

**A PLEA FOR RAGGED
SCHOOLS;
OR, PREVENTION
BETTER THAN CURE**

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A Plea for Ragged Schools; Or, Prevention Better Than Cure by Thomas Guthrie

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THOMAS GUTHRIE

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RAGGED SCHOOLS;

OR,

PREVENTION BETTER THAN CURE.

BY THE

REV. THOMAS GUTHRIE.

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MDCCCXLVII.

" Can hope look forward to a manhood raised
On such foundations ?"

" ' Hope is none for him !'
The pale recluse indignantly exclaimed ;
' And tens of thousands suffer wrongs as deep.'

* * * * *
" At this day
Who shall enumerate the crazy huts
And tottering hovels, whence do issue forth
A ragged offspring, with thin upright hair,
Crowned like the image of fantastic Fear ;
Or wearing (shall we say ?) in that white growth
An ill-adjusted turban, for defence
Or fierceness, wreathed around their sun-burnt brows
By savage Nature ? Shrivelled are their lips ;
Naked, and coloured like the soil, the feet
On which they stand, as if thereby they drew
Some nourishment, as trees do by their roots,
From earth, the common mother of us all,
Figure and mien, complexion and attire,
Are leagued to strike dismay ; but outstretched hand
And whining voice denote them suppliants
For the least boon that pity can bestow."

WORDSWORTH.



A PLEA FOR RAGGED SCHOOLS, &c.

ON approaching Edinburgh from the west, after the general features which distance presents,—dome, and spire, and antique piles of building, the Castle standing in the foreground, while Arthur Seat raises its lion-like back between the city and the sea,—the first object which attracts the eyes of a stranger is a structure of exquisite and surpassing beauty. It might be a palace for our Queen:—it is an hospital. Near by, embowered in wood, stands an edifice of less pretensions, but also great extent:—it is another hospital. Within a bow-shot of that, again, some fine open towers rise from the wood over a fair structure, with its Grecian pillars and graceful portico:—it is another hospital. Now in the city, and wheeling round nigh to the base of the Castle rock, he drives on by Lauriston. Not far away, on the outskirts of the town, pleasantly planted in a beautiful park bordered with trees, stands an old-fashioned building:—it is another hospital. In his way along Lauriston, within a stone-cast of him, his eye catches the back of a large and spacious edifice, which looks beautifully out on the Meadows, the low Braid Hills, and the distant Pentlands:—it is another hospital. A few turns of the wheel, and before him, within a fine park, or rather ornamental garden, stands the finest structure of our town,—a masterpiece of Inigo Jones,—with a princely revenue of £15,000 a-year:—it is another hospital. The carriage now jostles over a stone; the stranger turns his head, and sees, but

some hundred yards away, a large Dutch-like structure, stretching out its long lines of windows, with the gilded ship, the sign of commerce, for weather-vane, on its summit:—that is another hospital. Our friend concludes, and not without some reason, that, instead of the “Modern Athens,” Edinburgh might be called the City of Hospitals.

I have no quarrel at present with these institutions: their management is in the hands of wise, excellent, and honourable men; and, in so far as they fail to accomplish the good intended, it is not that they are mismanaged; the management is not bad; but in some of its elements the system itself is vicious. God never made men to be reared in flocks, but in families. Man is not a gregarious animal, other than that he herds together with his race in towns, a congeries of families. Born with domestic affections, whatever interferes with their free and full play is an evil to be shunned, and, in its moral and physical results, to be dreaded. God framed and fitted man to grow up, not under the hospital, but the domestic roof,—whether that roof be the canvass of an Arab tent, the turf of a Highland shieling, or the gilded dome of a palace. And as man was no more made to be reared in an hospital than the human foot to grow in a Chinese shoe, or the human body to be bound in ribs of iron and whalebone,—acting in both cases in controversion of God’s law,—you are as sure in the first to inflict injury on his moral, as in the second on his physical constitution. They commit a grave mistake who forget that injury as inevitably results from flying in the face of a moral or mental, as of a physical law. So long as rice is rice, you cannot rear it on the bald brow of a hill-top: it loves the hollows and the valleys, with their water-floods; and so long as man is man, more or less of damage will follow the attempt to rear him in circumstances for which his Maker never adapted him.*

