

National Secular Society Tract No. 6.

Mr. RAMSAY MACDONALD on SECULAR EDUCATION.

*Report of a Speech delivered in support of
Secular Education at a meeting held under the
auspices of the Secular Education League, in
the St. James' Hall, London, December 10, 1908.*

“THE case for the secular solution is a logical case, it is a just case. This is a question which concerns more particularly the children of the working classes. I am bound to say that nothing made me feel so disgusted as when I listened in the House of Commons, the other day, to gentlemen whose feet had never crossed the threshold of a Board School, who told us about the tremendous amount of concern they had for the quality of the moral and religious teaching given to other people's children. All I can say is, I wish they would look after their own children. If they had only shown the same anxiety for their own children and seen that they were well educated in morality and religion, well bred, trained in the knowledge of what was right and wrong, and had left us to do the same with our children, modern society would have been a much holier affair than it is to-day. I am not one of those who believe in peace at any price. I am in favour of a just and lasting peace, a peace that has been secured after the State and Church make up their minds to look after their own business. There is nothing more preposterous than that the State should attempt to do the work of the Church unless it is that the Church should actually expect the State to do its work. Let us suppose that we are all profoundly religious and that we are simply burning with anxiety to get the minds of our children, using the word in its very best sense, converted. The children have religious instruction for three quarters of an hour each day, and we are going to say : ‘ What

a blessed religious exercise they have had. How enlightening it has been to their souls.' Three quarters of an hour's instruction in Jewish history—very ancient—and the child might say: 'Thank God, if I did not know that David was the King of Judah, I might have been a thief.' We have a right to test education by results. We hear a great deal about science nowadays. I would like to hear Mr. Haldane, who is a leader in science, give his genuine opinion as a scientist, from the point of view of a man who believes in the scientific method, as to the effect of Bible reading in the schools from the religious point of view. Let us begin on a secular basis. Let us secularize our schools. Let us bring in, not Bills to allow sectarian strife, but Bills to increase the efficiency of education. Let us make a real beginning in the State care of children. Let us try to devise some means by which the wisdom, knowledge and power and the financial strength of the State, can build up a physical, intellectual and moral character in our children so that when they are no longer children they shall be powerful men and women, prepared to face life in all its aspects. Bring in Bills to do that and peace will naturally follow. If we could get our education ministers to tear out from the official volumes, all records of those round table conferences and barterings, and forget them, and simply go, day after day, to our schools, see the children, see the teachers and the buildings, and go from those schools to the factories and workshops and see the conditions under which the youth of the country has to work, and with that experience go back to the conference room, and construct an Education Bill which would enable them to meet those conditions, then you would have an education of the right kind. You would have peace, you would have a settlement which was not a surrender, and the whole country would benefit enormously as the result of those efforts."