

THE FAMILY PARLIAMENT.

[THE RULES OF DEBATE will be found in our December issue. The Editor's duty will be to act as "Mr. Speaker"; consequently, while preserving due order in the discussion, he will not be held to endorse any opinions that may be expressed on either side, each debater being responsible for his own views.]

* placed before a speaker's name denotes distinction in a former debate.

ARE WE OVER-EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN?

(Debate resumed.)

J. C. STEVENS:—While disclaiming the thought that even the lowest of the lower class can receive injury from "a good sound liberal education," I maintain that what is afforded in our public schools is not an education strictly of that sort, but goes beyond it, having regard to the general class of children who receive it. The standards up to the fourth are not beyond the attainment of a *very regular attendant* of the age of twelve, with ordinary capacity; but, in the first place, regular attendance is a great hardship, and in many cases an impossibility. Winter or wet weather in the country, with a school two miles off, is an awkward fact. In the second place, a fault in the compulsory system is starting from the point that all children are of equal capacity. It is no doubt difficult to deal with; but one child of ten will pass the Fourth Standard, and be exempt from attending school; while another child, perhaps duller or more nervous, is never able to pass it in all three branches, and therefore has to continue at school up to fourteen, though his parents may be in far greater need of his little help at an early age.

MARGARET M. OSLER:—Mr. Speaker, Though I entirely sympathise with some of the remarks made by the Opener of the debate (as, for instance, his condemnation of the system of "cramming"), still I think that at present our children are certainly not *over-educated*. It seems to me rather that we have not even yet advanced far enough in the science of education; that we are too easily satisfied by making our children pass certain rule-of-thumb, mechanical examinations, instead of making it our aim to develop and draw out all their faculties, to make their minds receptive and alive to all that is best about them, not merely in school, but out of it; not merely in their lessons, but in their lives. We ought not only to make them learn a few things, but rather to make them *capable* of learning many things. Our teachers should be trained to consider the passing of standards and examinations not as the *end* of education, but as one of the means thereunto. It is a great mistake to confound over-cramming with over-educating; and that mistake has, I think, been made by the Opener of the debate, if he will forgive me saying so. For myself, I am not without hope that, before long, teachers will recognise the advantage of *educating* rather than cramming the children, even in the matter of \mathcal{L} s. d.; for there is no doubt that many of the cases of undue forcing have arisen from the anxiety of teachers to obtain large grants. I believe that quite as large a percentage of passes could be obtained in the long run by a broad, free, generous system as by a cramped, mechanical, conventional system, and that the children would by that means be more perfectly educated. As long as there is so much ignorance, poverty, distress, crime in this our country, we shall find it difficult to believe that our children are *over-educated*, we must rather admit that, in spite of systems, examinations, and inspections, we have still much left to do before we can even say that they are *well* educated.

W. WALLER:—In the course of business I have had occasion to engage a number of boys fresh from elementary schools, who have, of course, passed the Sixth Standard. One of the first tests I apply is to give them an ordinary manuscript letter to read, and although most of them know better than I do what are the natural resources of Timbuctoo, and possess a fair knowledge of free-hand drawing, yet five out of six will find it

read such a letter in an intelligible manner. Is not this proof in itself of the evil of this over-education? The teaching which should educate them for their respective positions in life is neglected, while a lot of useless information is crammed into their over-wrought brains.