But apart altogether from this, who and what are the chil-

* Since writing the above, we have read with great pleasure some admirable remarks by the Lord Provost, at a meeting of the Governors of Heriot’s Hospital, on the same subject and to the same effect.

dren that, under the roof of these crowded hospitals, receive shelter, food, clothing, and instruction? It is much deplored by many, and can be denied by none, that in some of these hospitals not a few of the inmates are the children of those who are able, and ought to be willing,—and, but for the temptation these institutions present, would be willing,—to train up their children as olive-plants by the domestic table, and rear them within the tender, kind, holy, and heaven-blessed circle of a domestic home,—a home where they might nurse these precious affections toward parents, brothers, sisters, and smiling babes,—which, for man's good in this life, and the wellbeing of society, are worth more than all Greek and Roman lore. I cannot better convey my ideas and feelings on this matter than by saying, that when a Governor of Heriot's Hospital,—an hospital which enjoys the care and attention both of the Town-Council and city clergy,—I was astonished to be applied to by a respectable man on behalf of his son. Let me not be misunderstood. I do not much blame parents and guardians for availing themselves of these hospitals, even when they might do otherwise. A well-furnished table, lodging the most comfortable, a first-rate education, in some instances valuable bursaries, and occasionally, when launched into the world, a sum of money to float the favoured pupil on,—these present a temptation to tear the child from a mother's side, and send it away from a father's care, which it is not easy to resist. Still, to resume my narrative, I was amazed to receive such an application from such a quarter. The applicant was a sober and excellent man, living in what the world would count respectable circumstances. Knowing this, nevertheless I asked him, "Can you give your boy pottage in the morning?" "Yes," said he, surprised at such a question. "Potatoes to dinner?" "Certainly." "Pottage at night?" He looked astonished: he knew, and I knew, and all his neighbours knew, that he was able to do a great deal more. "Then," I said, "my friend, were I you, it should not be till they had laid me in my coffin that boy of mine should lose the blessings of a father's fireside, and be cast amid the dangers of a public hos-

pital." I may perhaps add, that I thought him a wise man, for he took my advice. And before leaving these hospitals, I think it right also to add, in justice to the management of Heriot's Hospital, that some £3000 a-year is applied to the maintenance of schools scattered up and down the city, where the children of decent tradesmen, mechanics, and labourers, receive a good *gratis* education.

Now, to resume, for convenience sake, the company of my stranger friend. Skirting along the ruins of the old city wall, and passing down the Vennel, we descend into the Grassmarket, —a large, capacious *place*, with the exception of some three or four modern houses standing as it did two centuries ago,—the most perfect specimen in our city of the olden time. Its old massive fronts, reared as if in picturesque contempt of modern uniformity,—some with the flat roofs of the East, and others of the Flemish school, with their sharp and lofty gables topped by the rose, the thistle, and the *fleur de lis*,—still look down on that square as in the days when it was one sea of heads, every eye turned to the great black gallows, which rose high over all, and from which, amid the hushed and awful silence of assembled thousands, came the loud last psalm of a horo of the Covenant, who had come there to play the man.

In a small, well-conditioned town, with the exception of some children basking on the pavement, and playing with the dogs that have gone over with them to enjoy the sunny side, between the hours of ten and one, you miss the Scripture picture of "boys and girls playing in the street." Not so in the Grassmarket. On one side of this square, in two-thirds of the shops (for we have counted them) spirits are sold. The sheep are near the slaughter-house,—the victims are in the neighbourhood of the altars. The mouth of almost every close is filled with loungers, worse than Neapolitan lazzaroni,—bloated and brutal figures, ragged and wretched old men, bold and fierce-looking women, and many a half-clad mother, shivering in cold winter, her naked feet on the frozen pavement, a skeleton infant in her arms. On a summer day, when in the blessed sunshine and