued with the traditions of the school, and got a better knowledge of its masters than is given by the three years and a half which is now the average duration of a boy's public-school life.

I was eight years at Eton, passed under eleven form-masters, and can quite well recall my time with each. Some, of course, impressed me more than others; doubtless some were better teachers than others. But what I feel bound to say is that at no time did I think I was learning nothing from them; there was not one whom I did not respect, not one of whom I do not recollect traits of kindness, carefulness, helpfulness to those under him. And this is just what I miss in many books about school-days—a due recognition of such a general debt to schoolmasters. Particular masters are praised—are even over-praised; but the generality are slightly spoken of, if not severely censured; whence the reader is left to infer that they did their duties in a very perfunctory manner.

I shall try to sketch some of the pastors and masters of myself and contemporaries as they appeared to me then, and still do appear, not giving any minute account of my own school-life or of our school-system generally; for the former was not eventful or out of the way, and of the latter enough has been written. Eleven in number were my form-masters. Of the eleven four are still living. With many I had later acquaintance; but my school impressions about them are clear, nor have they been much changed by my subsequent knowledge.

Well do I remember my first lesson up to my first master. He taught his form in a ground-floor room under the upper school, towards the north-west corner of the school-yard. He must have been quite a young man then, and was small of stature; but to a boy of eleven no master appears young or small. To me he seemed formidable at that first morning lesson—Greek grammar, I think it was. However, he did nothing to me that justified dread either then or afterwards during our mutual experience: we remained good friends. It was of course humble work that he did with us; but he did it well. And if easy in quality, in quantity (as I now know) the work of any of our then masters must have been great. A lively manner had this my first pedagogue; we have often met since, and I am glad to say he still lives. His scholar-

ship he has well proved by some classical editions of considerable merit.

From him I passed upwards to one with whom I remained a longer time than the usual half-year, the regular term of a boy's sojourn in one of the forms of the lower part of the school. For when I with his division moved up, he moved up also. We liked him very much, and I remember how pleased we were when we heard that he was to be promoted with us; and this was not because he was over-indulgent: he was an excellent disciplinarian, but just. Alert and vigilant he was: I remember but one occasion of his being absent in mind. He was hearing us say by heart our Ovid—twenty lines. The custom was for each boy to say but a few lines, beginning where the last left off, and then to be dismissed. I began to say; my hearer had, I think, some note or paper to look at which put him in a train of thought; I went on through the whole score of lines without any hesitation, and then, like Cock Robin, when I came to the end I began again. The same words recurring in the same voice roused him from his reverie, and he pronounced the usual "Go!" Afterwards he made some kind remark to my father on my good memory. A very good scholar this master was, as I came to know afterwards; at the time I probably did not appreciate this. Very handsome I thought him, and dignified. He had the character of being rather too lenient with his pupils, not forcing much work from the unwilling; but he had several distinguished pupils during my time. Afterwards he was appointed to the headmastership, accepting it rather under pressure at a difficult and critical time, when there was a general clamour for changes. If he did not satisfy all opinions, refusing to advance as fast and as far as some wished, he, at all events, gained credit for straightforward honesty in doing what he thought best for the school, and ruled firmly with justice and courtesy.

With my third master I reached the Remove, a part of the school in which geography lessons were a prominent feature; and a sore trial to many were "Description" and "Map-morning." Our worthy and kind form-master was especially noticeable and imitable in the lessons, his voice and manner being somewhat peculiar. We used to laugh at him and at certain often-recurring phrases. But at whom and at what will not boys laugh? According to my remembrance I did well under his teaching; and, though I did not much like the maps and their accompaniments, I yet had dinned into me somehow a fairly lasting knowledge of the "contagious countries." It is by his geography lessons that we who were under this master shall always remember him: we shall not easily forget

his feeling appeals to us as "miserable boys;" his wonder whence we had crept into his division. Doubtless, poor man, he was sorely tried at times by our dulness, bad memory, or thoughtlessness. I remember, when revisiting Eton from Cambridge, how I and a fellow-undergraduate stole up to the open window of his class-room to listen for the well-known tones and demand for the modern names of Troy or an Asiatic mountain-chain.

