

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. III.—NATIONAL EDUCATION.

IT is time to review the merits and failures of the English system of National education. The policy of the young department which controls matters educational, like the policy of older departments of Government, appears to be to maintain with rigidity the lines of routine, and to take care that a report which is little more than a declaration of its own good deeds, should be annually published. It is the principal business of the Parliamentary chief of the department to describe once a year, in glowing terms, the wonders that have been achieved under his administration. Every abuse is concealed, or, if that be impossible, palliated; every success is magnified. All the weight of official authority is used to keep things as they are. It is ever the lot of reformers to contend against a steady weight of opposition from the State departments whose systems they would improve. A well-drilled loyal and immovable bureaucracy are prepared to give battle to all who would presume to interfere with their official functions. Nevertheless, a growing and widespread impression has sprung up, which among experts indeed is no new one, that all is not well. It will be difficult much longer to deny the right of the people to judge the experiment of 1870 by its results, and from facts which have come to light, rather than from the statements of the governments of the day.

It is generally believed that the system has produced overpressure in so many cases that they cannot be called exceptional, and that the health of the children of the poorest classes is being in some degree impaired. It has been proved that the quality of the education in reading, writing, and arithmetic is not as good as the nation has a right to demand. It is admitted that subjects which have no claim to be considered elementary, are now taught and paid for by the State; and the Charity Commissioners have entered a public protest against a system which threatens to impede the creation of third-grade schools. It is not denied that School Boards are an extravagant means of providing the required education, and that the rates have risen to an exorbitant height in some places. The multitude of street arabs whom it was intended to bring within the walls of a school-room, has not yet been gathered in. With the evidence of these failures before their eyes it becomes impossible for the friends of education to remain any longer silent.

Let us clear the ground by recapitulating the points upon which we are probably all agreed. No child ought to be

allowed to grow up without receiving the elements of education. Schools must be provided. Parents must be compelled to send their children to them. The parents, if compelled to send their children to school, must be assured that they will not be taught anything to which they have a right to object. Hence the origin and the necessity for a conscience clause. The State must not inform its citizens how they are to think. The duty of the State therefore seems to be to compel with regard to those things upon which men are agreed, and to abstain from interference as soon as there is a legitimate divergence of opinion. How can the State know what knowledge is most required? How can an Act of Parliament impart it? The only matter in education upon which men are generally agreed is that everyone should know how to read, write and cipher. Here, then, as far as the State is concerned, its functions must cease. But education cannot be broken off at the three R's, nor can the three R's be taught without teaching much besides. From which reasoning it appears to follow that the State ought not itself to be the schoolmaster of the nation, nor to elaborate educational codes and standards.

But the State has been defining every article which is to be taught to four million English children in a series of elaborate codes during the last ten years. The State has, moreover, put the entire direction of the education of one million children under the public authority of the School Boards: and has in fact constituted itself the schoolmaster of the people.

We have many examples of Governments assuming to themselves the business of educating the people in the way in which they should think, and many are the wrongs and the absurdities recorded. In Austria the education of the people was committed to a School Board of Jesuits, who instantly made a decree prohibiting not only the reading of the Bible in a school but the sale of a Bible in a shop. In England the education of the people was committed to a School Board of ratepayers, whereupon the Birmingham ratepayers passed a bye-law which effectually banished the Bible from the State schools under their charge. Not more strange was the method in which the Chinese fulfilled their national obligation in this respect. Mr. Herbert Spencer declares in his "Social Statics" that they passed the following law: "Scholars are prohibited from chess, football, flying kites, shuttlecocks, playing on wind instruments, training beasts, birds, fishes or insects, all which amusements dissipate the mind and debase the heart." Why should we multiply instances? Similar mistakes have everywhere marked the attempts of retrograde statesmen to make teaching a Government service.

How is it that they cannot appreciate the distinction between

a Government insisting that all its citizens should possess the elements of knowledge, and a Government creating a vast department which is to prescribe in what form and from what masters they are to learn? What has the Government to do with the religious and political denominations in matters of education? Clearly nothing at all. When there is so much difference of opinion the function of the State ought to be limited to the duty of testing the secular proficiency of the scholars. But our present methods seem designed to bring religious and political considerations into prominence. Every School Board election is decided by them. The political and religious values of the candidates, instead of being ignored, are made the most of. The congregations of the churches and chapels and all the political clubs are set in motion. The interests of education are altogether neglected. The consequence is failure, extravagance, and, in some cases, grave scandal.

The very men in the parish who care least about education, and are least capable of superintending the schooling of the young, are thus entrusted with the care of the schools. If a system works badly, it is no answer to say that its failures are the fault of the people themselves who have elected the inefficient Board. As educationalists, we wish to see the children properly taught, and whatever stands in the way of our national duty in this behalf, must be reformed. The abolition of School Boards is, perhaps, the first thing needful in the cause of sound education.

Let us now consider the methods by which the cost of maintaining our present defective system is provided.

The nation is required to pay £2,800,000 by taxation; but a part of the nation is also required to pay an additional £1,800,000 by rate. Another portion of the nation, numbering 270,000 persons, is induced to pay £725,000 for the maintenance of schools where definite religious teaching is given to children of parents who do not object. This is not all. The parents themselves, who are compelled, willing or unwilling, to send their children to school, are compelled to pay £1,600,000 in fees.

The plan of paying public money from a double source, partly by grant out of the taxes, partly by grant out of the rates, is both extravagant and unfair from the partiality of its incidence. School Boards are not universal; all the ratepayers of England are not rated for this purpose, but only some unfortunate persons who live in some unfortunate localities. The experience of ten years has shown the reckless extravagance of the School Boards. With an income derived from rates of £1,800,000, and an accumulated debt of £14,000,000,

the School Boards are only able to supply the requisite education for 1,000,000 children, while the Voluntary School Managers supply an equally good education to exactly double that number of children with an annual subscription of £725,000, and a school plant worth £12,000,000.

It is clearly impossible to argue in the same breath that education is a national obligation, and that it is a local obligation. We believe, in 1870, the fatal decision to divide the cost between the rates and the taxes was very doubtfully adopted as a sort of compromise, as an experiment, and on the expectation that the rates would be trifling.

The express understanding upon which the burden was thrown on the ratepayers having proved fallacious, and the returns showing that the average school-rate is 5½d., whereas in some districts it rises to 2s. in the pound, it seems to be our duty to relieve those who by our miscalculations we have grievously wronged. The school-rate ought not to be maintained now that our eyes are open to its enormous inequalities.

We next proceed to consider the case of the parents and the children. What right have we to compel people to send their children to school, and to imprison them if they neglect, and at the same time to make them pay fees for what, to them, may seem no advantage at all, and which certainly involves a loss of work? If we educate the children of the people because it is for the benefit of the nation at large that they should be educated, and insist upon this public good without regard to the wishes of individuals, surely it is unjust that we should demand fees. Free education is a national duty, not less than free trade in education. Without price it should be offered, and only so can we justify ourselves in inflicting pains and penalties on the parents who prevent their children from accepting it.

We then offer to the workmen and cottagers of England relief from a tax which now amounts to a sum equal to an addition to their rent of 20 per cent.

We offer to the ratepayers relief from an inequitable and oppressive burden, which averages 5½d. in the pound. We relieve School Boards from a duty which, from their very constitution, they are incapable of adequately performing.

But how, then, fulfil the national obligation which requires the education of every English child? We answer, by putting in practice the simple principle of free competition. By contracting in the open market for the educational work which is to be done, and allowing the contractors free scope, after having fulfilled the terms of their contract, to carry on other educational work on the principles of free-trade. As

soon as a deficiency of school accommodation is reported in any district, an advertisement would be issued by the inspector, not for the creation of a School Board, but for tenders from individuals for the supply of the deficiency. The conditions of the contract on the part of the State would be the following: A school of a certain specified description (as now); a master of certain character and qualifications (as now); a Government grant according to results (as now), with the addition of an attendance grant, equal to the present school fees. The national obligation will be fulfilled by the acceptance of the lowest tender, *ceteris paribus*, and the nation, not the locality, will pay the bill. The contractors would probably either be the present schoolmasters acting independently, or else supported by combinations of individuals. They would bid against each other; they would offer to provide the State with what the State requires at the lowest possible figure, which would be infinitely less than the State now pays. The profession of elementary schoolmaster would instantly be enfranchised; it would cease to be what it is now—that dull monotony of service to many masters, which is gradually making a laborious and honourable career intolerable. A career would be opened to the schoolmaster with boundless possibilities of advancement, and endless opportunities for the display of individual talent.

What is it that we propose to offer without price to the children of England? The elements of education—that is to say, reading, writing, and arithmetic. We do not compel any child to learn more than these; therefore there is no obligation upon us to offer free instruction in any subjects but these. Education in the higher standards may fairly be paid for, as it is now, by fees; but let the fees be according to the market value of the instruction given, varying according to the locality of the school, the discretion of the schoolmaster, the ability of the parents. But in these higher subjects the State has no right to interfere; because here we at once find ourselves face to face with legitimate differences of opinion—as to what instruction is necessary, and what is expedient, and how it should be imparted. The State can only properly act when the nation is practically of one mind. “One thing must be strenuously insisted upon,” says Mr. John Stuart Mill, “that the Government must claim no monopoly for its education in the lower or higher branches.” “Nor is it to be endured that a Government should either *de jure* or *de facto* have a complete control over the education of the whole people.”

As a necessary condition of compulsion the children must be protected from over-pressure, as they are now, though in a feeble and inefficient way. The number of school-hours must

be limited, as now, and there must be no compulsory home-lessons; there must be a conscience clause, as now; but otherwise, the way in which the school-hours are employed must be left to the discretion of the schoolmaster. He will be judged by results, not by a slavish adherence to the rules of an official code.

To the relief of the parents, and to the relief of the rate-payers, we thus add the relief of the schoolmasters.

What a marvellous energy would this change instil into the whole educational machinery of England! The real educationalists, the true philanthropists, would rush into the vacuum caused by the abolition of School Boards. Bound by the State to exhibit efficiency in the elementary teaching, what variety would they introduce in the methods? Not one unelastic code for the children of the mountains of Wales and the children of the purlieus of Hackney, but a sympathetic training in harmony with the conditions of the scholars. How many schools would then introduce industrial and gymnastic courses! how many would provide the necessary midday dinner under elevating, not pauperizing, conditions! How many special subjects would be taught to the children of parents who could well afford, and would willingly pay, the extra fees, and would prefer not to be treated as pensioners of the State! What a desire would be created in their minds to give to their children something above the bare official, compulsory, unpaid-for standard! What a sense of responsibility would be brought home to them, and what discrimination would they be encouraged to show in selecting between the various standards offered to their unfettered choice!

What encouragement would be given to the profession of teacher! How often would a master endowed with administrative, as well as teaching, skill undertake the superintendence of a whole group of schools in a district, and supply, through a trained staff, not only the elementary, but the secondary education! And how easily, under such circumstances, might the intelligent children of the very poorest parents rise through scholarships by natural and easy gradations up to the highest level of collegiate training known in England!

Such a consummation is worth an effort. The English people are not stingy if they are satisfied that work is efficiently done. In educational matters, especially, there is no end to Parliamentary liberality. The reform we have proposed can, we are certain, be shown to be an economical reform. Nevertheless, we are equally certain that it will be opposed by the department, not on the ground of principle, not on the ground of abstract justice, but on the score of expense.

Let us deal with the finance of the business ; the figures are easily comprehended :

1. Present grant, which is yearly increasing	£2,400,000
2. Present rates for school maintenance, which will be transferred to the taxes, and will have a tendency to grow less	1,000,000
3. School fees, which will hereafter be paid by the Government for school attendance	1,600,000
	<hr/>
	£5,000,000

That will be the annual sum which Parliament will be required to provide directly. Be it remembered, that Parliament now provides precisely the same sum indirectly, and levies it by Act of Parliament. The increase in taxation will be met by a proportional relief from taxation ; and, moreover, the relief will come just to those persons most in need of relief. Thus far, therefore, the financial difficulty is unsubstantial. The proposal is one merely to adjust, not to increase the taxation of the people. We anticipate a vast superiority in the quality of the work done under contract with individuals, to the quality of the work now done by School Boards. Private managers will certainly conduct the present Board schools at a less annual expense than School Boards. The increase of school accommodation, which will be required with the increase of population, will be precisely the same under the new system as under the old. The only difference will be, that the burden in future will be placed on the proper shoulders—the shoulders of the whole nation.

Although a reform may be in itself right and founded on the truest economical principles, yet if it involves a readjustment of taxation distasteful to the Chancellor of the Exchequer of a strong Government, he will probably succeed in inducing the Government to offer it every possible opposition. Reformers, time out of mind, have always had the honour of combating the Governments of the day. Our first effort must be directed to place our arguments before the people rather than before the Government.

Yet in this particular case there is a weapon in the hands of those who belong to the little army of free-traders in national education, which, if wielded with resolution, may compel any Government to come to terms, and may decide the fate of the educational battle. The supporters of voluntary schools are subscribers of £725,000 a year, and are the owners of schools and masters' houses worth £12,000,000. By their liberality thus administered they keep 2,000,000 children off the school-rates. According to the average expenditure of School Boards, the schools and schooling of 2,000,000 children would cost the

ratepayer £2,000,000 a year. Now if the subscribers to voluntary schools determine in a body, and at the same moment, to withdraw their subscriptions and school-plant from supplementing the Parliamentary scheme of secular education, an addition of two millions sterling would by this simple act be thrown upon the ratepayers. Why should they not do so? No Government could stand the shock; and the unjust system of exacting the payment for the performance of a national duty from one class of the community only, would receive its death-blow. It is an appreciation of this fact which impels the Department to endeavour to keep the voluntary system alive, but in a dying state. Its policy is to destroy the voluntary schools one by one, to bleed the volunteers to death by slow degrees, and so to deal with the ratepayers, not in a united body, but by parishes. The Department would be staggered by the voluntary party "striking." Supposing they do "strike," and that next year School Boards are universal; supposing, for the sake of argument, that the ratepayers were to accept mildly, and without remonstrance, so tremendous an addition to their burdens. Would the result be so very disastrous to the cause of religious education? We think not; for at the present time, wherever those who object to definite religious teaching are in a majority, there are School Boards. Therefore, wherever the new School Boards would be established, a majority of religious-minded managers would have complete control, and the maximum of religious training allowed by the law would be imparted to the children. The school would be the property of the religious denomination to whom it at present belongs, and the School Board might be allowed its use during certain hours; at all other times it would be at the disposal of its owners for instruction in that definite religious knowledge without which most Englishmen believe education to be inadequate. The subscriptions which are now paid for the sake of providing such instruction would still be paid; but instead of those subscriptions supplementing secular education, they would be wholly devoted to the purpose for which they were paid.

This is the possibility which we desire Churchmen not to shrink from facing. The very existence of voluntary elementary schools as at present conducted is at stake. Why should we unwisely continue to defend a position after we have been outflanked, when by a judicious change of front we can outflank the enemy? We are strong enough to-day to deal with the case in a masterly and statesmanlike manner; we may not be strong enough to-morrow. For the moment we are allowed to support a precarious existence, because the policy which is destroying us is doing its work with certainty.

We make an appeal to all to assist in a national cause. We claim the help of those who have long ago advocated the duty of providing education free and without cost. We appeal to the ratepayers, who are patient sufferers under a grievous burden, and who are in danger of suffering more. We appeal to the mass of the people who are paying fees heavier than they can well afford. We appeal to the philanthropists who are enlisted in the sacred work of education, who know the deadening influence of the hand of the State, who have marked the sad results of overstrain upon children and teachers, and who note with unutterable disgust the false catch-words which bring victory in School Board elections. We are not afraid of appealing boldly to the secularist who maintains that the State should pay all round for efficient secular education, leaving the religious teaching to the voluntary bodies; to the Nonconformist, "who detests officialism, and believes that a righteous and God-fearing race need very little Government;" and lastly, to the Churchman, who does battle for liberty of conscience, who believes in the absolute duty of parents, be they Catholic or materialist, to insist that their children shall be definitely taught the reasons for their faith, the dogmas upon which, according to their knowledge, the principle of life is founded.

STANLEY LEIGHTON.



ART. IV.—OUR SUPPORT OF FOREIGN MISSIONS.

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS must be our ejaculation, as we learn that, in the year 1882, God's people in the British Isles contributed more liberally towards Foreign Mission work than they had ever done before; nearly £100,000 more than in the previous year.¹ Yet our jubilation will receive a wholesome check, if we realize one aspect of the second verse in that grand old hymn, "Te Deum": "*All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father Everlasting.*" If we Churchmen, whose privilege it is constantly to utter these words, would

¹ British Contributions to Foreign Missions amounted to :

£1,086,678 in the year 1879	} Without reckoning any income from investments or contributions from abroad.
£1,108,950 in the year 1880	
£1,093,569 in the year 1881	
£1,191,175 in the year 1882	