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EXAGGERATED ESTIMATES  
OF  
READING AND WRITING,  
AS  
MEANS OF EDUCATION.

A PAPER READ AT THE BELFAST MEETING OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE  
ASSOCIATION, ON 24TH SEPT., 1867,

BY

W. B. HODGSON, LL.D., F.C.P.,

*one of the Examiners in the University of London.*

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"SANS LUMIÈRES POINT DE MORALE."—*Mirabeau* (P'ainé). Tom. 5, p. 558. 1792.



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1868.

"To suffer the lower orders of the people to be ill educated,—and then to punish them for crimes which have originated in bad habits, has the appearance of a cruelty not less severe than any which is exercised under the most despotic governments."—P. Colquhoun, LL. D., "Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis." 7th edition, 1806, c. 2, p. 34.

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"What is the use of arguing so pertinaciously that a black's skull will hold as much as a white's, when you are declaring in the same breath that a white's skull must not hold as much as it can, or it will be the worse for him? It does not appear to me at all a profound state of slavery to be whipped into doing a piece of low work that I don't like. But it is a very profound state of slavery to be kept myself low in the forehead, that I may not dislike low work."—John Ruskin, Letter, March 30, 1867.

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"It is true there are people who say the Bible is enough reading for the poor, but they are evidently of a widely different opinion as to their own case, though in religion more than any other subject do all classes stand alike. In these days general knowledge is a fact for both the poor and the rich, yet it most certainly is not communicated at the parish school; nor is there laid down the very lowest and roughest foundation; no, not a beginning, not an earnest, not a pattern, not a morsel to speak of."—*Times*, Saturday, Nov. 19, 1864.

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"I am among those who think the greatest problem of legislation and government unsolved so long as ignorance, sensual waste, or crime keeps a large part of the people, though emancipated from the serfdom of their ancestors, still the thralls of appetite or prejudice, and consequently poor and miserable."—Sir J. K. Shuttleworth, at Opening of Art Workmen's Exhibition.—*Manchester Examiner and Times*, February 21, 1865.

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"One of the great objects now is that the education of all classes should be harmonized. . . . Whatever study can be commonly agreed upon as conducive to formation of good character, of improved taste, and instrumental in cultivating the faculty of accurate observation, that study is one which no particular class should acquire, but to which all classes should devote themselves."—Sir Stafford Northcote, at Exeter.—*Times*, Jan. 4, 1865.

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"In the most essential points, in the chief objects of life, and the most necessary elements of education, rich and poor are really on a level. . . . In the mansion and the cottage there is just the same necessity of methodical habits, forethought, industry, order, cleanliness, peaceful and respectful bearing, the study of one another's wishes and good opinions, openness and the virtues that make a good and useful being. These are matters of conduct; but even in school work there is far greater community between rich and poor than people are apt to imagine."—*Times*, Jan. 6, 1865.

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"Let us, then, I beseech you, in the name of God, let us earnestly and heartily have recourse to education. We must 'begin at the beginning'—we must prevent what is evil, by implanting what is good—we must enlighten the understanding, as well as control the will."—Dr. Parr's "Discourse on Education," p. 41, part II.

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## EXAGGERATED ESTIMATES IN READING AND WRITING.

IN these days much is said about progress, and I am not disposed to deny its reality in various regions, or to disparage its extent. But, admittedly, general and ultimate progression is compatible with partial or temporary retrogression; and there are occasions which tempt one to doubt whether the alleged progress be not a delusion—whether the too obvious retrogression be not final and enduring. Or, to take the somewhat hackneyed simile, which tells us that the advance of the tide is not inconsistent with the retirement of individual waves after they have reached the shore, let us but continue the analogy, and we find that the tide itself, after it has reached its highest, its appointed limit, retires also, leaving a wide waste of dreary sand; and that, though it returns again, it retires again, so that we have, on the whole, not progress, but only oscillation and repetition. The history of popular education tends to confirm the notion that movement is by flux and reflux, and that there is now a season of low water and ebb tide.

Not much more than half a century divides us from the state of social opinion which denounced, or dreaded, or ridiculed any and all teaching of the great masses, which prompted even intelligent and kindly men to predict the entire overturning of society as the inevitable result of the teaching of "the lower orders," as if society depended, for its very existence, on the domination of one small class more or less enlightened, and on the unquestioning subserviency of all other classes, whom any glimmering of light could not fail to render discontented, insubordinate, insurrectionary.