Number four was "my tutor." What this means a public-school boy, especially an Etonian, knows. Perhaps the outside world now know, or think they know, for in magazine articles, newspaper letters, etc., the tutorial system has been discussed, criticized, and (as I think) undeservedly abused. But into the question of its merits we will not enter. Of my tutor I necessarily saw and knew more than of any other master. I liked him: so did his pupils generally. From the beginning to the end of my eight years at school I was continually learning much from him. If he made us work hard, he also worked hard for us. But as a form-master he was terribly strict, and not liked, perhaps with some reason. He was so exacting that I believe there must have been cases where dulness, not idleness, got too severely punished; for it sorely taxed me (who was neither dull nor idle) to come up to his requirements, especially on the geography mornings, and I had one or two narrow escapes of severe punishment when it would have been really undeserved. But probably in those times form-masters were overweighted with too many boys; they had therefore no time to find out the exact powers of each; and my tutor thought it juster and better on the whole to err on the side of strictness. At any rate, with his pupils he was reasonable; he would not tolerate idleness, but he could find out what they were really able to do, and worked them accordingly. And for his promising pupils, when preparing for particular examination or scholarship, he grudged no extra time and trouble. Nor did he confine his sympathy and presence with us to pupil-room. He was often on the river, and at the bathing-places when we "passed" for swimming. And I remember some pleasant excursions with him up the river to Cliefden or Marlow in the summer term.

And while speaking of my tutor's work with us, I would say a word or two on the religious teaching and influence at a public school. Some have blamed public schools severely on this head: have asserted that before Arnold there was of Christian teaching nothing, or next to nothing. I cannot subscribe to this judgment. Doubtless there was room for improvement: *e.g.*, in the matter of sermons, we might with advantage have been more frequently addressed by our Head-

master, by other masters, by younger preachers. Yet I can still recall some good and impressive sermons. To one preacher (still living) many of us listened with interest, and (which is more) did things that he told us to do. But religious influence would come chiefly through the tutor; and I certainly do not admit that it was as nothing. Of my own tutor I feel bound to record one fact: how carefully and conscientiously he prepared us for Confirmation, taking each boy separately. I remember how serious and impressive were his words at the beginning, how thorough the instruction that followed. Nor can I look upon as valueless, in a religious or spiritual point of view, the Greek Testament or other Divinity lessons with tutor or in form. How these things impressed other boys, or bore fruit in them, I cannot pronounce judgment. All I contend is that serious advice and religious teaching were given to those who would hear and learn; our masters did their duty: for what our tutor did for his pupils, others no doubt did for theirs.

My next step up the ladder brought me to a master for whom, both as a master and on other accounts, I have always had a great respect. On entering his form one found a change in the work; and there was, I think, a difference in his teaching: he went more outside the actual school lesson in the way of illustration from history and literature. I am far from saying that our other masters did not suit their teaching to their class, making it higher and more advanced for the higher forms: they did so no doubt; but I seem to have noticed it especially in this case of my fourth step upwards. A year or so after I was in this division I came under this same master in another relation: he was our superintending master in college, and there he was much liked by us as a kind adviser and friend. He used to come round the corridors in the evening—I think I see him now, a remarkably upright figure, bearing a little lamp in hand—and would chat pleasantly with us in our rooms. He resigned his mastership to keep a promise of joining a friend in missionary labour at the other side of the world in New Zealand.

Perhaps my time under my next three masters was my least progressive time at Eton: yet not through their fault, but my own, for I was less industrious; and besides this, being high in the school for my age, I was rather victimized by bigger and older dunces in my boarding-house, helping them in their work to the detriment of my own. This is a thing hardly to be prevented in a public school; but, if it go not too far, it is not an unmixed evil that forward boys should have as it were the drag put on to some extent, while they also learn by teaching others and seeing and helping them over their difficulties.

