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SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ITS BEARINGS ON PRACTICAL LIFE.*

MICHAEL E. SADLER, M.A., DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL ENQUIRIES AND REPORTS TO THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

I.

WHEN I received through our host the honor of an invitation to be present at this meeting, I thought it would be best to choose a thoroughly practical subject for our discussion. I am deeply conscious that it is only your invitation which makes it not presumptuous of me to speak at all before such a gathering as this. The topic submitted to you is a practical and a difficult one. It raises, indeed, one of the greatest difficulties which beset the problem of secondary education, regarded not in its administrative or political aspects (about these I shall, of course, say nothing), but in its bearing on livelihood and life.

This leads me briefly to refer to an important feature of all scientific study of educational problems. You have to combine in it two distinct but equally necessary things. You need, as you need in the planning and construction of a battleship, the kind of technical skill which can only be acquired by years of exact and concentrated study. But you also need, not in a merely general

way, but on points of detail and design, the constant criticism of the men and women who watch the working of the schools, who have themselves experienced their merits or defects either in their own persons or through their children, and who are best able to judge whether the machinery is producing what it claims to produce. There is no other subject which calls in the same way for the constant combination, at every point, of highly expert knowledge with non-expert comment and suggestion. It is perilous to have either alone. To use a word coined by John Stuart Mill, no pedantocracy can be trusted with the sole charge of a thing so necessarily human as the school. On the other hand, it is just as vital for Britain to have schools organized, equipped, and taught up to the highest known point of quality and excellence as it is for us to have a navy, which is the mirror of all that can be done to date in the way of construction, gunnery, and seamanship.

The subject of education is full of open questions. It is an aspect of

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