Then came the period which may be called, for a well-known reason, the era of the three R's, *Reading, Riting,* and *'Rithmetic*. The inconveniences of total darkness were more and more recognized, and the advantage of, at least, a sort of twilight state of mind was more and more perceived; but it may well be questioned whether the noonday blaze of knowledge was not more dreaded by the educational patrons of the lower classes than even the midnight blackness of total ignorance. Teaching was encompassed with many limitations and precautions. It might be well for all to be able to read their Bible, according to the famous wish of George III.; but no other literature was encouraged. A good plain hand-writing, with a certain knowledge of ciphering, as it was called, might be useful for the taking of business-orders, and the keeping of accounts. But a too facile or graceful penmanship might be dangerous; it might even lead to forgery, and through that to the gallows. With acquirements so restricted, it was not unlikely that the lower classes would still demean themselves with due humility towards their superiors in

station, and believe and act and suffer according to the will of those placed in authority over them, whether spiritual or secular.

By degrees, the scope of popular education was widened, so far, at least, as regards the admission of other subjects of instruction. I cannot think that there was generally a more philosophic estimate of the true nature of education; but the frequent modern examples of individuals rising from humble station to wealth and rank, familiarized men's minds with the thought that so much culture should be generally given as would assist the exceptionally clever boy in his social ascent, rather than improve the condition of the great body of the working classes. Geography, and history, and sundry other things, were more and more generally introduced. It may well be doubted whether these additions were always or commonly improvements. Time was consumed in committing to memory the events of so called history, one half of which was probably false, while of the other half, one half was probably doubtful, while a large proportion of the whole was unimportant. History must, of course, be begun at the beginning, and the ancient Britons, and the Danes, and the Saxons, and the Normans must have due attention, though, probably, the pupils had passed away from the schools before they had gone down the stream of history below the time of Henry VIII., the names of whose wives, with the order of their execution, furnished excellent material for questions,—or of Elizabeth, whose character was summed up and recited in the pithiest phrases of the Pinnock order of historians. As for geography, such facts as the height of the Himalayas, and the length of the Brahmapootra, were stored up for reproduction at the stated examinations, where the effect was striking, in proportion to the recondite nature of the information, and in inverse proportion to its utility. The barrenness of this kind of teaching, for which, in some cases, no doubt, things of more importance were neglected, did much to damage popular education in the esteem of many, and to give occasion to those previously so disposed to disparage or deny the efficacy and the value of all popular education whatsoever. This tendency was brought to a crisis by the fact that the Educational Department of the Government was in danger of breaking down from an accumulation of routine work, while the annual cost of the educational grant had risen to an amount that shocked the frugal temper of the House of Commons; and the opportunity afforded by the complaint of the Royal Commissioners of 1858-9, that reading, writing, and arithmetic were in some cases neglected, and especially in the younger classes, was readily seized for the introduction of the Revised Code. Of that I need say little more here, than that it gave a new or renewed prominence to reading, writing, and arithmetic, confining practically its rewards to a certain measure of proficiency in these branches, under the name of payment for results, as tested by individual examination.

As to the actual result, opinion is considerably divided, and I cannot here weigh the conflicting testimony. My own belief, however, is that, as might have been expected, it has injuriously affected

the higher education, that is, all that deserves the name of education, while it has not generally succeeded in ensuring even mechanical proficiency in the three arts thus specially fostered. It has done much, I venture to think, to throw us back into the second of those stages of national opinion on educational subjects which I have hastily sketched; that, namely, in which this merely elementary sort of teaching was deemed enough for the masses of the people.

And here let me say that it is of reading and writing, and not at all of arithmetic, that henceforth I mean to speak. Arithmetic holds a quite different position from the other two things. Besides its actual uses in the working world, it is a science, capable of becoming the instrument of important training, and though when Baillie Nicol Jarvie said that the multiplication table (i.e. arithmetic) is the root of all knowledge, he had rather in view its application to bills of parcels, and tare and tret, and profit and loss, than to cosmic harmonies, or numerical proportions in the framework of the universe, the doctrine of numbers may truly be regarded as at once a root science and a great power in education. I would rescue it from the slur cast on it by the company in which it is usually found.

Of reading and writing, then, we are often enough told in words that they do not constitute education. By many this is considered a mere truism, but a truism quite as often means a truth neglected as a truth made real. It is with words as with things, (though words too are things), "Too much familiarity breeds contempt." The coin which passes from hand to hand, loses gradually the clearness, and finally the traces, of its image and superscription. Now, in spite of the currency of this truism, I venture to think that reading and writing are far too much regarded not as all education, but as all of education that can be secured for and by the children of the mass, nay, as all that it is important for them to obtain; and that thus a low, unworthy, and mischievous estimate of education, so far as concerns the masses, prevails among us.