DONALD HENRY, M.A.:—Forster, Fawcett, Goldwin Smith—these, Sir, are weighty names to be arrayed against us: names which embrace a wide field of political and educational opinion. Nevertheless I would humbly place before you, Sir, my reason for believing that in this important matter of education they have erred. But first permit me to ask you to glance over the names which appear on the world's scroll of fame. And what do we find? We find this, Sir: that the mightiest men of the past, the men who have done most for, and who therefore have benefited humanity most, have been men who have "risen from the ranks." Would it not, then, be a wiser policy to do all possible to bring out *more* of such men than to do anything which might seem to put an obstacle in their way? Do we not cultivate our gardens to produce the best fruit? Do our farmers not strive by every means to improve their stock, so as at least to have one or two prize animals? Why treat our brother-man worse? But, Sir, over-education I hold to be a contradiction in terms. Sir, there cannot be over-education any more than there can be over-clearness of expression or over-excellence of eyesight. As the clearest expression and the healthiest eyesight are gifts to be prized and used, so also is the highest form of education, and so is that education to be carried to its highest point. For, Sir, what is education? It is emphatically an enlarging. It is the drawing of a man or child out of himself—out of his narrowness and selfishness into the broad tide of universal knowledge. It is the taking away from him of his singularity, which cramps, and at the same time stamping him with his individuality, which is strength. It is the widening of the area of his vision, and enabling him to see himself and all things in their true relationship, and as made for their own proper use. This being so, Sir, not only should the child under the power of education be brought gradually to find his own only position in the world, but it should enable him to see more clearly than he would have done without it the sacredness of that position, and the debt he owes to everything about him. It will be objected to this that while true of adults, it will not hold among children. Sir, I ask to be told why it does not, or should not, hold among children? They are the same mentally and physically with adults, and why should their mental food affect them differently? Sir, I dare say it does not. And the cause of our error here is that, the startling junctures of child-life being few, we do not mark so often the effects of their education as we do in those of maturer years. There cannot be *over-education*.

* CATHARINE DICKSON LOGAN:—Mr. Speaker, If this question applied to Board School children alone there would be little debate on the subject. Few who have read the account in the papers of the cramming some scholars have to undergo under the New Code, will feel any doubt that they, at least, are being surfeited with—shall I say education?—hardly that, rather a series of dry facts. But the question is a wider one—regarding England's children generally; and still I contend that they are grossly over-educated. By this we mean, their heads are filled with knowledge that unfits them for their right place in the

world. Sometimes children of people who have risen in life are sent to a so-called good school that they may be better educated than their parents. There they learn this, that, and the other, which make them feel home life rather a bore, and domestic duties sadly below them. They even dictate to their parents what they themselves will or will not learn, and teach them how to manage the house. Another evil is that the quantity of learning must be compressed into so small a limit of time that the health or eyesight of the pupils is often affected. Our forefathers were surprised to see young people in glasses, but now in any good-sized school several such may be found. This "over-educating" is effected in several ways, and one means rarely recognised is the incapacity of teachers. Many persons take to this mode of gaining a livelihood as being the most lady-like, without an idea of what they are undertaking. They seem to think the pupils can do anything, and in any quantity they choose to give. Then the current amount of cramming for examinations is deplorable. For six or twelve months pupils have to go through a course of preparation for the next Local Examination. During this time they study only the subjects and periods needed for it, so their education at the best part of their school life becomes one-sided. Before the examination comes they generally feel ill for weeks; but that is quite a secondary consideration! The Examination must be passed, and if they are at all muddled in their ideas a "coach" is employed to fix names, dates, &c., in their minds. But beyond this is the low stand many schools take, and are content to take, as far as real education is concerned. Teachers are ready to give scholars any amount of technical learning, while their aim should be to awaken in their minds an earnest search after knowledge. They should remember that in the school-days of our boys and girls is only the beginning of learning, whereas the best knowledge is what one attains later in life. I should be the first to advocate a high standard of education, meaning not so much the imparting of knowledge as the awakening of the pupils' minds. Certainly the system of education pursued in many schools is not beneficial, mentally, morally, or physically.