But to return to these three masters. The first was certainly a good and careful scholar: he had some distinguished pupils, and was reckoned a very good tutor; but in his form teaching he was rather dull, and unawakening in manner. Afterwards he became Headmaster, then Provost, and filled both positions with credit and honour. Above him came a master who was generally liked, a courteous and gentlemanly man. He used especially to enforce neatness and finish, and to check rambling, diffuse and slovenly work. Next to him was one whom I recollect as particularly kind to my brother and myself, to whom he gave some specimens from his collection of stuffed birds, as we were keen young naturalists. He had been a fine cricketer in his youth, and was often to be seen looking on in Upper Club; once or twice I remember to have seen him batting well in practice or in a match. I believe he had weak health; he died at Eton as a master before I left the school.

And now I rose to the division of one whom I liked much, and from whom I learnt much—more, I think, than from any one form-master before. It is true that I was under him longer than I had been under any other; for, as one rose towards the top of the school, promotion became slower. A very clever man he was, but eccentric; indeed, so much so, that we boys applied to him the monosyllable “mad.” He was a decidedly good and stimulating teacher, gave one new ideas, especially about the connexion of words and philology, little attended to at that time. Energetic he was, and almost violent in manner at times; enthusiastic, and devoting great pains where he thought them well bestowed. To myself he was very kind on more than one occasion. I have a book given me by him as a prize for a special verse copy. Such prizes, it was said, he often promised, but generally forgot to give; however, I am an instance to the contrary. That he failed to make his mastership and his house a success financially, and left the school in consequence, does not, of course, lessen my debt of gratitude to him as a teacher.

Tenth in order and penultimate was my next master. Of him, too, I had a long experience—as had all boys who rose quickly and reached his division while young, having to wait for admission to the headmaster’s division. Of this master’s teaching I have not such a favourable remembrance as of some others; in fact, I do not agree with the estimate of it given in several notices since his death by grateful pupils; for he is exalted above his colleagues—spoken of as decidedly in advance of them. As form-master he was not so to my apprehension or that of many others; and I was beginning to be able to judge. Being now old enough to understand reasons for work, I worked, and got on well with him; but I

did not think then, nor do I think now, that as a teacher he was above my other masters, or even equal to some. His teaching did not seem an advance on the form below; he was particular, not to say crotchety, about some little things, and seemed to me to aim too much at enforcing his own views. But he had many pupils who won distinction both at Eton and afterwards; and I do not wish to disparage his general merits. For he was a man widely known, had many interests beside those of the school, initiated and generously helped many good works. It is only as a master that I think his zealous friends have unduly extolled him at the expense of others—rather as if he was the only enlightened, liberal-minded, and conscientious tutor among far inferior colleagues.

And now I come to our Head—"The Doctor," a well-known name, which I will not scruple to give, Dr. Hawtrey. Long did he reign over our school, resigning the ferule to take the Provostship about a year after I went to college. That he was a polished scholar and gentleman is beyond all question; nor were these unimportant points in a school like ours. Less minute and precise in scholarship he was than some of our day; but many of these appear to me, in analyzing the parts, to have lost enjoyment of the whole. Indeed, the generation to which our then chief and my own father belonged, as well as some of my own generation, did, I feel sure, enjoy their classics more than our juniors do. Of this headmaster's teaching and influence over his division I have always thought highly. The willing and intelligent boys gained much, learnt to take wider views of things, heard illustrations from many a language and literature. It is true there was not much driving of the laggards in that form; the aim was rather to lead the van than to bring up the rear. "Somebody must be last" was the consolatory remark with which our Head used to meet a somewhat derisive titter of ours at the last name read out in the examination list. I have no doubt he wittingly gave up the forcing principle, thinking it did not become the headmaster of a great school to be like one of Pharaoh's taskmasters. Thus it happened that triflers could and did trifle. Indeed, not only in the Doctor's division, but throughout much of the school, there was more freedom and more chance of shirking work than is now the case either there or elsewhere. A minimum was required, but a minimum easy to get through somehow; and boys were left more to themselves. Perhaps less work, on the whole, was got out of them (though of this I am not sure as regards Eton of late years and Eton then); and for some boys the system had disadvantages. But there are counterbalancing disadvantages in the high-pressure system, where every corner

of a boy's time is filled up, and he is never, even out of school hours, otherwise than superintended, lectured, and directed. Such was not our Eton system; such, indeed, is still not the public-school system as compared with private schools; but it may tend more and more to become so, as new studies rise up and popular clamour demands that each and all shall have a place in the public-school curriculum. But whither am I diverging? Our "Magister Informator," at all events, went on the old plan, and worked it, on the whole, well. And I, with doubtless many others, feel grateful to him for his teaching and influence during the latter part of my school-life.