In last Friday's meeting one speaker drew forth strong expressions of dissent, by saying that often it is thought enough to apportion knowledge to the station in which the pupil happens to be born, and in which it is assumed that he is likely to remain. I must confess that my own experience supports this statement. Thus, not many years ago I visited a school for female orphans in London, and I was told distinctly by the secretary that only a very plain education was even aimed at, "because," said he, "they are destined to be domestic servants, and it would not do for them to be too near the level of their employers' attainments!" It may not be necessary here to speak in condemnation of that spirit which would keep back those who have so few and so slight opportunities of culture for the supposed sake of those who have so many and so great advantages within their reach; or to contend that the lot to which human beings are really and truly called by Providence (that Providence so often appealed to as a justification of existing evils which it is sought to maintain), is not

the condition in which they are born, or in which their parents live, but that of which by the best culture of all their faculties, they qualify themselves adequately to do the work; or to argue that the education of the lower classes is in the interest even of the upper. But that this spirit prevails largely beyond the circle of such an association as this I cannot doubt. There are persons who, as I once heard Archbishop Whately say, embark in the ship of knowledge in order to delay the voyage, being quite willing to appear as promoters of education if they can but gain the power to limit it within what they consider to be safe bounds.

Even among those who regard education with very different feelings, and who have no unworthy jealousy of others less favoured by fortune than themselves, a similar estimate of the sufficiency of the mere elements of knowledge in schools for the people may be traced. "Teach a child to read and to write, and he will educate himself," this is a common saying. No doubt, your Stephensons, and your Faradays, and those with large natural capacity for any kind of mental effort, will, with this simple help, do all besides for themselves. Nay, even without this help, their innate energy would still surmount every obstacle in their way. But such men are the exceptions, not the rule; and the frequent appeal to such cases in evidence of the sufficiency of reading and writing in humble schools, is one more proof of the prevalence of the error which looks at popular education rather as a means of enabling the peculiarly gifted to rise into a higher station, than of enabling and disposing all efficiently to discharge the duties of their actual station, even though they should rise to none higher. It is to the average capacity, the average disposition of ordinary school pupils, that teaching must be adapted, and it is by its success in dealing with that average capacity, that average disposition, that its efficiency is to be judged. Now, that for such natures reading and writing will be a master-key to all or much beyond, is not to be thus proved, or without proof to be accepted.

Another sign of the current estimate of reading and writing may be cited. We are all familiar with the statistical tables about criminals, and the proportions among them of those who can read and write well, imperfectly, or not at all. Crime, we are told, flourishes most rankly among the last, less among the second, least among the first. What, then, is the natural inference from such statements? Of course, diminish the ignorance, and you diminish the crime (1.) But the ignorance of what? Of course, of reading and writing. Ignorance of reading and writing is productive of, or accompanied by, a great amount of crime. Knowledge of reading and writing will, therefore, diminish crime! There may be fallacies more palpable than this; there can be few more gross or serious. The inability to read and write argues, in our present state, it may be freely granted, great ignorance of all beyond that it is good or useful to know. But the ability to read and write, (not to cavil about the degree of ability), by no means argues the knowledge of aught

beyond. Negatively, the ignorance implies much, positively the knowledge implies little. Let us take an obvious illustration. If a man does not possess a penny, he is undeniably very poor; if he does possess a penny, is he therefore rich? Is he removed more than very slightly from absolute impecuniosity? It may be said that, with even one penny, a man may begin to increase his store; but his doing so, his striving, or desiring to do so, depends on considerations widely apart from the mere possession of the penny. The tabulation of such statistics may be useful in various ways. It is not in the facts or in the figures, but in the application of them that the danger lies. By all means let those tell-tale columns make us blush for the deplorable and disgraceful national ignorance that they reveal; let them spur our determination to remove it; but do not let them lull us into the delusive fancy that the presence of the *minimum* of knowledge will cure the evils which the absence of that *minimum* indicates, if it does not cause.

We will now test a little more closely the real educational value of reading and writing.

1. Reading is a mechanical means, one of several means, of gaining knowledge and ideas. Writing is one mechanical means of conveying knowledge or ideas to others, as well as a means of recording them for either others or ourselves. What is the educational value of either? There is, I am well aware, a high sense, in which it may be contended that he who can read easily, intelligently, appreciatively, pleasurably, even one valuable book, especially if he can read it aloud with due "emphasis and discretion," correct intonation, and utterance at once expressive and impressive; and who further can give written form to his thoughts and knowledge, if, that is, we take writing to mean not merely penmanship, but what is called composition also,—may be said to have received no mean or narrow, though it may still be a defective education. But it is obvious that we are here concerned with such measure of the powers of reading and of penmanship, as is commonly obtained in our cheap and general schools. Now, the first thing that strikes us, is, that they are at most, not knowledge, but means of knowledge. I say not *the* means, but means of knowledge. They are no more knowledge or education, as has often been said, than a knife, fork, and plate constitute a dinner. Given the dinner,—the knife, fork, and plate are useful in enabling us to deal with it. But, though the combination is best, it is better to have the dinner without the implements, than the implements without the dinner. That the two can be separated is undeniable; and so it is quite possible, though not common, to find a man shrewd, sagacious, even well informed, who can neither write nor read, and it is not only possible but very common to find the grossest ignorance and the greatest dullness associated with ability to read and write (2.) But it may be said that a knife, fork, and plate are instruments not for gaining a dinner, but for helping us to consume it when gained; whereas reading and perhaps writing are instruments for actually gaining knowledge.

