

THE UTILISATION
OF THE
CHURCH ESTABLISHMENT.

A

LETTER TO THOS. SCOTT, *Esq.*,

(OF RAMSGATE), BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE PILGRIM AND THE SHRINE,"
"THE MEANING OF THE AGE," &c.



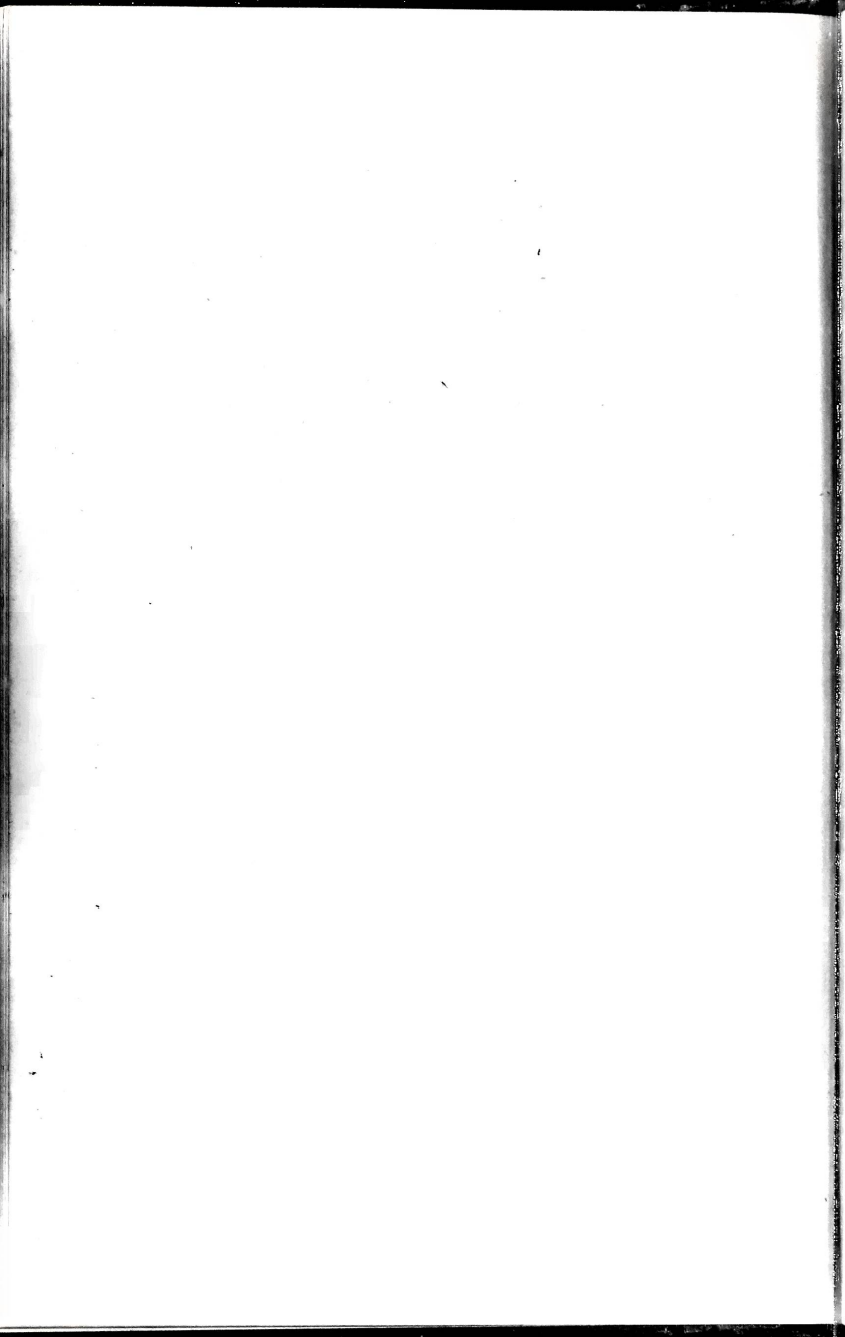
"Now once again, by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of devout and holy men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in His Church, even to the reforming of reformation itself. What does he, then, but reveal himself to his servants, and, as his manner is, first to his Englishmen?"

MILTON, "*Plea for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing.*"

PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
MOUNT PLEASANT, RAMSGATE.

1870.

Price Sixpence.



THE UTILISATION
OF THE
CHURCH ESTABLISHMENT.

DEAR SIR,—

KNOWING that you are in the habit of putting before your readers some special subject for thought at the season of Christmas, it has occurred to me that you may like to extend the consideration of a scheme which has long occupied my mind. I, therefore, offer for your acceptance and that of your readers, in case you approve, this letter on the important question of redeeming the vast organisation and resources of our National Church Establishment from their present condition of uselessness, or worse, and turning them to account in the promotion of civilisation and practical religion.

I do not propose, in the remarks which I am about to make, to bring any charge against the Church on the score of its responsibility for the position which it occupies. Suffice it to say on this head that if the Church lags so far behind the age as to be no longer capable of controlling or influencing it for good, it is because the Church was modelled and constructed in and by a previous age in such a way as to incapacitate it for the development and progress which were necessary to enable it to hold its relative position,

should the age ever resolve to make a move. That is, the secular Cosmos of which the Establishment was a product denied to the Church the liberty which it reserved to itself—that of motion.

