

EDUCATION: TRUE AND FALSE.

(*RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO THE
LONDON SCHOOL BOARD.*)

BY

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A GREAT struggle is going on at present between the friends of true education and the supporters of Christian theology. A similar policy to that which was in former times employed against science is now being adopted by orthodox enthusiasts in reference to education. Then the clergy bitterly opposed modern science, but they discovered that it was impossible for them to prevent its progress ; they therefore made strong efforts to deprive it of its legitimate influence, by hampering its teachings with Biblical and theological interpretations. As Professor Huxley observes in his *Lay Sermons* : " In this nineteenth century, as at the dawn of modern physical science, the cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrew is the incubus of the philosopher and the opprobrium of the orthodox. Who shall number the patient and earnest seekers after truth, from the days of Galileo until now, whose lives have been embittered and their good name blasted by the mistaken zeal of Bibliolaters ? Who shall count the host of weaker men whose sense of truth has been destroyed in the effort to harmonise impossibilities—whose life has been wasted in the attempt to force the generous new wine of science into the old bottles of Judaism, compelled by the outcry of the same strong party ? It is true that, if philosophers have suffered, their cause has been amply avenged. Extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science, as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules ; and history records that, whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed, if not annihilated ; scotched, if not slain.

But orthodoxy is the Bourbon of the world of thought. It learns not, neither can it forget; and though at present bewildered and afraid to move, it is as willing as ever to insist that the first chapter of Genesis contains the beginning and the end of sound science; and to visit, with such petty thunderbolts as its half-paralysed hands can hurl, those who refuse to degrade nature to the level of primitive Judaism."

This is precisely what is now happening in the struggle to establish a free and secular system of education; and we have no fear but the results will be the same as those which followed the conflict of the Church with science. From the very inception of our national system of education the clerical party has carried on a persistent warfare against it. Prior to 1870 the clergy had the absolute control of the instruction of the rising generation, and what were the results? True education among children was entirely unknown, and thousands of boys and girls never even entered a school, except perhaps a few on Sundays, when mundane affairs were seldom referred to. In 1820 only six per cent. of the population were receiving even the poor instruction then imparted. *Cassell's History of England*, says that in the reign of George III., "education, either in town or country, was scarcely known. In our time even there was not a school in all the swarming region of White-chapel, and many other equally poor and populous regions of London, much less in country towns and agricultural parishes. . . . The consequence was, that the condition of the agricultural population was as debased morally as it was destitute physically in the almost total absence of education, the very funds granted by pious testators for this end being embezzled by the clergy or squirearchy."

It is worthy of note that the efforts made in the early part of the present century on behalf of education met with the most determined opposition from the clergy of the Established Church and from some of the dissenting sects. Even Mr. (afterwards Lord) Brougham, in seeking to increase the educational grant and in endeavoring to promote a national scheme of instruction, found that his greatest difficulty lay

with the exponents of the Church. Washington Wilks, in his history of the first half of the present century, gives some valuable information upon this subject, showing the opposition offered by the Christian party to all kinds of education but their own narrow and imperfect method. Mr. J. M. Ludlow, in his *Questions for a Reformed Parliament*, mentions that when the first grant of £30,000, in 1839, was proposed by Government for educational purposes, Canon Wray and the Rev. Hugh Stowell headed an organisation in opposition to it. In 1843 the English Dissenters resisted and threw out the Government Factory Educational Bill. If to-day the Church is more energetic in the matter of education, it is because it seeks to counteract the influence of our Board schools, which sooner or later will destroy the power of that theology which has ever impeded human progress and fettered human thought.