Let us grant that they are tools for gaining knowledge ; they are not crop, but plough and harrow. Now, given the plough and the harrow, the mode of using them remains to be taught ; the disposition to use them remains to be encouraged. Neither of these things follows inevitably from the mere conferring of the tools ; the workman may still be unskilful, or indolent or both. To give a man a loom is one thing ; to teach him to weave well and industriously is quite another thing.

This leads me, dropping metaphors, in which fallacy may lurk, to say in the second place—

2. That the power of reading and of writing often rusts unused, if it is not wholly lost, through neglect and apathy after leaving school. The attainments are not usually carried far enough to render their use either easy or pleasant, and the power gradually decays (3.) For, in the third place—

3. A knowledge of the sounds and forms of the letters, the syllables and words made up by the letters, is too commonly confounded with knowledge of the things read about, with the taking in of the ideas verbally expressed. An extreme instance may be given. The late Principal Baird, of Edinburgh University, reported that on an official visit which he made to some schools in the remote highlands and islands of Scotland, he was greatly surprised and pleased by the fluency and correctness with which the children read some verses from the New Testament in English. He ventured to put some question, and then discovered that the children knew nothing whatever of English, that they spoke Gaelic solely, and that they read the English words aloud, by imitation, as mere sounds, without any sense to which they could be echo. Let me cite another instance less extreme. In a school in Hampshire I once heard some girls read, as I thought, with rather unusual correctness, a description of a crab. I happened to ask, as it was an inland place, if any of them had ever seen a crab. After a pause, one girl acknowledged her having seen a crab ; but, on inquiry, it appeared that it was a crab-apple she had seen, and it never had occurred to her that the description did not at all fit the object supposed to be described ! So, after reading about the straining out of gnats, and the swallowing of camels, one of the pupils (as Miss Cobbe vouches) being asked what was the great sin of the Pharisees, answered, not hypocrisy, but “eating camels.” These are detached examples of misapprehension of the things for which the equivalent words are given : but thousands escape detection, and, whether it is through the eye or through the ear that the words reach the sensorium, it is a sad truth, that in innumerable cases they excite no ideas, or false ideas. For such condition of mind is it wonderful that reading should be an irksome, not a pleasing task, one to be soon laid aside, and as seldom as possible resumed ? The great mass do not, like the few, persevere sufficiently to surmount those hampering difficulties and earn the reward which such perseverance brings. But, in the fourth place, as I have already said,—



4. Reading is but one means, if, in the long run, the most important, for acquiring knowledge. On Saturday last I had a letter from home which, by an apt coincidence, illustrates what I mean. My little boy, not yet four years old, says to his mother, "Mamma, why does cousin Bella learn lessons?" "That she may grow up to be wise and useful." "But don't I learn by asking questions?" "Out of the mouth of babes." The radical fallacy is in supposing that no knowledge or improvement is obtainable except from books, and the result is the confounding of means with ends. A child is a living, restless, never ceasing interrogator, "perpetually wanting to know, you know," perpetually asking, What? and how? and when? and where? and above all (as I have observed with some surprise) why? perpetually putting all around it "to the question." This is to nurses and parents and teachers a disturbing, fatiguing, and exasperating process, and questions are commonly discouraged, or evaded, if not forbidden. "Children ought not to ask questions:" "Children should be seen, not heard:" such are the ethics of the nursery. I willingly allow for the difficulty of at once carrying on, at least in school, a continuous course of teaching with many pupils simultaneously, and of caring for individual differences of mental state. But principles do not cease to be principles because their application is difficult; and it cannot be doubted that one intelligent answer to such a question as a child will ask and at the time when it asks it, when its interest is aroused and the mental soil is prepared, does more good, has more suggestive and stimulative power than pages of "useful knowledge" which are not "*en rapport*" with the child's mental state, and which respond to nothing then active within its little brain. A child of average health and capacity sucks in knowledge at every pore; its craving for knowledge is truly insatiable. "It is as natural" says Quintilian, "for the human mind to learn as for the bird to fly, or the fish to swim." But many who spend dreary years in seeking the power to read Quintilian in the original, and most frequently without succeeding in the endeavour, tell us a very different tale. The youthful mind, they say, is averse from knowledge, that is, what they call knowledge, or, at best, indifferent to it, and it must be artificially coaxed, or bribed, or threatened into the semblance of interest. A child eagerly examines every object around it, or, in lack of objects, then the pictures or images of objects. But between the child and nature we interpose an opaque medium called a book, and we expect the child to profit by symbols which to us, indeed, are full of meaning, but which to it are mysteries, whose significance it is slow to discover. Pedants snort disdainfully at the thought of teaching science to children. Yet what is science, in great part, but observation methodized? A child cannot be easily kept from observing and even from generalizing. The question is whether it shall do both ignorantly, of its own wild fancy, or under the guidance of maturer judgment and ampler knowledge. As all children, not wholly stupefied by the compression and distortion of the school, form for themselves a kind of science, draw inferences and make generalizations,