ALTHEIA:—Does education tend to make the people discontented? No! I grant you that now, while compulsory education is a new thing, and has only reached the younger generation, a certain amount of discontent and of conceit has arisen. The parents, ignorant themselves, look upon their children as prodigies—"Among the blind, the one-eyed is a king!"—but this, in a few years, will right itself; it will then be no more a marvel that the poorest man can read, write, and cipher, than that he can walk. Surely, when a man is educated to make the best use of all his faculties, he is much more likely to be a contented, yes, and a thankful man—patriotic and loyal to his country, the country that has looked after his best interests, and educated him even against his will—just as a man sent to sea in a well-appointed ship is more likely to be a contented man than one sent out in a miserable vessel which cannot make way. True education makes a man observant; now, is not an observant man, seeing with clearer vision the mighty works of God, more likely to be a good man, and more likely to thank God for his life, and to strive to make the best of his life?

S. VON S.:—As to the cost of our present system of education, it is easy to say, a few shillings or even a few pounds per head; but to me, a poor and heavily taxed father, it is a serious matter pecuniarily, and rather aggravating to feel that I am somewhat crippled now, to be still further crippled when trying to find employment for my own children. By all means let our children be taught to read and write and cipher well. If there be a Stephenson, a Faraday, or a Siemens among them, be sure he will come to the front—nothing will keep him back. But let us avoid the Latin, the science, which is, except in the case of

those who are studying for the post of pupil-teacher, lost almost as soon as acquired, and whilst reducing the expense, increase the health, the physical strength of the future men and women of England. If the money must be spent, I would say, instead of dabbling in languages and sciences, spend it on the homes. The effect on drunkenness will be equally the same; it will be the best of education, a self-respect, and there will arise a prosperity that all the Latin, French, botany, and chemistry ever taught in a Board School could never call forth. As it is, subjects are only half taught, and still less learned, the pupil's head is turned with the idea that he is a learned lad, and he scorns to work with his hands; the result is the almost starved clerk, the thousands out of employ.

J. BOWES:—The Opener of this debate has, by appealing to our tenderest sympathies, thrown a specious veil over his arguments. Who can contemplate without a shudder the harrowing spectacle presented of the annual massacre of thousands of innocents, and the lingering destruction of thousands of others? Statistics are not always facts; and I would ask where these miserable little martyrs are to be found? Go at closing time to any of our large Board schools, and see the children pouring out by hundreds. Where are the pale faces, the enfeebled bodies, the failing eyes? If they are there, I can only say the owners are Spartans, and keep up their spirits in a wonderful fashion. As to the subjects taught, will our people be any the worse if by a knowledge of botany a country walk becomes a "joy for ever"? Will a labourer delve one whit the worse if he knows something of the laws of chemistry? Will the mechanic prosecute his labours less skilfully because he has learnt something of the lever, the wheel, and the pulley? Will our servants be any the worse if they know the constituents and relative value of food and the laws of sanitary science? Will our working people enjoy ribald songs if their ears have been trained to appreciate good music? Shall we blame them if, by the discrimination which comes from a knowledge of art, they hang on their walls beautiful prints or engravings in place of the coloured daubs of their forefathers? I object to the Opener's assertion that the groundwork on which education must rest is "common sense." By all means cultivate that valuable article; but I assert that the groundwork of education must be religion. Make our children good practical Christians, otherwise the education which strengthens the mind and sharpens the intellect is worthless; nay, injurious: it may make clever rogues, but not useful men. I assert that knowledge, as the handmaid of religion, is the only lever that can raise the masses; its acquisition is no monopoly; therefore I declare we are *not* over-educating our children.

The Debate on this question will be resumed in our next issue. The Honorarium of One Guinea is awarded to JOHN COSSEY, Loddon, Norfolk, whose speech will be given at the adjourned Debate.

Other speeches, supporting Opener's argument that we *are* Over-Educating our Children, received from—A. S. Black, E. S. Bannester, A. M. B., An Elementary School Teacher, A. Y., Spero Meliora, E. J. Bull, M. A. Roberts, George A. Pearson, J. H. Langford, J. C., George Rilot, Mrs. Gabriel Davis, 554, J. H. Allen, T. P. Garbutt, D. T., F. E. Andrews, J. Wolton, W. E. Plyer, Isabella Elliott, E. B. Jones, W. F. Holtom, G. Nash, W., C. Moore, A Poor Ratepayer, E. Poole, E. G. Goddard, T. Bunting, J. B., G. Midcilli, W. King, A. B. C., J. Eaton Fearn, Henry R. White.