The conflict which has recently been going on amongst the members of the London School Board was produced from the same cause that originally, for a time, paralyzed the educational movement. That cause was the desire to ally with education religious teaching, in reference to which there were and are so many various and conflicting opinions amongst its exponents. Thus it will be seen that a great obstacle to obtaining at first any national system of instruction was the diversity of the views entertained by the many sects of theologians as to what should comprise the religious element in education. The teachings of the Established Church were considered by the Nonconformists to be erroneous and injurious, while the instruction given by the dissenting bodies was pronounced by Churchmen to be "heretical" and "fraught with grave dangers." Ultimately it was conceded by Parliament that the Bible might be read in our public schools, but that no theological doctrines should be taught. This constituted what is called the "compromise." In Birmingham, however, a determined opposition was offered by the late George Dawson and others to this concession upon the ground that as the meaning of the Bible was a debateable question, it, like all debateable books, should be excluded from public schools:

This is the position we take, inasmuch as it appears to us to be the only rational and satisfactory solution of the question. We contend that a National School which is paid for by all, irrespective of their theological opinions, should be an institution for the teaching of that which all require and upon which all are agreed. This agreement experience teaches us, is confined to purely secular knowledge. It is admitted on all sides that it is essential that children should be so educated as to prepare them for properly playing their part in social life, and to afford them a fair opportunity as far as their natural gifts will permit, of discharging aright their duties of citizenship. In order that this may be done, certain secular teaching, about which there is no dispute, is necessary. Let therefore the duties of the School Board be confined to carrying out the generally acknowledged necessities of education. The moment the question of religious instruction is introduced, discord arises, and the real object of the school is interfered with. To teach any form of religion or to impose Bible reading in our public schools at the expense of the ratepayers, we hold to be unjust and to be a revival of the old Church-rate in a new form. To take a decidedly secular stand, and to insist upon an absolute avoidance of every form of theological teaching, we regard as being the only true course to pursue in opposition to the proposals made by the clerical party on the School Board. To simply exclude sectarian teaching as it is termed is not sufficient while the Bible is retained, for that book is the source of the perplexity caused, and of the contradictions found in the theology which is sought to be inculcated.

The present struggle in London between Churchmen and Dissenters has revealed the wish, upon the part of a large section of the religious party, to use the public schools and the public funds for the purpose of teaching incomprehensible dogmas. In other words, an attempt is being made to convert our Board schools into miniature churches, and the teachers into missionaries, for the promulgation of the doctrines now taught in the orthodox pulpits and in the Sunday-schools. The leaders of this reactionary movement proceed as

if Board schools had been established as nurseries for the purpose of supplying the Church with congregations as the old members fall off. Now it is quite certain that nothing of the kind was ever intended by the originators of the institution of the Board schools. The fact is that when it was abundantly proved that millions of children were growing up without any sort of education under the voluntary Christian system, it was deemed desirable to make other provisions to meet the educational wants of the age. The theological party, of all sects, had failed to prepare the young for good citizenship; therefore the State took the matter in hand, and taxed all alike for the common good—for if we efficiently educate those who in the future will wield the destinies of the nation, it must be an advantage, not to one class only of society, but to the whole of the community. Intellect will, henceforth, more than ever rule the world, and the better that intellect is cultivated the better it will be for all sections of the commonwealth.

It has always been of the utmost importance that the nature and object of education should be clearly understood. But it is more than ever desirable that its true meaning and purpose should be recognised at the present time, when the members of the Church party on the London School Board are persistently striving to subvert the National policy of education. These theological obstructionists must be reminded again and again that no man ought to be compelled, either directly or indirectly, to pay for teaching his own or his neighbor's children a religion in which he does not believe. Public schools ought to be secular, free from religions of all kinds, for these have always, with few exceptions in which Christianity cannot be included, been a constant source of dissension, strife and dispute. America does her public schooling well, and is fairly free from what we quaintly call "The Religious Difficulty." The *Independent* (U.S.), referring to certain sections which, even in America, would like to get hold of the schools, says: "The time has come when all religious denominations must affirm that no public moneys shall be used for sectarian instruction; the time-honored principle of the

separation of Church and State must be again emphasized. If a church is not willing to support its own schools, it cannot come to the State for aid. Our public schools must be kept free from the touch of ecclesiastical control. No church has a right to use ecclesiastical pains and penalties to control the vote of American citizens."