Now, had our secular movement been a retrogressive one, that is, in the direction of less knowledge, less morality, less religion, or towards a lower degree or quality of civilisation, the Church, constituted as it was, would doubtless have served an admirable purpose: for it would have been both a drag upon our downhill progress, and a fixed standpoint from which we might be hauled back up to our previous elevation. Again, had the age stood still, it would have found the Church ever beside it, to cherish it in sympathetic immobility. It so happened, however, that the age neither went back, nor stood still, but, as I endeavoured to show in a little tract* to which you gave circulation at this time last year, it went on in all essentials of civilisation far beyond any previous conception or anticipation. And so it happens that the immovable Church, left behind solitary and sad, not at its own incapacity for locomotion, but at its desertion by its old co-ordinate and companion the secular Cosmos, has ever since operated as a heavy drag upon our uphill progress.

Thus our force is not merely wasted in overcoming a superfluous resistance, but it is impaired through its diffusion over the mass of a cumbrous appendage which derives its vitality from our system. For we must bear in mind the fact that the amount of vital and other force possessed by any system is necessarily limited; and that if an undue proportion be exerted in any one part of such system, the other parts must suffer a corresponding deficiency, and fail to perform their functions properly. There may be, too, a morbid reaction upon the parts thus

* 'The Meaning of the Age.'

enfeebled, and of so serious a nature as to endanger vitality altogether. Again, when any portion of the system becomes congested, an excessive action is set up in the region of the congested part, resulting, no doubt, from the effort of nature to re-invigorate it, but which develops into a dangerous inflammation if continued so long as to reach a high pitch of intensity without having penetrated the seat of the morbid inactivity.

Just such a congested mass in the midst of our social and political system does our Church Establishment present the appearance of having become. We cannot cut it off, for it is part of ourselves, deriving its nourishment from the sources of our own vitality, in the same way as a deeply rooted cancer from the unhappy victim of its growth. And we suffer so much from the drain upon our system caused by the constant direction of our vital forces towards this morbid region, that we have not strength left to allow us to do justice to our other and essential functions. The returning currents, too, come back vitiated to carry the evil into the rest of the system.

There is a theory among mesmerists that a healthy circulation of the vital forces may be restored to deranged organs by means of the magnetic traction of the hand—that the passage of the fingers, especially when accompanied by gentle pressure over the inflamed and congested parts, will, by drawing the vital currents along their proper channels of communication, place the whole system once more in a condition of harmonious sympathy with itself. I desire to effect such a re-union between the Church and the whole fabric of our body politic, and I propose to follow the tactics of the mesmerist, and endeavour, by the imposition of hands upon the affected member, to reduce its arrested or disturbed circulation to healthy harmony with that of the system generally. A little judicious mechanical

pressure often facilitates the removal of an obstruction upon which the whole interior force of the system has been employing itself in vain. In fact, Nature itself prompts the external application of the hand to an affected part of the body in aid of those internal forces which are striving to effect a cure.

In the case which I have proposed for present consideration, one fact must be specially kept in view. The constitution of the patient has not merely developed: it has undergone a change. Figures apart, the fundamental idea of the State is altogether different from what it was when in earlier days it kept company with the Church. It is necessary to infuse that idea into the Church, if it is ever to be brought forward and made available for the new uses of the State.

The change to which I refer is this:—Under the old *régime*, when knowledge was the monopoly of a certain limited class, it was the custom to govern men through their ignorance and superstitions. It was not unusual to use the term “Faith” to express the frame of mind which induced such submission. I will not dwell upon terms, but allow that the qualification for submission was so universally possessed that obedience was very general. The King and the priest laid claim to a divine right to govern; and the people to a divine right to be governed; and so continued together in tolerable harmony. But now the people have woken up to the conviction that they are not justified in thrusting the burden of their government from their own shoulders, and entrusting their responsibilities to others. The governors, too, have failed to vindicate the divinity of their claim to the satisfaction of the people. Thus, for the Church *as it was*, the people know too much. But they feel that they do not yet know enough to be able to govern themselves as they desire to be governed, and to realise the high conception of

civilisation to which they aspire. They want all their available force of knowledge to enable them to proceed in the path of self-government; and the Church absorbs and employs too much of their force in the endeavour to keep them back in the old paths of ignorance and submission. So that the nation is really divided against itself, and that on a matter which is vital to its continued prosperity and even existence.

I am not going to show how or why we cannot be expected to reverse the order of nature, and renounce our development and its results. Rather shall I take it for granted that if the Church is to continue to endure at all as an Establishment, it must be remodelled and re-constituted after the fashion of the State. Neither shall I occupy my space and your time with arguments to prove that inasmuch as it is a creation and creature of the State, the latter has a perfect right to deal with it, and either to abolish it altogether, or to convert it into an useful engine of civilisation.

There can be no doubt that if the Establishment had no present existence, no attempt would be made to create such an institution. But seeing that it does exist, and is capable of being made a powerful agent for good, it would surely involve vast waste to throw it entirely away, and undertake the formation of another organisation in its place. I propose, then, to convert our old fleet, instead of allowing it to rot, and encountering the huge cost of building an entirely new one. Many of the vessels may be capable of being made effective by the application of modern armour; and, where a more radical change is required, the timbers and other materials are yet sound enough to be turned to account. But any scheme for thoroughly reconstructing the Ecclesiastical Navy must be so extensive that it is as much as one man can do to suggest the idea, and make a few propo-

sitions by way of starting the work and enlisting the support of others.

The principle of Church Establishments had its origin in a time when the preservation of social order was entrusted almost exclusively to two great classes of public servants, the military and the clergy. It was the function of the former to repress by physical force all attacks on the lives and property of citizens and all efforts to subvert the State, whether from within or from without. And it was the function of the latter to induce people by spiritual terror to submit to the existing order of things. Gradually, and under a process of natural development, the function of the soldier came to have reference, except in very special emergencies, to external and foreign dangers, the maintenance of domestic safety and order being committed to a police composed of civilians. Similarly, the function once exercised by the clergy, of inducing people to be "good" by the agency of spiritual terror, has gradually come to be superseded in favour of a persuasion founded on the early development of the rational faculties through the agency of Schoolmasters. That is, for all purposes of domestic use, the Soldier and the Parson have been superseded by the Policeman and the Teacher. And one sufficient reason why it is impossible to restore the authority of the clergy as preservers of social order is, that under the influence of the Teacher the general intelligence has so advanced, that the ignorance which alone gave efficacy to the system of spiritual terror, has almost entirely disappeared. The change is recognised by a large portion of the clergy, who, greatly to their credit, have endeavoured to meet it in a becoming spirit, and have set themselves with a will to assist the diffusion of intelligence among their people. Too many of them, however, are content to forego the quiet fulfilment of their duties for the sake of the

notoriety gained by their disputes among themselves. Fighting was always easier than working, and not only is there a greater pleasure of excitement in it, but it is apt to gain recognition, honour, and pay, while honest, useful industry passes unnoticed and unrewarded.

Since the modern system of government rests upon the general diffusion of intelligence, the first condition essential to its efficiency consists necessarily in the universality of a sound education; that is, an education which at once cultivates the intellect and instils a knowledge of the principles of human association, and of the mutual duties which grow out of a state of society; and this, not merely in the narrow domain of private life, but also in respect of public and political relations. The more ignorant and incapable a people are, the more arbitrary and despotic must be their government in its conduct, and the more mysterious in its sanctions. But now the people have so much to do with their own government that it may be said that they *are* the government. People and government are, therefore, alike interested in the question of popular instruction, and the country is now happily aroused to a sense of its deficiencies in respect thereof. But with all the urging of the subject in and out of Parliament, the particular scheme that I am about to propose does not seem to have occurred to any of those who are putting themselves forward as champions of National Instruction. Even the newly formed "National Education League," with its admirable aspirations and practical wisdom, has not thought of utilising the gigantic Church Establishment by converting it into an engine of Education.

There is a reason for the League passing over an already existing organisation, which must here be adverted to. The object of that body is to provide an unsectarian education for every child in the country, and it fears that it is vain to seek for such an education at

the hands of a clergy. That such a feeling should exist at the present day is perhaps not to be wondered at. The clergy have not striven to let the public know how far they have become emancipated from the shackles of ecclesiastical tradition. The disability under which the clergy of the Establishment laboured has not been confined to themselves. The Establishment was but the largest of many religious sects, and the clergy of all the sects shared the disability. Thus, as a body, they are still credited with being under the influence of those religious tenets which represent man as placed on the earth, less to work out a desirable condition of society than to dream of a future state of existence; and which regard a preparation for another and hypothetical world of which nothing can be known, as of infinitely more consequence than an education for this one. It was through acting under the influence of the doctrinal bias of their particular sects that a past generation of clergy gave occasion for the rebuke conveyed in the following fable, the authorship of which I have failed to ascertain, but which it may not be without use to repeat even now :

“One winter’s night a poor boy, worn out with cold and hunger, lay senseless before a rich man’s door: and the rich man seeing him, was moved with pity and carried him into his house. In a little while the warmth of the fire, which was blazing in the room where the boy was laid, restored him to life, and, feebly opening his eyes and raising his head from the ground, in a faint, low voice, he cried, ‘I have had nothing to eat these two days: give me food, or I shall die.’ Bread and meat and wine were placed before him; but as he stretched forth his hands towards the food, the rich man removed it from within his reach, saying, “Stop: before you eat you must say grace.’ And he repeated a form of grace which he ordered the boy to say after him. But another man, who was present, interrupted him, and cried, ‘Your words are wicked, the boy shall not utter them: *this* is the grace which he must pronounce’—and then he gave another form of words which he would have the boy speak. And when he had finished talking, a third man, more vehemently than the other two, exclaimed, ‘Both of you are wrong. I cannot suffer the boy to

sin by doing as either of you would urge. *This* is what he ought to say;—and he repeated in a loud voice a third form of grace. And then all three spoke together, each one insisting that he *alone* was right. And they became angry, and abused one another, and the altercation continued for more than an hour, for they would come to no agreement. And as they were still debating and quarrelling, they heard a groan. Then suddenly they stopped talking, and turned towards the boy and found that he was dead.”