Other speeches, supporting Opponent's argument that we *are not* Over-Educating our Children, received from H. Ingram, D'A. Rupert Tate, J. Bolton, J. Cromar, A. E. Robinson, A. Polson, A. J. Jakeman, Celia, Grey, A. W. S., J. McCurrach, R. J. Walker, A. H. Beal, J. Hedley, M. N. Champney, J. Brearley, W. Irvin, T. H. Cox, R. F. Colam, W. J. Chell, F. Dolman, J. H. Judd, T. Brown, T. Proud, H. Vaughan Walker, A Working Man, Charlotte A. Fritchard, H. K. Roads.



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ARE WE OVER-EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN?

(Debate concluded.)

HENRY R. WHITE:—Is it too much, Sir, to expect that those who are continually urging the necessity of higher education should try to prove their case by facts? Yet, while they are constantly demanding more statistics from those who maintain that education is being carried to excess to-day, they produce none of their own, they do not attempt to answer those already given, and merely seek by a rhetorical flourish to evade them. But it cannot be denied, Sir, that brain-disorders are on the increase among the juveniles; nor can it be denied that there is a dearth of artisans, labourers, and domestic servants, while there is an immense army of clerks and morning governesses, whose earnings, when at work, scarcely enable them to live, and who would think themselves supremely fortunate if they could but secure the wages of those whom they regard as altogether beneath them. And is not the British householder severely taxed to provide for the children of the poor an education which encourages them to look forward to positions which the vast majority can never occupy, and which is therefore making them discontented citizens and vicious members of society? The truth seems to be, Sir, that this question of education is but another illustration of the time-honoured proverb, "Extremes meet." We suddenly awoke to the fact that the education of the poorer classes was shamefully neglected, forthwith we rushed to the opposite extreme, and now are educating them to an absurdly high degree. But that there is a happy mean, there cannot be a doubt; and if I may venture to suggest it, I would say, Give every child a thorough elementary *English* education. Teach them the three R's, grammar, geography, and English history; the girls, sewing, cooking, and domestic duties; and the boys, mechanical drawing and mensuration. Away with foreign languages and the "ologies" from our elementary schools; they are harmful to an infinite degree. Nor let our opponents say that we are keeping our poorer brethren down. We are doing nothing of the sort, Sir; for "in this busy world of ours men naturally find their own level," and the sharper boys and girls will always come to the front. And then is the time for our benevolent friends to help these prodigies, by founding scholarships to aid them in their further studies. But as to the great majority of children, the course of study I have indicated is amply sufficient; and if followed, the supply of poor clerks and governesses would be at once restricted, the better-paid and not less honourable classes of artisans and domestic servants would be properly supplied, and instead of brain-afflicted children, and complaining tax-payers, we should have a vigorous and hearty race to follow us, while householders would gladly pay their mite to aid the good cause of educating those who, through no fault of their own, have been thrown into less favourable circumstances than themselves.

A WORKING MAN:—I have listened with much pleasure to the able speech of our learned friend who opened the debate. It no doubt fairly represents the feeling of a large number of his constituents. But as I cannot accept all his statements, much less his conclusions, I wish to say a few words on his wonderful sentence: "Does it not raise the children above their station, make them discontented with their surroundings, cause them to despise honest labour and manual industries, while it does not provide them a field for using the heterogeneous knowledge with which they have been crammed?" Certainly if a child has been "dragged

up" in narrowed surroundings, education, as it always does, stirs the hopes and prompts inquiry; and when these are allowed to be acted upon by knowledge, they can often be traced to the source of many an honourable citizen's career—not through discontent of honest trades, but because they have patiently, painfully, and justly fulfilled their honest trade. Intelligence first, work intelligently done second, the recompense third. Therefore there is an honest *discontent* as well as a dishonest; and my experience, Mr. Speaker, is that we gain more by the former than we lose by the latter. And, let me add, I pity the locality in which the hon. gentleman resides if such is not his also. The "heterogeneous knowledge," whatever that may mean, is said to be useless. Perhaps it is, so far as £ s. d. are concerned, in some cases; but it may be the means of imparting a wide field of healthy recreation.