The clergy are constantly boasting that the children of past generations were indebted to the Church for the education they received. It is true, that before 1870, religious bodies were active in imparting a certain kind of instruction in British and National schools, but little or no education, in its truest sense, was given. Reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic, constituted the whole of the instruction which the children of the working classes received in those days. Of course, tuition in these four departments is necessary, but these branches do not comprise education in its highest and fullest sense; they are only the means whereby education is obtained. Even knowledge is not necessarily education, which consists in the ability to use what is known wisely, not only for the benefit of the individual, but also for the welfare of general society. True education involves physical and moral training, intellectual discipline, and the formation of character. It includes the imparting of authentic knowledge about the phenomena of nature and of man. Professor Huxley, in the March number of *Macmillan*, 1868, wrote as follows :

"By way of a beginning, let us ask ourselves, What is education? And, above all things, what is our ideal of a thoroughly liberal education? Of that education which, if we could begin life again, we would give ourselves—the education which, if we could mould the fates to our own will, we would give our children. Well, I know not what may be your conception upon this matter, but I will tell you mine, and I hope that I shall find that our views are not very discrepant. Suppose it were perfectly certain that the life and fortune of everyone of us would one day or other depend upon his winning or losing a game of chess. Don't you think that we should all consider it to be a primary duty to learn at least the names and the moves of the pieces; to have a notion of a gambit, and a keen eye for all the means of giving and getting out of check? Do you not think that

we should look with disapprobation amounting to scorn upon the father who allowed his son, or the State which allowed its members, to grow up without knowing a pawn from a knight? Now, it is a very plain and elementary truth that the life, the fortune, and the happiness of every one of us, and, more or less, of those who are connected with us, do depend upon our knowing something of the rules of a game infinitely more difficult and complicated than chess. It is a game which has been played for untold ages, every man and woman of us being one of the two players in a game of his or her own. The chess-board is the world, the pieces the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of nature. Well, now what I mean by education is learning the rules of this mighty game. In other words, education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of nature, and the fashioning of the affections and of the will into harmony with those laws. For me education means neither more nor less than this: anything which professes to call itself education must be tried by this standard, and, if it fail to stand the test, I will not call it education, whatever may be the force of authority or of numbers upon the other side."

This is a kind of education that the Church has never understood, and therefore has never taught. The Earl of Hardwick, at the opening of Parliament, November 19, 1867, is reported to have said, "All that was required for the working classes was to teach them to read the Bible." And Dr. Adam Smith states, in his *Wealth of Nations*: "The object of religious instruction is not so much to render the people good citizens in this world, as to prepare them for another and a better world in the life to come." This is the sort of "education" that the Church has imposed upon the rising generation. The result has been that the real object of culture, which is to elevate and to discipline the moral nature of man, has been retarded by such theological instruction.

We desire to emphasize the fact that the true object of all correct education is to cultivate the faculties and to develop the sympathies that are common to all members of the human family; to make them intelligent and humane, and to fit them to play their part in daily life so as to harmonise with the good of all. By what means can this be accomplished? We answer,

by the acquirement of secular knowledge and the study and application of the sciences, for these create the very conditions of existence that secure the greatest possible amount of social happiness. In order that our Board schools may be properly utilised for these purposes, we submit that the teachers therein should devote the whole of their attention, when teaching in school, to the inculcation of practical truths, and leave speculative opinions concerning theology alone. These truths are sufficient to tax the ability of the teacher and to occupy the time of the scholar, without perplexing their minds with such proposals as Mr. Riley and his religious supporters wish to be carried out. These pious enthusiasts would have Bible lessons given, the Trinity explained, and the children told that Christ is God.

But, as the London *Daily Chronicle* aptly observes, if we once embark on the enterprise of drawing out a program of theological study for School Board children we shall court the fate of those who rush to the letting out of waters. The children will be taught a particular form of theology by people who are never weary of denouncing reformers for teaching "luxuries" at the expense of the ratepayers. Nothing can be more diverting than the attitude of people who howl with rage because we teach children who are to be handcraftsmen how to draw a plan, but who wail and gnash their teeth because we do not teach them dogmatic theology, and indoctrinate them in the antiquities of ecclesiastical history. It is worse than folly to urge that a girl cannot be taught all that is necessary to make her a good wife and a fond mother without she is told that the son of Mary had no human father. How can it qualify a clerk, intellectually or morally, to be assured that theologically one is three, and three are one? Cannot a boy be prepared to become a good workman without being taught to submit to bad masters, which is enjoined in the New Testament? Will it be impossible to have in the future efficient statesmen and sound moralists except among such as taught that the ruling powers in the universe were established, and are controlled by God? Such notions are preposterous and worthy only of the Dark Ages

when theology was master of the situation, and education amongst the masses was unknown.