probably erroneous, certainly incomplete, shall they be left without guidance, as without encouragement? (4.)

Even attempts to teach science are often marred by confounding it with literary or verbal knowledge. Nature is treated on the system of the Eton Latin grammar. Technical names and lists of genera and species are committed to memory without due explanation of the grounds of distinction. I have before me a catechism for the young, entitled "First Lessons in Physiology." All the knowledge runs freely from the pupil, when tapped by the teacher with a question. The teacher says: "How many varieties of absorption are there, and name them?" The pupil answers: "Interstitial, cutaneous, recrementital, respiratory, venous, excrementital, and lacteal." Such are the new husks upon which babes are fed! Without a revolution in method no mere change of subject can do much good.

5. Again, the learning of the art of reading, being treated as an end, is made much more difficult than it needs to be. The letters are taught by their names, not by their sounds; in the arbitrary order of the alphabet, instead of in the natural order of the organs by which they are pronounced. Spelling is still taught by means of columns of long, hard, unconnected words, selected for their very difficulty and rarity, to be learned by rote, or, as is said with unconscious irony, "by heart." At a large and well-endowed school in London, I have seen dozens of boys engaged simultaneously in laborious efforts to learn to spell badly, with the aid of a most ingenious book, in which every word was incorrectly spelled. Then the process of teaching to read begins too early, as it is continued too long. I know well the difficulty in a school, where the minds of the pupils may be, nay must be, in different stages of development; still, the first thing being to rouse an appetite for knowledge, and the second to gratify it when roused, all attempts to reverse this order, or even to anticipate its evolution, must be injurious. A child that, eager to hear a story over again, puts to its ear the book in which it is told, is in a fair way of learning to read swiftly, easily, gladly. Before it reaches that stage, the instruction might have been tedious and ineffectual. These are but hints which it is impossible here to follow out in detail.

6. Then, what is the literature by means of which reading is too often taught? In Scotland still, the shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (in my boyhood I used to wonder what the longer could possibly be), has prefixed to it an alphabet which is learned as a preliminary to plunging into the depths of Calvinistic divinity. Even in London I have visited a "respectable" school, in which reading is taught from the Bible, and so soon as the pupil is tolerably proficient, he is promoted to the dignity of secular reading! And this is done in the supposed interests of religion! It is as if we were to begin the teaching of our children with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and then advance them into *Robinson Crusoe*, or *Miss Edgeworth's Tales*. In many Scotch schools the Bible is almost the only

reading book ; the junior and senior classes are called respectively the Testament class and the Bible class. I have heard of a boy so taught who, having been asked by his mother to read a passage in a newspaper, was suddenly roused from his monotonous chaunt by a box on the ear, accompanied by these words—"How dare ye, ye scoundrel, read the newspaper with the Bible twang?"

7. With such a spirit in the school, is it wonderful that the whole teaching should have a narcotic tendency, that it should crush intelligence, and breed disgust, weariness, hatred of all study? At a former meeting of this Association, I heard one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (since dead), declare that in certain schools he could tell pretty accurately by the pupils' faces how long they had been at school. The longer the period, the more stupid, vacant, and expressionless the face. Another school inspector (Diocesan), has told me that when, examining a class in the Acts of the Apostles, he asked:—"Why did the cunuch go away rejoicing,"—the answer frankly was—"Please, sir, because Philip had a done o' teaching on him." What hours of weariness and waste are summed up in this brief story! Such teaching defeats its own end; the power to read is gained at the cost of the desire to read. This, if, in spite of false quantity, I may adapt the words of the Roman poet, is "*propter legendum legendi perdere causas*," for the sake of reading to lose that which makes reading to be desired.