* CHARLOTTE A. PRITCHARD:—Mr. Speaker—Sir, This is a question upon which it is very difficult to give a decisive answer, so many and so conflicting are the various shades of opinion brought to bear upon the subject. However, setting aside the much-disputed point of "over-cramming," and taking into consideration the immense advantages to be reaped from a fair knowledge of things past, present, and I had almost said future, I think I must join issue with Mr. Opponent, and try to show that we are *not* over-educating our children. To begin with, what would be the first effects of keeping our children in the rear-guard of this great educational race which is being run so animatedly by all around us? of forbidding them to compete honourably, fearlessly, and undauntedly with their fellows? What, I say, would be the first effects of such a course? Only this, they would soon feel themselves inferior in intellect to their companions, they would become diffident, shy, and awkward; unable to converse freely and unconstrainedly with their compeers; and after a time they would become so painfully sensitive of their general backwardness that they would shun all intellectual society, and give themselves up to those idle and profitless amusements which have proved the ruin of so many of the sons of men. Again, it has always been said that the best fortune we can leave our children is a good education. Riches may fail them, friends desert them, but their knowledge no man can take from them; with it they can go forth into the world and place themselves as determined conquerors in the great struggle of life; and in that struggle, which men are they who generally come to the fore, the educated or the non-educated ones? And, last of all, think of the good education has done amongst our poorer classes; think of the homes it has refined, the drunkenness it has cured, the souls it has saved from a life of misery, wretchedness, and wrong-doing! Contrast the sober, hard-working, painstaking labourer of to-day with the slovenly, intemperate, lazy artisan of yesterday! Education acts as a great refiner, it makes noble that which was ignoble, it teaches us, imperceptibly perhaps at first, but none the less surely that—

"'Tis not for man to trifle! Life is brief,
And sin is here.
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,
A dropping tear.
We have no time to sport away the hours,
All must be earnest in a world like ours."

W. KING:—In discussing any subject, it is usual to attach great weight to professional opinion—doctors' on medicine, merchants' on commerce, and so forth. I therefore thought it a noteworthy comment on Opponent's speech when, after reading it, I took up my paper and chanced on the following:—"The majority of elementary teachers in this country have passed the following resolution by an unanimous vote, 'That the work required by the new code is considerably more than can be done by an ordinary child in an ordinary school during the regular school hours.'" This is, to my mind, most significant. There may be some (of whom Opponent may be one) who will think self-interest dictated this, but I would fain think better of those whose business it is to train our children. At all events, this opinion would have been entitled to respect had it emanated from a minority of the profession, but an almost unanimous vote is doubly so. More important still, perhaps, is the fact that "700 reports have been sent back from the Education Department to Inspectors for re-consideration." This means that the schools were not, in the opinion of the Inspectors, up to the required standard, and such a wholesale failure is conclusive proof that the standard is too high.

H. VAUGHAN WALKER:—In replying to the allegations which the honourable member asserts against the education system of this country, I will at the outset place before you two facts, which at once prove that the assertions of the honourable member, in the main, are wrong. In 1882, Leicester earned the highest Government grant in this country, viz., 18s. 0½d. per head; and on reference to the Registrar's returns, we find that juvenile mortality has decreased in Leicester since the Education Act came in force. At Goole also the schools are in a high state of efficiency, five out of six schools having received the "excellent merit grant." Her Majesty's Inspector, in his report, referring to the large boys' school, says: "Here, as in all schools under the Board, no signs of over-pressure can be detected; indeed, happiness and healthy rivalry reign supreme." And speaking of a large infant school, he goes on to say: "The children are bright and intelligent, and though far advanced, are evidently not overworked."

