

**A  
SCHOOLMASTER'S  
APOLOGY**

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A schoolmaster's apology by Cyril A. Alington

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*CONIUGI DILECTISSIMAE  
DECENNII PRIMITIAS*

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ANNONIA

## PREFACE

WHEN I was travelling in America in 1897 with the present Bishop of Oxford,<sup>1</sup> I remember that when we started on a bicycling expedition he usually mounted the sidewalk on his machine and incontinently fell off. As I picked him up and inquired into the cause he would always say cheerily that he did it to propitiate τὸ φθονερόν, the jealous power which in Herodotus has such influence on our undertakings.

The object of a Preface must be similar, but I have no sacrifice to bring, and must content myself with the confession, needless perhaps in view of what follows, that I have only myself to blame for this book. Various friends will recognise traces of their handiwork: they know that my gratitude is theirs already, and that my apologies are to be had for the asking.

“Fool, said my Muse, look in thy heart and

<sup>1</sup> But he was not a Bishop then: merely a Canon of Westminster, to be described in the unforgettable phrases which seasoned the boundless hospitality we met with as “Canon Gore of Westminster, England:—a very homely man, unhand-some, lean to gauntness.”



write." I cannot remember the previous conversation between the parties, so that I am not sure how the epithet was earned : but I have taken the advice, so that I cannot fairly shrink from the condemnation.

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## I

THE idea of writing a book is one with which almost everyone who has read for Honours either at Oxford or Cambridge has probably at some time toyed. But the mere desire, in the abstract, to write a book is rather like (should we say?) the mere desire, in the abstract, to get married. It may be that sociologists will some day be able to establish that the latter desire is the explanation of most of the unhappy marriages that we see: it is improbable that the former accounts for our enormous output of unreadable literature. For between the idea of a book and its realisation lie many serious obstacles, of which the first and greatest is the solution of the question—what sort of a book is it to be? And here let me say at once that there is one kind of book that I have never had the least desire to write, and that is the kind of book which only specialists can write and only specialists can read. For specialists as such I have a respectful aversion which (even had other things been as equal as they assuredly are not) would have stifled in me

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any desire to join their body. Throughout my life I have suffered from the unwillingness of those who have addressed me to believe that I really could not understand what they were saying. Lecturers who assume that one is acquainted with the cardinal facts of the History of Gothic Architecture or has a firm grasp on the elements of Political Economy: veterinary surgeons who assume that one can tell without thinking which is a horse's off hind leg—all through my life I have suffered from those who would not begin at the beginning. I believe my situation is far from uncommon. The most glaring instance is probably to be found in the services of the Church of England, where it is almost demonstrably true that prayers, lessons, and sermons fail largely of their effect from their assumption of a knowledge which the average congregation does not possess.

In any case my respect for, and my dislike of, specialists would have been enough to keep me from joining their numbers, even without the worthier motive which must keep many a good book unwritten. There must be many who feel, with Browning's *Pictor Ignotus*, that to let the casual reviewer criticise the work of their lifetime is indeed to let the merchant traffic in their heart, and prefer to

"know their knowledge to the world unknown."