8. Lastly, it ought never to be forgotten that the power to read does not in the least determine the use to which it is to be put. What will be the nature of the books or journals read? How much of mischievous, not to speak of idle, literature is there in the world that must all find readers, admirers, purchasers! With the diffusion of the mere power of reading, without intellectual and moral culture, must we not expect that this sort of literature will be multiplied? The increased numbers of cheap "sporting" papers, of papers devoted to police reports, with coarse and exciting woodcuts, and of the literary master-pieces of the "singing saloon," have of late attracted notice. Nay, the power to read and write arms with greater force the disposition for evil, as well as that for good. In every wicked enterprise such attainments are helps to its success. It used to be argued that writing ought not to be taught to the people, lest it should lead to the commission of forgery, or other fraud; but this sort of argument, if futile against teaching to write, supplies a reason why the power of writing, or of reading, should be associated with such training and guidance as will tend to ensure its beneficial employment.

As I rejoice to see in this Association, and elsewhere, a growing tendency to regard the teaching of all classes, and of both sexes, from the same points of view, and to apply to all alike the same fundamental principles, I will here briefly say that what I think to be the exaggerated estimate of reading and writing in the instruction of the poor has its exact counterpart in the hitherto far too exclusively literary character of the instruction of the rich. In this

aspect, how pregnant with meaning is the title, "Grammar school," so almost universal as the designation of our upper schools! Not to insist on the practical identification of "Grammar" with the teaching of Latin and Greek, what a petrification is this term of the whole cast of opinion, which viewed all instruction as an affair of books and words! What a record it preserves of the habit of regarding even Science as a knowledge less of things than of what men have written about things, and of the style in which they have written! Widen as we may the sense of grammar, far beyond the scope and practice of schools, past or present, till it become, if you will, co-extensive with philology, and even literature, (and far be it from me to disparage such studies), how lamentably does this title fall short of what ought to be the aim of education in such a country, in such an age as ours! Over the door of the Bradford Grammar School stands this inscription:—

"Quod Deus optimus maximus bene vertat  
Aedificium hocce ad literarum antiquarum  
Studium promovendum juventutemque doctrinâ  
Elegantiore imbuendum extractum est atque  
Muis in perpetuum consecratum."

—"For promoting the study of ancient literature, and for imbuing youth with elegant learning, this building has been raised, and for ever consecrated to the muses."

A noble part of a liberal education, the polished and graceful capital of the educational column, but assuredly neither its shaft nor its base! Try mentally to realize what Bradford or Belfast is, and what it needs for the instruction and guidance of the youth who are to do its actual work, to maintain and to extend its prosperity, to remove its evils, to raise the character of its people, to improve their sanitary and social condition, to teach them how to lead a clean, healthy, happy, human life—and how painfully one-sided and defective it is! How it ignores the essential! How it magnifies the less important! How it subordinates strength, solidity, and service to grace and ornament and surface-show! Assuredly the time is coming, I think it is at hand, when such a title as that of "Spelling school" will be regarded as scarcely less expressive of the purposes, grand and manifold, at which our upper schools, aye, all our schools, ought to aim. Even in our higher, even in our highest schools, improvement is slowly but surely creeping in; slowly but surely is it being recognized that any school which ignores the knowledge of man himself, of the objects animate and inanimate with which he is surrounded, and of the relationship between him and them, his social duties, his economic interests, and the reciprocal bearing of the individual and the social well being is radically, deplorably, disgracefully defective. Every improvement in our lower schools will react upon the upper, and *vice versâ*. And when the instruction of our higher classes is what it ought to be, and in proportion as it shall be what it ought to be, will the problem of our lower education be practically solved. Had our upper classes ever been really educated,

they would not, and could not, so long and so complacently have endured the ignorance and consequent degradation of the masses of their fellow citizens, of those whom, as if in mockery, they style their fellow immortals, their brothers and their sisters.

It is, however, of the lower schools that I here speak. It is even fortunate that narrow and selfish fears are beginning to urge on what enlarged conceptions and generous impulse have failed hitherto to effect. Thus (1) the recent extension of the suffrage is opening the eyes of many to the necessity of training the masses to the judicious and beneficial exercise of the power thus conferred. One whose name will be, in history, connected as well with the political changes that he resisted as with the educational changes that he introduced, has said that we must now teach our future masters their letters. That this was said in bitter irony there can be little doubt; and it cannot be taken to mean that in the opinion of the speaker that amount of teaching will suffice. Those who have already had the suffrage can, for the most part, read and write. But they, too, need enlightenment, and moral as well as intellectual training; so do those whom they elect to represent them. On the one hand, reading and writing have not prevented dishonest voters in thousands from selling their votes for bribes, solid or liquid; on the other, reading and writing, and much besides, have not prevented unscrupulously ambitious millionaires from debauching whole constituencies by lavish expenditure, or from masking their immoral and demoralising practices by liberal donations to charities, to schools, and even to churches. Nevertheless, the fear of the large classes now admitted within the pale of the constitution for the first time has given no slight impulse to the general zeal for education. It is for us to see that the movement now begun be turned to good account. Let us help to educate, but in what? That is the question of questions.