The facts of science and the teachings of the Bible cannot be taught as if they were both true, without confusing the youthful mind, and causing erroneous notions to be formed. For instance, if the "laws of nature" are to be relied upon the doctrine of prayer is a delusion; if success in life is dependent upon intelligence and industry, it is not the gift of God; if of ourselves we can do no good thing, self-improvement is impossible; if disease is caused through a violation of natural law, it is not the result of the possession of devils; if some persons were ordained to condemnation before they were born, there is no such thing as universal salvation; if "the wisdom of the world" is necessary to man's progress it ought not to be described as being "foolishness with God." Finally, if the contents of the Bible cannot be understood by eminent scholars, children ought not to be expected to know its meaning, and to teach them that which they cannot comprehend is a waste of time and an injustice to taxpayers, who contribute money for the education, not for the bewilderment of the young. This is not a question only of personal conviction, but one of national concern. Our contention is that the State has no right to bias the rising generation either for or against religion, and every attempt to do so, should be opposed to the very last by the Secular party.

The crusade which has been carried on by the orthodox party against a secular system of education in our Board Schools is doubtless the result of a mistaken notion that theology and Bible reading are a preventive to crime; and moreover that a "godless" education is dangerous to the moral condition of society. Now there is ample evidence, furnished by undeniable facts, that Bible reading and the teaching of the theology, do not prevent crime or increase the moral status. The truth is, that since the Board Schools have replaced Church instruction, crime has considerably decreased. In referring to the early part of the present century, the Rev. Dr. Milner quotes official figures which show that during the first seven years of the Bible Society's existence, the wickedness of the country, instead of

being diminished, had almost been doubled! For instance, in 1810 the convictions for crime were 834; but in 1817, when for ten years thousands of additional Bibles had been in circulation, the convictions had increased to 3,177. From a Parliamentary Report of Sir John Trelawney in 1873, concerning England and Wales, we learn the following percentage of criminals to the population:—Church of England, 1 in every 72; Dissenters, 1 in every 666; Roman Catholics, 1 in every 40; and Infidels 1 in every 20,000. The *Pall Mall Gazette* recently stated that “during the period between October 1, 1891, and October 10, 1892, there were 629 convictions for various offences, of clergymen connected with the Established Church.” The *Church Times*, some time ago, reported the Bishop of Dover as saying, at the Conference of the Canterbury Diocesan Sunday-school Teachers, that he had tried to trace the career of a hundred of his own scholars. He was only able to trace seventy-seven, and of these only two attended church regularly, while thirty-nine were confirmed drunkards. He further stated that at Leeds the chaplain of the gaol reported, that 230 out of 282 prisoners had been Sunday-school scholars. At Pentonville Prison, out of 1,000 convicts, 757 had been brought up at Sunday-schools. “The United States Commission of Education for 1871” published some curious figures, from which it is found that, in examining the educational condition of eight Bavarian provinces, the following suggestive facts were presented:—In the first four provinces there were forty-seven churches, twenty-two schools, and seventy-one criminals. In the second four provinces there were ten churches, thirty-four schools, and only forty-three criminals. Thus it is seen that those who read the Bible, and also those who preached from it, were not prevented from becoming criminals; while the facts in reference to the Bavarian provinces show that the School was superior to the Church as a promoter of the great virtues of life.

Another interesting truth worthy of note is that during the “godless” teaching of our Board schools crime has decreased. The evidence presented by the Judicial Statistics of England and Wales for the year

ending September 29, 1891, reveals the fact that under nearly every head of crime there was a marked decrease compared with those of preceding years. Mr. West, Q.C., Recorder of Manchester, recently stated that crime in that city had decreased by two-thirds, and this improvement he attributed largely to the influence of Board school instruction. Mr. Howard Evans was reported in *Lloyd's Newspaper* of November 27, 1892, as saying: "Criminal statistics show that the work of education has proved morally effective. Only a quarter of a century ago the population of our convict prisons was 11,600; it is now only 5,000, though our population has increased ten per cent. Within the same period the numbers convicted for indictable offences have fallen from 14,000 to 9,000." After reading these facts surely it cannot be contended that Bible reading and theological teaching are necessary to secure a moral state of society. It is not here contended that religious teaching should not be taught under some circumstances and at some places. What we urge is the necessity of keeping it from our public schools, so that these institutions shall be devoted to their original and legitimate purpose, which is the educating of the young in the secular requirements of life. Those who believe in the necessity of Christian instruction (whatever that may mean) have their churches and chapels wherein such instruction can be given.