Unfortunately, the Government of the country, by its adoption of and alliance with one of the religious sects, gave to the whole category of theological and ecclesiastical questions an importance that was at once factitious and injurious to the general welfare of the community. What are in reality either mythologic fancies or metaphysical subtleties, and suitable, perhaps, for intellectual exercises for wranglers in schools of philosophy, thus came to be widely regarded as matters of importance and essential to the well-being of mankind.

Thus, even within the same sect, such vastly undue preponderance has been given to differences of dogmatic opinion, that the attention of the whole country has at times been diverted from matters really essential to civilisation to watch with breathless interest the progress of the contest and the settlement of the points in dispute. The following extract from a work* recently published well illustrates my meaning:—

“I remember being, as a boy, powerfully and painfully impressed by the circumstances of a police case which I read in the newspapers. A ruffian, living in the back slums of London, had, being mad with drink and jealousy, horribly murdered his wife in a paroxysm of brutal fury. He was tried for the crime and condemned to death on the clearest evidence. Owing to various circumstances his execution was postponed. In the short time which elapsed between the man's condemnation and his death, certain Bible-readers and other philanthropic persons who had access to this condemned felon,

* ‘Orval, the Fool of Time.’ By Robert Lytton.

succeeded in teaching him to read, and, in some degree, to think. The man's natural intelligence, when unobscured by the fumes of alcohol, and withdrawn from the customary savageries of a dissolute and desperate life, appears to have been extraordinarily receptive. It was reported of him that, under the care of these teachers, he learned to read so well that, before he went to the scaffold, he could read the Bible without assistance. His first page of that book was read, and (so the public was informed) his first prayer was breathed, almost within sound of the nails which were being driven into the gibbet on which he was about to perish. Certain persons were so strongly impressed by these facts that they forwarded to Lord Palmerston, who was then Secretary for the Home Department, a petition for mitigation of sentence. But the crime was atrocious, clearly proved, and without 'extenuating circumstances.' The man was hanged. At that time, the Church was vehement in her demand for exclusive jurisdiction over the education of the people. Reading this horrible story, one naturally asked, 'In Heaven's name, what is the Church about?' The question was answered at length by the 'Times' newspaper, which contained the report of this man's execution. The greater portion of that paper—the space of several columns at least—was occupied by an elaborate discussion between the Rev. Mr. Gorham and the Bishop of Exeter as to the vital Church question of the time—whether or not an unbaptized infant is after death consigned by the Deity whom Christians worship, to a place of eternal torment, in punishment of the omission by its parents of a prescribed ecclesiastical ceremony."

It is true that while I write are echoing in my ears the cries of the combatants over the recent appointment to the see of Exeter, with section denouncing section, and each claiming for itself to be the real and only Simon Pure in orthodoxy: until I am reminded of Milton's apothegm, that a prelatical Church "may prove a nursing mother to sects, but it will be a step-dame to truth." Nevertheless, the change that has taken place in the last few years is of immense extent and significance. Behind and beyond all the blatant disputants who keep themselves ever before the eyes of the public, lies a vast body of clergy emancipated wholly or in part from the Egyptian bondage of Article and Creed, endeavouring quietly

to do their duty in the rational teaching of the people committed to their charge, wondering why the Church as a depository of dead dogmas is kept up, and what the nation is afraid of that it hesitates to pull it down, or to convert it to uses commensurate with its means. The press is almost entirely emancipated, and even its most liberal utterances are largely the work of the clergy, numbers of whom hesitate not to confess the relief and satisfaction which their intellects and their consciences derive from such opportunity of exercising without stint the truthfulness that is in them.

This with very many. Others, of less decided temperament, are anxiously awaiting such action of the country as may withdraw them from a position which they are disposed to regard as untenable in itself. Pray do not understand me as charging the clergy with insincerity. Their position is a sufficiently painful one without reproach being added thereto. The nation required of them in their youth a subscription to tests which their mature judgment disapproves. In the meantime, they have married wives and got families, for whose maintenance they are dependent upon their vocation. They find, too, that, notwithstanding all drawbacks, their position generally is one which enables them to do much good socially, and they would be sorry to lose such vantage ground of usefulness. The one thorn in their career is the enforced repetition of dogmas which no longer command their belief. Laymen, probably, do not fully realise the pain and mortification it is to a clergyman to have to stand up in the face of his congregation and repeat a declaration of his belief in things which he knows scarce any intelligent person present either believes, or credits him with believing—propositions which are by their very nature totally unverifiable, but which he has constantly to declare that he believes, and that “sted-

fastly." When I say that he knows that scarce an intelligent person in his congregation credits him with believing such things, I mean, of course, among the masculine and educated portion; for of the female part he does not value the assent one jot, because he knows that the end and aim of a woman's education with us is to accustom her to accept, and not to judge, that which is put before her. I have little doubt that one of the reasons why so few men go to church, besides that of their objection to mislead the ignorant by the sanction of their presence, is their compassion for the clergyman, and their unwillingness to subject him to the mortification of seeing them there as conscious witnesses of his humiliation. With regard to the feeling of clergymen in respect of each other, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, as of old no two soothsayers could meet without laughing, so now no two clergymen believe in each other's sincerity.

Thus, the imposition of tests in the National Church is at the basis of the artificiality and falsehood which is the bane of modern society. The morals of our whole system receive at their very fount an infusion which taints them throughout. In the very religion which forms a principal part of our earliest education, as well as of our perpetual admonition, profession is placed above truthfulness.

It cannot be otherwise, so long as dogmatic articles of belief are imposed as a condition of sharing in the material advantages of a religious order. With the Nonconforming bodies I am not here concerned. They are private to the members who compose them. The Establishment is a national institution, and citizens are entitled to partake of its benefits. For the Establishment to impose tests of faith, is for the country officially to make itself a party to falsehood. It matters little, in this view, whether the particular items professed be true or

not. The mere fact that they are of the nature of dogmas, and, therefore, incapable of verification, places the subscriber to them in the position of one who leaves it to chance to determine whether that which he professes be truth or falsehood. He asserts that which cannot be proved, and, therefore, asserts that which *may be* untrue. Let the condition of orders in the Establishment be a certain proficiency in certain branches of knowledge, if you will; but do not continue to exact a profession of belief in particular conclusions, for by so doing you place the accident of correctness above the noblest of human faculties—the faculty of truthfulness.

In spite of all drawbacks, however, the national conscience is growing with the national intelligence. Mythology and dogma are fast following astrology and witchcraft. Music and various sensuous attractions are being resorted to, in the hope of refilling the churches to which belief is no longer able to compel congregations; and, in the meantime, whole classes of the people starve for lack of knowledge. Church and country are alike ready to own the touch of a hand that shall bring them together again in the bond of a common need. The enchanter has already waved the wand of eloquence and justice over a great wrong in a sister land. The birds of night flew screeching away, and the right triumphed with unanticipated ease. The Irish Church has shown us what can be done with the English. It is no disendowment, no disestablishment that is needed here, only the incubus of tests to be removed from its clergy, and themselves converted into unsectarian teachers and schoolmasters. Is the task beyond the energy or the will of our present magician? I think not, or not for long. He grows apace. He has but to see that to “feed the lambs” is even more than to “feed the sheep,” and that under the ripening influence of his voice the country would soon be

eager for the change, and wonder how it could have delayed it so long. The principle of such a transformation—from repugnant professors, or bickering disputants, into hopeful, eager, free, and actual teachers of the people—is no new one. The Act of Edward the Sixth (1, c. 14), for regulating the Acts of Mortmain, and “Uses, superstitious and charitable,” has already led to the conversion of many a “religious foundation” to purposes of education. To the operation of this Act in past ages we owe the existence of many an endowed grammar-school, in place of a nest of indolence or superstition. What is to prevent it from operating in the future on a yet larger scale, and turning the entire institution—which now ranks belief above knowledge, and assent above conviction, which ministers to a morbid emotionalism in women, and to a passive indifferentism, or active scepticism, in men—into an agent for imparting a sound practical education to the multitudes of our children? Under such extended operation of this Act, in place of the gloomy and periodically opened church and its unpractical teaching, of the listless, perfunctory, or superstitious parson, and of the unintelligent or carping congregation; in place, too, of whole parishes being pauperised under the vicious operation of “Founders’ Wills,” we should everywhere have schools with their airy halls, their model fields and gardens, their exercising grounds, and their workshops for training up the young to be intelligent, healthy, skilful, industrious, and frugal citizens.

“And what when Sunday comes?” I think I hear you ask. “Is there to be no gathering for the worship to which we are accustomed, under the presidency of the old familiar parson? No seventh day of rest, recreation, and devotion to higher things?”

I will answer the query by asking you, “What, in a condition of intelligent, educated, and unsupersti-

tious society, will be needed as an equivalent for the 'religious worship' of previous times?"

I take for granted the retention of the seventh day as a holiday when it derives its sanction from the reasonable and natural, instead of the mythical and supernatural. Under the *régime* I am supposing, there will be small likelihood of making the seventh-day holiday less prized through the institution of a number of competing "saints'-days." When men are encouraged to turn an intelligent eye to the heavens, they will see that the revolutions of the moon have been ordained in such close conformity with their convenience, that they cannot do better than continue to make her quarters the measure of their weeks. France rejected human convenience and astronomical fact as well as priestly fiction when she exchanged the seventh day for the tenth.