Then, again (2), foreign nations, we are told, are beginning to beat us at our own weapons. They have learned more than their letters. They are, it is said, driving us out of the markets which, with insular arrogance, we have fancied should for ever be ours exclusively. A cry of alarm is raised for more and better technical instruction; and, though this is narrow enough in the thoughts of many who raise it, more and better general culture will certainly come out of it; a greater development of general mental power, and the formation of better social habits, will ere long be discovered to be the things really needful.

Again (3), our industry is partially paralyzed, our capital is wasted, our prosperity, our very national existence, are endangered by strikes and trade combinations and restrictions, which check production, often by means as unscrupulous and truculent as the end sought is false and mischievous. The masses have been suffered to grow up in ignorant and angry defiance of the elementary principles of economic science, and reading and writing will not cure this long rankling sore. Broadhead, who could read and write (as he has amply shown), believing at the time that the introduction of a certain

machine would injure his craft, instigated an act of criminal violence. He confessed that he had discovered his error ; but the discovery came too late. Had he made it sooner, one outrage less would have been attempted. With wider knowledge others, perhaps all, might have been prevented. Knowledge is not merely power ; it is restraint and guidance, if not impulse. It is the rudder, if not the sail ; the fly-wheel, if not the steam-boiler. It is true that there have not been wanting men of so-called education to defend such blunders, and even to extenuate such atrocities ; but their education has lacked the special direction which alone could save from error in this matter. It is true that the employers are often not more intelligent in this respect than the employed ; but the enlightenment of the latter, who are the many, and from whose ranks the former, hitherto the few, must largely come, will extend to, and react upon the former also, and do much to soften their mutual relations, to make all see their common interest, and to fuse them together, so as in time to modify, if not, as some hope, to obliterate the distinction itself (5.)

For such reasons as these, a new educational agitation is arising, or the old is reviving with fresh vigour. One and all point to something far beyond reading and writing. I am, I must say, hopeful of the ultimate, if not of the early, issue. The now swelling call for "compulsory" education will force on the public mind the fundamental inquiry, what ought education to be. If, by compulsion, what now passes under the name of education were rendered even universal, I presume to think that the existing mass of pauperism, crime, vice, misery and disease, would scarcely be perceptibly abated. But it is no small gain to have recognized the claim of even the poorest, still more even because the poorest, to something that is called education. Bad or grossly defective education in any quarter cannot continue long after education has ceased to be regarded as the heritage of the few. Just as air becomes stagnant and foul when confined, so education when restricted to the few loses its vital freshness. To diffuse education of any kind is indirectly to improve it. Make education general, universal, and the (so called) higher education will be rationalized, and, as I think, liberalized (6.) Youths will no longer be sent into active life from costly seminaries, accomplished it may be in Greek metres, but ignorant of the structure of their own bodies, the constitution of their own minds ; filled with mythologic lore, but unaware of their social duties ; primed with verbal scraps of inconsistent moral precept, but less ashamed of debt than of honest industry ; looking on the world as a spoil for the lucky, or the crafty, or the strong, not as a field for useful and ennobling labour to the benefit of all as well as of self ; of self just in proportion as it tends to the good of all. Then, instead of the rich being fed on intellectual sweetmeats, while the poor are starved, or gather up the crumbs that fall from the others' table, all, rich and poor alike, shall be nourished with plainer, more substantial and wholesome diet, not without such lighter fare as may be obtainable by either. As knowledge will be no longer confounded with books, or with words about

knowledge, so morals, of which the laws are as eternal as they are simple, as universal as they are strong, the morals in which all sects and conditions of thinking men agree, will be dissociated from the verbal and dogmatic formularies about which men differ, and, while becoming less sectarian and theological, will become more widely Catholic, more truly religious (7.) We, or our survivors, will then look back with a smile, not of contempt or pride, but of joy and pity, on the time when there was so great a pother about so small a matter as reading and writing, and when even this beggarly amount of teaching was found to be a tremendous national difficulty, just because so little more was aimed at, or desired, or perhaps conceived. The less is included in the greater, and the little becomes easy from the effort to do much.

### NOTES.

(1.) p. 6. "A MAIDEN SESSION.—At the Salisbury Quarter Sessions, just held, there was not a single prisoner for trial. The Mayor of the city (Mr. S. Eldridge) had therefore the pleasing duty of presenting the Recorder (Mr. J. D. Chambers), the clerk of the peace, and the governor of the gaol with a pair of white kid gloves each, according to custom on occasions of this sort. The Recorder, in addressing the grand jury, said that he had read the other day in *The Times* that Wiltshire was one of the best educated counties in England, and *it was highly satisfactory to learn therefore that the decrease of crime had been in proportion to the spread of education.*" (!)—*Times*, 2nd Jan., 1868.