There are other grave reasons why the Bible should have no official place in our public schools. Its educational teaching is based upon fear and not upon love. In Proverbs we read: "A rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding." "Thou shalt beat him with a rod." "Chasten thy son . . . and let not thy soul spare for his crying." Such Bible injunctions as these may be the teachings of God, but they are the very essence of brutality. Moreover, portions of the Bible are unfit for children to see. Where is the moral to be derived from such stories as those of Lot and his daughters, David and his adultery, Jacob and his wives, Judith and Ruth? What effect would the following passages have upon the religious youth in whom the appetite for strong drinks was hereditary? "Thou shalt bestow thy money for whatever thy soul

lusteth after—wine or strong drink” (Deut. xiv. 26) ; “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more” (Prov. xxxi. 6, 7). It may be said that only the good portions of the Bible are to be read. If so, these (or precepts equally as useful) can be had from other books unaccompanied by what is so very objectionable.

But further, the Bible undoubtedly teaches what is false upon matters of history, science, philosophy, and morals ; and yet these are among the Bible lessons that are to be read. Still, upon each subject the most glaring errors are propounded. The teaching of such fallacies is the more reprehensible because many of those so-called orthodox saints who insist upon “Bible Lessons” do not believe in them. Professor Huxley saw the evil and inconsistency of such conduct. Hence, some years ago, when he was a member of the London School Board, he addressed its members as follows. Speaking of the first chapter of Genesis, he said : “The reading of this chapter would convey—whatever the chapter was intended to convey—that the world was made in six natural days. I don’t say whether this is the right interpretation or not ; but I appeal to the common sense of the Board whether that is not the interpretation which every child capable of understanding the English language would naturally derive from the statement contained in the book of Genesis ? And, that being the case, it is perfectly certain that this statement is erroneous, and no more capable of being disputed than whether the earth stands still or not. I submit that it is an absolute crime that this Board should sanction the instilling into the minds of children statements which are not true, and which the instruction which they receive a few years later will infallibly upset. . . . What I ask, and what I have a right to ask, and what you as honest men must grant, is this, that these tender children shall not be taught that which you do not yourselves believe.”

Thus we plead for purely secular education. Sanctions for moral actions depend upon no Bible and upon

no supernatural religion. Let our children be taught that honesty is right, not because they are commanded by the Bible not to steal, but for the reason that stealing is an infringement upon the rights of others; that telling the truth is right, not because lying would offend any God, but for the reason that falsehood tends to undermine that confidence which is necessary to the stability of society; that honor is due to parents, not because children may live long, but for the reason that they are indebted to their parents for life and training. These are real and natural sanctions, dependent upon neither theology nor upon "sacred books." Finally, we plead for secular education because it is no part of the functions of School Boards to seek to increase the numbers of either Roman Catholics, Protestants, or unbelievers. That is a task which should be left to those who take an interest in either one of the three classes of society mentioned, and it is their duty to provide for the cost of the respective propaganda. No one would complain more vehemently than the Christian if he were called upon to pay for the teaching of the principles of the National Secular Society. Why, then, should Secularists be taxed to pay for the teaching of a theology which they believe to be the greatest enemy of all correct and useful education? Is there no justice to be found in the realms of theology? Has the orthodox faith blunted within its devotees all sense of equality and right? We think that, to a large extent, it has, and our duty as Secularists is at least to protect the young, who are unable to protect themselves, and to remove the snares placed in their path. We would shield them from the allurements and the dangerous policy of those who would sacrifice the mundane welfare of the rising generation, unless it is sought to be secured by the aid of a theology that has, during centuries, proved itself to be the deadliest foe to all noble and ennobling aspirations.

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