With regard to an equivalent for the present services of the Church, I should say that, under the system which I am anticipating, inasmuch as truthfulness will be esteemed above opinion, the demand for positive dogmas will give place to a demand for "positive philosophy"—that is, for *evidence*. Thus the "sermons" of the future will consist of deductions from verifiable facts in morals and science applied to the nature and duty of man. There will be no difficulty in making such selection of prayers and hymns from existing rituals as will enable all who desire such mode of expression to combine in a common worship. And there will be no lack of educated men to hold formal discourse on all edifying topics when every village will have its qualified schoolmaster, and every town its staff of highly educated instructors. People, lay or cleric, of ultra-metaphysical dispositions will still be free to confound "religion" with profoundest problems in metaphysics—that which is of the heart with that which is of the head; and to puzzle themselves about the composition of the Godhead, the in-

carnation of Deity, and the doctrine of atonement. They may even be gratified, too, by occasional addresses on such abstruse and abstract subjects, delivered, at their special request, by the head of the local schools, or any other whom they desire to hear. It would be thoroughly in accordance with the spirit of the converted Establishment to devote a considerable portion of its funds to the maintenance of a body of men (and perhaps of women) specially qualified by attainments and natural gifts to exercise the office of preacher or lecturer, and whose function it would be to itinerate the country in promotion of higher education in religion and morals. It is not easy to value the relief that congregations and parsons alike would instantaneously feel were only they required to preach who had something to say, and could say it so as to be worth the hearing.

It is clear that a national system of education must, to preserve its character of being national, recognise only such principles and doctrines as are capable of general comprehension and application. It must, so far as it goes, be such that all can use it without violation to their consciences. It is not bound to come up to the full need of every one's private convictions; but it must have eliminated from it all that is doubtful or controverted, and all that appertains to the province either of the mystic or of the mountebank. Of course there are to be found in every community persons of narrow and deranged comprehension, who raise objections to every scheme that is propounded for the general good. It will be open to these to follow their own isolated course, or to supplement the teaching of the public instructor by a teaching more in accordance with their own preferences. But those who obstruct and denounce a comprehensive scheme of national instruction simply because it is comprehensive and tends to foster amity and union between all classes and sections of the people in place of the

prevailing bitter divisions, and who desire to build up a distinct *imperium in imperio*, must be disregarded as bad citizens who avow an interest in direct antagonism to the welfare of the State. Even these, however, will be free to bring up their own children as may seem best to them. They will only not be suffered to vitiate and cripple the State system by an infusion of their own anti-patriotic idiosyncracies.

I had written thus far when I lit upon the following passage in a tract of Milton's,* which I find singularly appropriate to the present question, advocating the institution of movable and itinerant ministers as a more effective method of promoting religion and civilisation than that of fixed incumbents, and desiring at any rate to abolish the system of *paid* clergy. He says :

“Be the expense less or more, if it be found burdensome to the churches, they have in this land an easy remedy in their recourse to the civil magistrate, who hath in his hands the disposal of no small revenues, left perhaps anciently to superstitious, but meant undoubtedly to good and best uses, and, therefore, once made public, *applicable by the present magistrate to such uses as the Church, or solid reason from whomsoever, shall convince him to think best.* And those uses may be, no doubt, much rather than as glebes and augmentations are now bestowed, to grant such requests as these of the churches; or to erect in greater number, all over the land, *schools, and competent libraries* to those schools, where *languages and arts* may be taught free together, without the needless, unprofitable, and inconvenient moving to another place. So all the land would be soon better civilised. . . . Those public foundations may be so instituted, as the youth therein may be at once brought up to a *competence of learning and to an honest trade*; and the hours of teaching so ordered as their study may be no hindrance to their labour or other calling.”

The schools, to the foundation of which Milton would thus appropriate the Church funds, had for their special object the education of ministers, rather than that of the people at large. But his proposition

* ‘The Likeliest Way to remove Hirelings out of the Church.’

contains the germs of the plan which I have set forth, and contemplates the employment of Church property by the civil magistrate for purposes of Education, or *such uses as solid reason from whomsoever shall convince him to think best.*

Great as Milton was, there was one respect in which he failed to transcend the notion which has long prevailed in men's minds, the notion that people *may* have Education, but *must* have religion. We are learning now-a-days to transpose the terms, and say, "People *may* have religion, but they *must* have Education." And the change implies no derogation to religion, inasmuch as the cultivation of the intelligence which God has given us is in itself the first of religious duties. It is, moreover, impossible to impart the smallest degree of Education without in some measure developing the whole hierarchy of faculties of which the religious faculty is a member. The fact is, that the sense in which the denouncers of what, in the current slang of the day, is called "Godless education" employ the term "religion," has no real reference to religion whatever. They do not mean by it the cultivation of a sense of duty to man and responsibility to the Creator; these come with every accession of knowledge and intelligence in the most "Godless" course of secular instruction. Every newspaper, every story-book, is in this sense a religious teacher. No: the term "religious education" in their mouths really means *a bias in favour of some particular ecclesiastical sect.* It means a strait-jacket of dogmas and tenets so early imposed that the young and flexible mind can by no means struggle out of it, but is bound to grow to its shape and stop at its limits. Thus, the word religion, which properly signifies that which *binds one back* from an impious and wrongful course, is transformed into an agency for *binding one up* in narrow, unnatural, unwholesome restriction. It is made to

constitute a training which is a system of repression and distortion for the whole intelligence of its subject, instead of an Education which is really a *drawing out* of the whole powers of the mind.

To the authority of Milton I will add the weighty judgment of Bishop Butler. The charge of "sacrilege," so readily brought against those who would turn to useful account property which has once been dedicated to "the Church," had no terrors for him. "Every donation to the Christian Church," he maintains, "is a human donation and no more, and therefore cannot give a Divine right, but such right only as must be subject, in common with all other property, to the regulation of human laws." "The persons who gave lands to the Church had no right of perpetuity in them, and consequently could convey no such rights to the Church."

And even if it were not so; even if property once dedicated to "the Church," or "religious use," of the nation, could not rightly be appropriated to any other use, there would still be no real obstacle to the principle I am maintaining. A people converted from one religion to another carries over, as a matter of course, the endowments of the former religion to the service of the latter. Were this not so, the alternative would be that if the whole nation were converted with the exception of one single person, that person would become the proprietor of the entire religious endowments of the nation. And, farther, if there were no such exception, there would be no claimant whatever to the property. Well, the religious revenues, then, follow the religion of the nation. Suppose the nation does not merely reform its old religion, nor merely exchange it for a new one, but shifts its whole idea of the subject of religion, and comes to deem its best use to be one which is altogether secular and unreligious, the same reasoning requires that the old religious revenues shall still

accompany the nation in its new phase, and be legitimately applicable to its new uses.

I claim the new phase upon which England is entering to be an educational rather than a "religious" one, that is, in the old, and what I deem bad, sense of the term. To my mind the very act of bringing together children of various sects and ranks from their isolation of creed or of caste, and placing them on a footing of school-fellowship, to learn the same lessons, experience the same discipline, and compete in the same classes and same games, and of so recognising all, not merely as citizens of the same country, but as members of the same universal family, and children of the same universal Parent—this very act is to me in itself and without reference to the nature, however "secular," of the instruction given, a religious act infinitely transcending, in its high religious character, the most fervid expression of sectarian piety. Its very fundamental principle is the recognition of the Brotherhood of Man, and the Fatherhood of God. Under its influence children would insensibly and without tedious verbal repetitions of incomprehensible dogmas and catechisms, come to regard the Almighty as truly the Maker and Sustainer of all, and no sectary or partisan. Thus the more distinctively religious any system of Education is, the more essentially irreligious it must, at the same time, be; for its object is to rear children to be not good men and women, but firm adherents of a particular communion; to build up partition walls between man and man, rather than to instil comprehensive views of life and duty. And, moreover, as such denominationalism is irreligious in respect of God, so it cannot fail to be unpatriotic in respect of the State, and a huge impediment to the advancement of mankind generally in civilisation. Beside the divisions bred in the country, and the weakening of the bonds of sympathy between citizen and

citizen, it necessitates an enormous waste of power in every respect in which union is strength. It is owing to the inveterate sectarianism which has hitherto prevailed, that the peace and security of the community is perpetually invaded by a multitude of Lazzaroni, who, by the default of an united and determined effort, have been suffered to grow up among us. England now no longer finds in her colonies an outlet for her criminal population. They remain in her midst, allowed to continue in ignorance and pauperism, and to propagate, unrestrained, their own bad kind. The very efforts made, not to improve their condition, but to support them cheaply, have had a pernicious result. For bad feeding weakens both body and mind, and so tends to disqualify the individual for supporting himself. Pauper parents, in their turn, rear a race inferior even to themselves, with organisations so defective as scarcely to be morally responsible. In this way the number of the population possessing defective brains and morbid temperaments has perpetually increased, until the country is overrun with pauperism, crime, and disease. "London, in this aspect," wrote several years ago one of our most popular writers, "is so horrible to me, that when I go into such quarters of the town using my eyes, I lose the belief of the possibility of the progress, or even of the long existence, of an empire with such a mighty crime and danger at its heart. I do not believe that any one can be well acquainted with the sights of ignorant and neglected childhood, which are hidden in the metropolis alone, and entertain within himself the possibility of any wealth, or any power, or any spirit in a people, sustaining for many generations longer, a State on which that wicked blight is resting." And the evil is by no means confined to the towns. The reports furnished to the Government by its medical officers of health, reveal such a state of abject ignorance, misery, and hopelessness,

existing among our lower agricultural populations, oftentimes, too, even on the very skirts of noble estates, that we may well doubt the stability of our social system.

To the waste of power caused by our divisions I attribute, at least, a very large proportion of these evils. Party spirit in religion, infinitely more than in politics, is the canker which must devour our national prosperity until England becomes the husk only of what she has been; the caricature and opposite of what she has it in her to be. It is a poor sort of love to God that thus manifests itself in hatred to man: if not in the actual feeling of hatred, yet certainly in all the results thereof.

You will observe that I do not contemplate introducing into the system of instruction provided by the State any teaching which is *opposed* to the tenets of any religious body, except in so far as the development of the scholar's intelligence generally may be held to be inconsistent with the holding of such tenets. But it is scarcely to be expected that any sect will have the hardihood openly to raise such an objection on its own account, whatever may be the private opinion of its individual members on the point. Except also in so far as concerns the probability that the children of parents professing different creeds may, through being instructed together in secular matters on a common system, come to attach less importance to religious differences than their parents may deem desirable.

Two points in answer to these exceptions should be carefully noted. One is, that no children will be compelled to attend the common schools whose parents choose to send them elsewhere. To all the State will merely say, "You may be instructed where you please, but instructed you must be." The other point is, that ample opportunity will be afforded to parents, and their chosen agents, to supplement the

common secular system by special instruction in the religious tenets of their sects. It is by the adoption of this method that the colony of New South Wales has, after years of agitation, finally solved the problem of National Education. The plan was first mooted there by myself in 1857, in a pamphlet which you have seen, entitled 'A Plea for Common Schools.' In 1867 it became law. Its principal opponents were the Roman Catholic clergy. To the credit of their people it may be said, that not only did the congregations keep almost entirely aloof from the opposition, but they very generally accepted the system for their children. And the clergy, finding that they only exposed themselves to the liability of being disregarded and set at nought as bad citizens, either sullenly acquiesced, or contented themselves with uttering feeble protests.

In the meantime, the colonists are not slow to avail themselves of the permission given to use the school-rooms at certain stated periods, for the purpose of having their children instructed in the peculiar views of their respective sects. The week-day curriculum is also largely supplemented by voluntary Sunday-school teaching. Thus, owing to the parents having sufficient good sense to reject the extreme views of their priestly dictators, the system works harmoniously and satisfactorily to the people at large. And there is no reason to doubt that under its beneficent influence the old divisions engendered by a rigid sectarianism will gradually give place to a closer union between the various constituents of the nation, and the whole power of both Government and people vastly strengthened for all purposes of mutual aid and advancement.

I do not pretend to enter minutely into any details of the broad scheme which it is the purpose of this letter to propound. Let it be once clearly seen by the people of England that some thoroughly radical and

comprehensive change is absolutely necessary to enable us, not merely to maintain our place among the nations, but even to continue to exist at all as a civilised people; let it be shown that we are in danger of losing the benefit of all recent advance in knowledge, and all recent refinement in sentiment, and of sinking down suddenly and at once from the height to which we have attained, unless with a bold and resolute hand we impose upon all sections and classes of our nation that moral and industrial instruction by which alone a free people can long stand;—in short, let the serious and startling nature of the present emergency once be clearly comprehended, and there can be no reason to fear that we shall prove unequal to its demands. Too long have men sacrificed their public duties as citizens to their private duties as members of religious corporations. The necessities of our State are far too many, and complicated, to be adequately served by a knot of politicians, while the bulk of the community busy themselves about matters of private concern. While the congregations have been praying prayers and listening to sermons on Sundays, and working assiduously at their particular callings on week-days, the greatest interests of the country have been so neglected that they have got far beyond the reach of ordinary appliance and remedy. The question is no longer one of mere patching and repairs. To those who know and lament the present condition and immediate prospects of the country, I commend the earnest consideration of the plan herein proposed for the utilisation of our gigantic and comparatively useless Church Establishment and revenues.

Please remember that it is not destruction but *re-construction* which I am contemplating. The plan has in it nothing that is incompatible with really useful parochial work. So far from pulling down one single bishop, I would largely increase the Episcopate in

this my Secular Church of the Future. The hierarchy of school-controllors would occupy a yet nobler position in the senate and heart of the nation than any other sort of prelacy whatever. Their main function would consist in *seeing* that none lack instruction, or suffer from incompetent instructors. The bishop of the future would differ from the bishop of the period, inasmuch as his task would be rigidly to banish all doubtful disputations from the common-school room, in place of having to adjust them in the church. No longer compelled to be a partisan in fratricidal conflicts of opinion, his real work would consist in securing the efficient instruction of his flock in those essentials concerning which opinions do not conflict. But while the duties of his office would be confined to the secular, there would be no restriction placed upon the exercise of his preferences in his private capacity. Bound by no test, and subscribing to no hypothetical conclusions, the teacher in the schools of the State, whether bishop or simple schoolmaster, will be free to hold what views he may please, and to inculcate them as he may please, *when not on duty*. It will be required of him only that he be a well-educated and reputable man, and able to teach thoroughly the rudiments of learning required in the common-schools. His philosophy, his "religion," his partisanship, will all be matters apart, and of concern only to himself. A teacher of secular learning in school hours, he may be a zealous inculcator of dogmas, or whatever he may deem to appertain to "religion," at all other times. Solely responsible for his peculiarities, their manifestation will commit no one but himself. In short, while the bishop, acting on behalf of the State, shall see that in the common-schools of his diocese nothing is taught beyond what the State requires, he shall countenance the freest expression on the part of his subordinates in all other respects. The only and suffi-

26 *Utilisation of the Church Establishment.*

cient guarantees for their moderation and trustiness will consist in their education and character. Here, the *man* will be more than the *office*; for his functions, out of school, will be voluntary. If, under such voluntary *régime* of free expression, an educated people come to exhibit social, intellectual, or religious developments varying from those of a previous age, there will surely be no dereliction of "religion" in ascribing such changes to the continued and continuous operation of that "spirit of truth" which was promised to guide men into all truth.

It will be a noble climax and crown to the work to which you have dedicated yourself,—the establishment of "Free Inquiry and Free Expression,"—should your promulgation of the suggestion herein crudely put forth, first lead men to set about rescuing the Church from its traditional function of conserving dead dogmas and shackling opinion, and to make it the efficient agent of the intellectual and moral redemption of the vast mass of our population.

Christmas, 1869.

