A Letter to the Mayor of Boston

My dear Mr. Mayor:

It will be with a good deal of satisfaction that I coöperate with you and any other cities of Massachusetts for the purpose of increasing the pay of those engaged in the teaching of the youth of our Commonwealth. It has become notorious that the pay for this most important function is much less than that which prevails in commercial life and business activities.

Roger Ascham, the teacher to Queen Elizabeth, about 1565, in discussing this question, wrote: "And it is pity that commonly more care is had, yea and that among very wise men, to find out rather a cunning man for their horse than a cunning man for their children. They say nay in word, but
they do so in deed. For to the one they will gladly give a stipend of two hundred crowns by the year and are loath to offer to the other two hundred shillings. God that sitteth in Heaven laugheth their choice to scorn and rewardeth their liberality as it should. For he suffereth them to have tame and well-ordered horses, but wild and unfortunate children, and therefore in the end they find more pleasure in their horse than comfort in their children."

In an address which I made at a Harvard College Commencement I undertook to direct attention to the inadequate compensation paid to our teachers, whether in the universities, public schools, or the pulpits of the land. It is perfectly clear that more money must be provided for these purposes, which surpass in their importance all our other public activities, both by government appropriation and by private charity.

It is significant that the number of teachers who are in training in our normal schools
has decreased in the past twelve or fifteen years from three thousand to two thousand, while the number of students in colleges and technical schools has increased. The people of the Commonwealth cannot support the Government unless the Government supports them.

The condition which was described by the teacher of Queen Elizabeth, that greater compensation is paid for the unimportant things than is paid for training the intellectual abilities of our youth, might exist in the sixteenth century, but it ought not to exist in the twentieth century.

Fortunately for us, the sterling character of teachers of all kinds has kept them at their task even though we have failed to show them due appreciation, and up to the present time the public has suffered little. But unless a change is made and a new policy adopted, the cause of education will break down. It will either become a trade for those little fitted for it or be abandoned
altogether, instead of remaining the noblest profession, which it has been and ought to be.

There are some things that are fundamental. In the sixteenth century the voice of the people was little heard. If the sovereign had wisdom, that might suffice. But in the twentieth century the people are sovereign. What they think determines every question of civilization. Unless they are well trained, well informed, and well instructed, unless a proper value is put on knowledge and wisdom, the value of all material things will be lost.

There is now no pains too great, no cost too high, to prevent or diminish the duty enjoined by the Constitution of the Commonwealth that wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, be generally diffused among the body of the people.

This important subject ought to be considered and a remedy provided at the special session of the General Court.