

## THE HIRELING SCHOOLMASTER.

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For an infant people we are justly proud of our school system. No expense, no pains, have been spared in the erection of the stately edifice. Strong are its foundations, lordly its pillared aisles and lofty domes, exquisite its polish. A true master-builder laid its corner-stone and another is adding the copestone with "shoutings" of praise. The first legislative wisdom in the land, the choicest administrative ability, have been put under tribute. Funds without stint have been supplied for its need. The workmen on its walls have been cheered by the plaudits of the multitude. The face of the country has been lined as a chess-board to facilitate the work. Thousands of school sections, wards, and districts; a legion of Trustees, Teachers, Examiners, Inspectors, books, pamphlets, papers, reports; all manner of aids and appliances are brought into requisition in order that our youth of both sexes may gain a sound, useful, practical training for their several callings in life, or be enabled to mount the ladder of knowledge from the little school in the woods to the University itself. Will it be credited that the power to frustrate and render nugatory all this paraphernalia of educational enterprise, to reduce the actual harvest of all this machinery and exertion to *nil*, is still suffered to reside in a single one of all these agencies, the success of all the others being absolutely dependent on his will? Incredible! but so it is. The very life of the school system dwells in the schoolmaster. He is its *heart*. When this organ is healthy and vigorous, growth and beauty are diffused throughout; when it ceases to beat, or is embedded in the "fatty degeneration" of sloth or indifference, what can follow but degeneracy or death? And in not a few sections this school-death reigns undisturbed. The schoolmaster holds the key of success. He shuts or opens, binds or looses, at pleasure. He is the arbiter of educational destiny. He is the main pillar of the temple; and woe to the building when he is untrustworthy! On him rests a responsibility not elsewhere surpassed. In him resides a power, in him is vested a trust, far-reaching, sacred! And yet, in every County in the Province may be found teachers who are utterly insensible of this responsibility, utterly recreant to this trust. Practically unassailable, the hireling defies every criticism, and smiles at every futile assault. In vain may Legislatures deliberate; Ministers issue manifestoes; Inspectors scrutinize and condemn; "Central Committees" elevate the standard "to the plucking" point; Trustees remonstrate; taxpayers growl and grumble;—*the hireling teacher frustrates, defies, laughs at them all!* And

— "little he'll reck if they let him sleep on  
In the place where the School Law has laid him."

In any human being sloth is a vice; in the teacher it is a crime.

We feel sympathy, not indignation, towards the teacher who does his best, in vain. We pity incapacity: we *loathe* unprincipled dereliction of duty. When failure springs from pure indolence or sheer indifference, words fail to characterize the fault as it deserves. The lazy teacher is a downright criminal—a living, barefaced fraud—a salaried calamity. In the first place, he obtains money under false pretences. Is this the extent of his criminality? By no means. His salary (a dead loss to the section) forms but a single item in the school disasters of the year; and it is not the principal item. Think of the time far worse than wasted in that school of forty or fifty children!—precious weeks and months gone, never to return!—at a period of life when every hour is gold. The true seed-time is lost forever! Nor is this all. Money squandered—time lost: what next? Habits of idleness or trifling contracted. Think of the demoralizing influence of bad example daily brought to bear on the plastic, imitative mind of

youth! From the person and character of the teacher flows forth a ceaseless stream of unseen mystic power, moulding the youthful character for better or for worse. Mere inaction does not arrest the process. The teacher who tries to kill weary time by whittling a stick, is silently but surely whittling out of his pupils any habits of industry they may have acquired. It is difficult to expose in words the deep, far-reaching effects of an influence so malign. Banish it from the sacred precincts of the schoolroom! Make the teacher a present of his year's salary the first morning of the year and let him go. Do anything, everything but allow an indolent master for a single day to shed his baleful influence around your children. Were it possible for such a one to leave the school where he found it—no better, no worse—he would be comparatively blameless. But it is not so. The unfaithful teacher not only adds nothing to the work already done, but mars, disfigures and in part destroys. To habits of industry, order, neatness in the pupil, succeed those of idleness, confusion, and slovenliness—habits at best slow of removal, and which may adhere to the character while life endures. In a word, when we consider the mighty influence of example, and especially the teacher's example—his demeanor, personal appearance, morals—on the minds of those committed to his charge, it is simply impossible to calculate his power for good or for evil.

And now for the remedy. Is there none? Can it be possible that law and regulation are both silent on so grave a matter as this? Will it be believed that the unprincipled hireling can, in the name of a noble calling, with absolute impunity continue to rob school sections and devastate youthful character? If I am not mistaken, he can. Now, if this be the true state of the case—if it is a fact that no remedy is provided for an evil which, if universal, would suffice to stifle education everywhere, and which, being, as it is, not uncommon, actually does paralyze only too many schools in the rural districts annually, then surely it is not too much to say that the defect is a serious, a fundamental one, a substantial grievance, crying aloud for earnest consideration and swift redress.

Before proceeding further, I must anticipate a possible objection. The existence of the evil may be admitted; the lack of remedy denied. It may be said that the existing "Form of Agreement" between Teachers and Trustees contains all that is required as a guarantee of faithfulness on the part of the former, or redress on that of the latter. I deny this. It is quite true that the teacher solemnly binds himself to "teach faithfully;" so far, so good. Now, suppose he should not teach faithfully, where is the redress on the part of the trustees? Remonstrance might fail; threats pass unheeded; dismissal would be a dangerous resource. How could inefficiency be proved in a Court of Law? Many a worthless pedagogue may thank the fear of consequences for that sublime immunity from molestation which he enjoys in the occupancy of his sinecure. There are occupations in which a single day's idleness would mean disaster to the idler. Teaching is not one of them. There is not the least difficulty in holding office here, one year at least, without evincing more than the very faintest resemblance of exertion. An experienced hand especially knows how to accomplish this. Always at his post—doing nothing—who can touch him? Punctuality and routine effectually screen him from all outside interference. Is not the mill always in motion? and who, assuming to weigh or measure the peculiar grist, could positively swear to the number of bushels? Entrenched in a position impregnable to legal batteries, the hireling laughs at all comers. Trustees bewail their contract; the taxpayer growls; the Inspector condemns; the school-desks are sparsely occupied; the very hireling himself sees, feels, understands it all; *n'importe*, there he is; and there, too, in undisturbed possession he will remain till his term expires, when he means to seek for "pastures new." The