I have thus given my impressions about eleven form-masters. Some two or three of the classical staff there were who taught forms below the fourth form, in which I entered. Also there were non-classical, or extra masters; but attendance on these—even on the mathematical—was at that time optional, and they were not in the same position as the classical masters, an injustice which has since been rectified.

Of two extra masters I retain an affectionate remembrance. One was our French master, a courtly-looking old gentleman, in dress and manner quite of the old régime. I used to go to him for lessons when quite young, some time before I entered the school—indeed on entering the school, or soon after, I discontinued my French with him, it being thought that I should be overpressed by adding this to the regular lessons. But when I afterwards took up the language again, the early foundation thus laid stood me in good stead. The old gentleman was sorry to lose me for a pupil, having predicted for me the Prince Consort's prize, then lately established. He was a pleasant teacher and a friend of my father's. Long years afterwards I came upon a blotting-paper interleaved book of exercises done in those early days.

My other extra master came at the end of my Eton course. He was the German master; but I learnt from him not German, but Hebrew. Most liberal he was of his time and trouble, was an enthusiastic Hebraist, and always glad to see me at any odd moments I could spare. I learnt from him for more than two years till I left for college, being for the greater part of the time his only Hebrew pupil. He knew other Oriental languages besides Hebrew; Syriac and Arabic certainly, and perhaps more. Also he and his family were very musical.

Such are my reminiscences of my school and schoolmasters. Too favourable a picture some will deem it; yet, looking back as I do with the light of many years' subsequent experience in the same line, I am confident that it gives quite as truthful an impression of Eton then as do some descriptions that are more carping and critical. A working boy well cared for sees

the best side. Granted; but some of the indolent who have written saw only the worst. Some boys (it may be said) will learn from any one. True; but also some from no one. And then, repentant as they grow wiser, those of this kind (or something like it) put upon their masters and their school faults mainly their own. Nor would anyone be right in supposing me to have been an all-work-and-no-play model boy; I took my fair share of everything that was going. I have confined myself in this paper to the masters and their work with us; but I have memories of and could be garrulous about Eton cricket, football, fives, the river, the surrounding country. And again, let none suppose I have penned these reminiscences to prove that our system was faultless, our masters superhumanly perfect, or to complain of all change. "The old order changeth, giving place to new;" no sensible person would deny that changes were needed at Eton as elsewhere, or that good has been done by some reforms. But it is a pity when we cannot mend and reform without disparaging the generation on whose foundation we build, on whose work we improve, without supposing that with us were born both wisdom and conscience. And about the masters of our time, I repeat my conviction that, whereas outsiders might from some accounts infer that they were unenlightened, indolent, and self-seeking, they were as intelligent, hardworking and conscientious as any body of masters in the present day.

With masters thus respected and liked, it may well be that boys were less ignorant and idle than a younger age is prone to believe. More leisure they had to be idle; but under good influence leisure uncontrolled is not always abused to idleness—nay, it may be and is turned to good account in various ways. While, on the other hand, the boy with his time over-filled is apt by a kind of reaction to give all his leisure (almost as a matter of conscience) to the very opposite of work. Having thrust upon him, as he thinks, too much wisdom, he runs into the more foolishness. The bow bent over-much, when loosed, recoils the more. But the learners of my own time I neither blame, praise, nor estimate in any way—"that which we were we were." With our teachers I think we had no reason to be dissatisfied, and so I pay them this debt of gratitude, for I honour the maxim of the old school in Aristophanes,¹ whose words I freely paraphrase:

Remember not each petty fault, forgetting all the good
Of older men who fed thy youth with wisdom's sacred food.

W. C. GREEN.

¹ *Ar. Nub.*, 999 : ἐπιστήσαι μὴ μνησικακῆσαι τὴν ἡλικίαν ἐξ ἧς ἐνεοττοτροφήθης.