* J. EATON FEARN:—The true end of all education is to equip a person to fight successfully in life's great battle, and a soldier's accoutrements should be distributed out of the great armoury of learning according to his individual necessities. It is requisite in any country that there should be "all sorts and conditions of men." We cannot *all* be editors, doctors, or parsons, any more than we can *all* be joiners, bakers, or drapers. It is evident, therefore, that a person's education must differ in measure as well as in sort. A smattering of science, a taste for matters literary, or an accurate knowledge of English history, will not make a man a better joiner or baker. If we employ a man to trim our garden, we expect him to know how to plant and to dig, and not to quote "Hamlet," or put himself in striking dramatic attitudes with his spade. But the present system of education drags a lad by sheer force, irrespective of abilities, inclination, or future position, up to a certain given standard, and that by no means an easy one. Is it unnatural, therefore, that an indolent lad, of by no means brilliant talent, having received sufficient education to fit him for the duties of an inferior clerk, should despise an honest trade, by which he could earn a comfortable living by the sweat of his brow? And does not the present system entail a great burden on the pockets of their poor parents, who have to keep them at school, to learn a lot of useless things? Are not the long hours and tedious lessons the cause of numerous bodily ailments to the children themselves, whose minds reap benefit at the expense of their ill-fed, ill-clothed bodies? And does not this "little knowledge" create within the minds of the children themselves a spirit of rude criticism; a contempt for honest manual labour, and those who work with their hands; feelings of dissatisfaction with their present position; and a false estimate of what they really do know? Surely, Sir, every honest, truth-seeking reader of your widely-read Magazine will arrive at the logical conclusion

that we *are* "over-educating" the children of our poorer brethren.

* JOHN COSSEY:—Mr. Speaker,--The present time is most opportune to bring up for consideration and discussion the question now before us, and I feel sure a large majority will be with me in opposition to the Opener's assertion "that we are over-educating our children." His arguments are clearly based on statements made of exceptional cases, and not from personal observation. Admitting that the standards get higher each year, it must be remembered the only compulsory part of them is made up of the three R's. The Education Department very properly hold out inducements, in the shape of extra grants, to those schools taking up extra subjects successfully; it is for members of School Boards and managers to decide whether or not they will teach extra subjects; and as they are an elective body, virtually it rests with the parents themselves. The inducement to get children to school between three and five, held out by the School Board referred to by the Opener, is clearly a step towards preventing the necessity of what the Opener calls "diligent cramming:" the children become early initiated in regular habits; and in many cases their temporary absence from homes of vice and misery is of itself sufficient to encourage others to take up this or any other system having the same aim. The scare of over-education would very soon be a real anxiety if the code encouraged the pushing forward of the most intelligent children—often the weakest, constitutionally. If the standards are so extremely difficult, surely one each year is sufficient for any child. The teacher's time is much better employed in making the average and dull children efficient. No doubt there are exceptional cases of prolonged hours and over-pressure; they are entirely in opposition to the intention of our national system of elementary education embodied in our Education Acts and Code, and are certainly not necessary where the school work is kept up throughout the whole year. Home lessons should be encouraged in the upper standards, not new or difficult lessons, but such as would assist in fixing in the children's minds more clearly the purport of lessons already studied. The Opener's statement that blindness and brain disease among children is on the increase requires statistics in proof thereof. Then a question arises: May not this increase be attributed to other causes—*i.e.*, drink, &c.? Is the sixth a fair standard to quote in measuring the quality of work demanded? There are few districts in which the bye-laws make that a compulsory standard. Probably for a few years education may have a tendency to create a large supply of clerks, inferior teachers, &c.; it will not be long before the knowledge acquired will enable people to see that the healthy occupation and homes of our agricultural labourers and domestic servants are preferable to the lighter and less healthy employments. