

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THEIR CRITICS

SEEING that our Public Schools are by their numbers, their moral power, and the splendour of their traditions undeniably to be reckoned among the strongest and most vital elements of English national life, it was only to be expected that they should be speedily called upon in the new age of reform to answer the challenge of the critic. And the critic—honest, fussy, peevish, or ignorant—worthy or ignobly unworthy to touch so famous a shield even with the blunted spear-point—may be sure that he will be met whenever and wherever he will, and effectually “delivered of his vows.” No considerations of pride—no contempt for the most churlish manner of fighting—must keep us in our tents: for upon this point we must satisfy ourselves that we possess the truth. The training of character, however attempted, is coming to be in the belief of Englishmen the noblest art in use among us, and the most invaluable of all our industries: and either the history of England is a history of degeneration, or her Public Schools are the guardians of her highest work-day traditions and the best hope of the coming race.

More than one attack has been nevertheless made upon them lately; and among others it has pleased a writer, whom we see no reason for naming, upon an occasion to which we need not further refer, to say of “the Public School product” with reference to “the character that is still its boast,” these words: