

The Old Parish Schools of Scotland.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER MACRAE, M.A.

“SIR,” said Dr. Johnson to an educational reformer of the period, “I hate by-ways in education. Education is as well known, and has long been as well known as ever it can be.” If Dr. Johnson were alive to-day, would he still maintain that education has long been as well known, as ever it can be? Very probably he would, and perhaps he would not be far wrong. He might even go the length of saying that in spite of all that has been written and said on the subject the last fifty years, we know nothing of any practical value for the work of true education, which was not equally well known to the schoolmasters, who were Dr. Johnson’s contemporaries, and who taught the eighteenth century heroes, whose names loom so large in our literary, commercial, and imperial history. At all events it cannot be alleged against the English schoolmaster of bygone days that his boys were not educated and trained to play the man, and to do their duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call them.

If the true object of education be to train a man to make profitable use, in the affairs of life, of such talents as Nature may have bestowed upon him, the old parish schools of Scotland achieved probably the greatest educational success on record. When these schools began their great work at the end of the seventeenth century, Scotland was perhaps the poorest and most turbulent country in Europe; but in less than a century after the schoolmaster got fairly started, he raised, or at all events largely helped to raise, his country to a prominent, if not a foremost, place in all departments of human activity. And yet there was nothing about the old Scottish school which would not stand hopelessly condemned in the light of the educational theories of the present day. There was no compulsory attendance, no definite syllabus of work, and no examinations in the present-day sense. The subjects taught were few and stereo-

typed, the books used were fewer still. Some boys had no books of their own at all, and were wholly dependent on the generosity of their class fellows for an occasional loan of one during school hours, or sometimes perhaps to be taken home for a night when the fortunate owner could spare it. The building was usually of the most primitive description. The furniture very poor and very scanty. Marks and prizes were as a rule unknown. Scholarships of all kinds were exceedingly rare. In one of the largest of the Highland counties with a population of about 80,000, there was, so far as I know, only one scholarship to help a boy to continue his education at a grammar school. It was founded about 1780, and its yearly value was only a few pounds. I have examined the list of boys who held it from 1780 to 1860, and only one of them so far as I could make out made any real use of it, so that such educational benefits as the boys of that county may have enjoyed in former times were in no sense secured by the aid of any public help or endowment. Whatever good the parish school did for Scotland was due entirely to the nature of the work done by the schoolmaster, and the ideal of life and duty which he succeeded in setting before his pupils. Neither grants nor scholarships, nor other expenditure of public money played any part at all in his work.

My own memory goes back to an old parish school in the Highlands, forty years ago. The schoolmaster was an old man, whose methods and ideals were at least as ancient as the days of Locke. There was absolutely nothing about the school which would not be ruthlessly condemned by any educationist of to-day, and yet, judging from the successes achieved, and the positions attained by many of his pupils, the old man's work could hardly be called a failure. That work was done under conditions which would now be considered quite impossible. From March to November the attendance was very small, about thirty or forty children who were too young to herd cattle or scare crows, and perhaps one or two bigger pupils who enjoyed the distinction of attending school all the year round. By November the season of out-door work for young people was

ended, and the school attendance rapidly increased to over a hundred—boys and girls of varying ages up to eighteen years or more, who came to school during the winter months, most of them intent upon work. The greater number came to improve their writing and arithmetic, and especially their practical knowledge of the English language. But some of them came to learn Latin and mathematics, and to carve out for themselves in due time a career of success which, in their school days, they little dreamt of. In all this varied work the old schoolmaster never received any help. He did everything single-handed, and that was possible only because the spirit of true work was all but universally present, especially among his elder pupils, and the difficulties of discipline and work so familiar to the schoolmaster of to-day were practically unknown. It is no exaggeration to say that those boys who had been at work from the beginning of spring until the end of harvest learned more during their four or five months of attendance at school in winter than the average English schoolboy of to-day does in as many years, and the sacrifices and shifts made use of to provide the necessary books and opportunities for the more advanced work, would seem quite incredible to the London schoolmaster of to-day, with the County Council at his back to encourage himself and his pupils in every form of extravagance.

But it must not be supposed, however, that all the pupils in the old parish school were eagerly thirsting for knowledge. All classes of boys were to be found among them, from the minister's son to the ill-clad urchin of the thriftless labourer, and if some of the boys afterwards achieved success, there were others who did not. But as records of failure are only too easily found everywhere, let me rather notice the class of boys whose careers have done credit to their native parish. I am speaking of a rural parish which, forty years ago, had a population of about 2,000, with four small schools. From that parish there are now in London alone, to my own personal knowledge, several old boys well up in banks, insurance offices, and various business firms ; there are five doctors, one Presbyterian minister,

four schoolmasters, and one journalist. Another is a teacher of science for one of the English County Councils, but he certainly was not taught any so-called science at the old parish school. One of them who died a year or two ago was a knighted member of the Government of one of the largest and most flourishing of our colonies, and one was Prime Minister a few years ago of another colony. In Scotland and the colonies many of them occupy good positions. Quite half a dozen of them who enlisted as private soldiers have risen from the ranks to a commission. Others are farmers in their native county, earning an honest and competent living, and never in arrears with their rent; whereas the rich smiling fields of England are often lying waste because men cannot be got to make the fertile land pay the expense of working it. Perhaps this may not be a very striking record of achievement after all, but it is at least a creditable one, considering that there was hardly a single boy in any of those four schools whose father's yearly income reached £100, or who was allowed to attend school regularly all the year round, or who received any education beyond what was provided in the common school; there was certainly no boy who ever received any outside monetary help for his education. It is evidently possible to obtain the benefits of a practical and profitable education without that lavish expenditure of public money on buildings, appliances, and scholarships with which the present generation is so familiar.

There are probably no schools left among us now where the individual proclivities of the pupils are allowed the same freedom as in the old-fashioned parish schools of Scotland. Every boy was practically free to work as he pleased, so long as he did not make himself objectionable or troublesome, but the overstepping of this limit was always checked with a strong hand. Corporal punishment, however, was of far less frequent occurrence than might be expected under the circumstances in which the schoolmaster had to do his work; and there was never any of that driving and forcing of the stupid or even of the lazy, which is so often expected of the present-day schoolmaster. It was in

the moral force that he brought to bear upon his pupils through the reproof and exhortation which formed a prominent feature of the daily Bible lesson, that the old schoolmaster's influence was chiefly asserted, and the aims and responsibilities of a true life set before the pupils. The unwholesome moral atmosphere which inspectors and examinations have created in the schools of to-day was unfelt and unknown. Under such conditions, then, the individual proclivities of the pupils enjoyed a wide latitude, and it is no less interesting than it is instructive to endeavour to recall the tendencies shown and the promises given by those who have done well in life. It need hardly be said that the promises were very varied, but in the midst of all the variety there was one point of similarity. The boys who have done well all made their first onward move not by showing signs of any special talent, but by neglecting all side considerations, and applying themselves seriously to their school books, until they learned to understand and then to master them. It is mainly from books that we derive the knowledge which raises us to the position of educated men or even to the rank of civilized human beings. The education of direct contact with Nature, of which the present day faddist speaks and writes so volubly, has long since been left to the untutored savage, and for him it may be the best, "but we are made for higher things." We live in a state of civilization which is highly artificial, and the more we adapt ourselves to our surroundings the greater must be our power over them. The boy who has learned to get direct at the meaning and the teaching of good books possesses the key to the whole store of human knowledge, and has within his reach all the benefits that mere secular education can bring.

To sum up, then, the whole secret of the educational success of the old Scottish schoolmaster consisted not in the amount of knowledge he imparted to his pupils, nor in the intellectual training with which he provided them, but in the true and worthy ideal of life and duty which he set before them by means of the Bible, and in the fact that he succeeded in giving so many of them a real interest in their ordinary school books

and a real desire to master and to understand them. The mental habits thus formed at school were afterwards transferred to the ordinary everyday occupations of life, and the result was thorough and successful work in many an undertaking, and capacity for advancement and responsibility whenever an opportunity occurred. After all, the greatest and most important factor in the work of education is the personality of the schoolmaster and the religious belief that is in him, and the sooner we abandon our fads and get back to this truth, which was old long before the days of Dr. Johnson, the better for our schools and for our scholars.



A Rearrangement of the Psalter.

BY THE REV. S. C. LOWRY, M.A.

FOR two hundred and fifty years our English Prayer-Book has maintained its present form. Any alterations made therein have been slight and insignificant. Practically it stands to-day as it existed in the Stuart dynasty. This feature is esteemed and prized by a certain type of mind, conservative of accustomed methods and apprehensive of any change. To such the rigidity of the Prayer-Book makes for calmness and quietness, is a guarantee of continuity, and an evidence of the unity of, at any rate, the Anglican branch of the Church. They find pleasure in the thought that from generation to generation the same time-honoured services have been held, the same prayers read, the same Psalms sung, without alteration or, at any rate, without any serious break. To others, however, this unchangeableness, this rigidity, is a matter for regret rather than satisfaction. They think that grooves are dangerous and may be sometimes deadly. They consider that progress is a note of a living Church, and that progress may mean the adaptation of the services to the needs of successive ages. They feel, for