(2.) p. 7. "Although the perusal of such works must, in strictness of speech, be denominated reading, yet, so far as the cultivation of mind is concerned, it is little else than the sheer act of deciphering so much letter press, without the acquisition of a single new idea that can at all conduce towards improvement."—Rev. Thos. Price, "Tour in Brittany, Literary Remains," 1854, vol. 1, p. 81. "No doubt the power of reading is a key to the whole literature of England. But in the hands of persons ignorant how to use it, a key is of little use."—*Saturday Review*, 4th Jan., 1868, p. 20. In the very same article the writer says:—"What is wanted is that every child should be able to read and write fairly before he goes to work; that he should be enabled to turn this knowledge to ~~more~~ intellectual account while he is at work; and that, in cases where his parents' means, or his own industry, can defray the cost, he should be further enabled to perfect himself in the various branches of study which have a bearing, general or special, on his professional occupation." It is too obvious that the reviewer does not expect the child to turn the ability to read and write to any "intellectual account" during the school period!

(3.) p. 8. "The imperfect instruction given to the children in factories, under the half-time system, is retained by them during a year or two at most, when it is forgotten, and many intelligent young overlookers are unable to keep correctly the simple accounts which should form a part of the duties of their position."—Mr. Samuelson, M.P. (speaking of Bradford, Yorkshire).

(4.) p. 10. "Why are the people who notice what comes before them to be marked by a separating name, and called naturalists? Why are we ashamed of a failure in what comes to us through books and the costly instrumentality of masters and teachers? Why do we blush at any flagrant slip in history, or science, or language, and keep cool and easy under any extravagance of error in

what nature, through our own observation, might teach us."—*Saturday Review*, 28th July, 1863. Article on "Ignorance." Yet Canon Moseley, who is deservedly an authority in education, would keep out of schools (not merely elementary schools) all "the sciences of observation," specially so called. At Clifton College, on 30th July, 1867, he is reported to have said:—"The subjects of human knowledge, which claimed to be considered and taught in our schools, might be divided into four groups. First of all," (why 'first?') "there were the languages and the subjects allied to them; secondly, the pure mathematical sciences, which were pursued in the exercise of pure thought and rested upon abstractions; thirdly, the sciences of experiment, including physics and chemistry; and fourthly, the great sciences of observation, such as natural history and the like. He thought they might put the last out of consideration, as they had had quite enough to do with the three others." In like manner, I once heard it contended that any new poetry is superfluous, because there is more poetry already written than any human being can possibly read! In like manner, it has been urged that the discovery of new planets is absurd, because we have as many already as we well know what to do with! But, perhaps, we ought less to regret that the subjects in the fourth class are thus shut out, than rejoice that those in the third are admitted. Too often both classes are still visited with the same arbitrary sentence of exclusion, and on the same ground, that there is quite enough to do without them! It is not very long since subjects of even the second class ceased to be regarded as unlicensed intruders on the traditional monopoly of the first.

(5.) p. 14. "To the three reasons given in the text a fourth may well be added. Society is, not without reason, more and more alarmed by the rapid increase of outrages which threaten its very existence. "Education" is hailed as the sure if slow, remedy. The adult ruffian is probably beyond its influence, but the embryo garotter may be tamed if only he can be taught to spell "gallows;" and on the juvenile pickpocket a course of alphabet, with exercise in pothooks and hangers, may have a salutary effect, deterrent or emollient! By all means let trial be made. Its failure will open the eyes of many to the need of something better, though it may also lead many to say, "Education has been tried, and tried in vain."

(6.) p. 14. "Coleridge, when he predicted that the effect of popularizing knowledge would be to plebify it, erred in his vision of the future, as many seers have done before and since. He uttered that prediction on the assumption that knowledge, in its higher portions, was confined to the regions of theology and psychology; and he overlooked the fact that, in proportion as these branches of knowledge have been cultivated by the few, ignorance has prevailed among the many. He failed to observe that, if thousands rushed to Abelard's lecture room, millions outside of it were immersed in the grossest superstition."—*Saturday Review*, 26th Oct., 1867, p. 544.

(7.) p. 15. "As Sir R. Palmer reminded his audience, the line between 'religious' and 'secular' is purely conventional. 'All knowledge, all instruction, in whatever is honest and of good report, is essentially religious.' Dogmatic theology concerns itself with creeds; but religion has to do with common life; and its sphere, though not identical, is co-extensive with that of education. The clergyman and the schoolmaster are inevitably working together, whether they are working in concert or not."—*Times*, 2nd Nov., 1866.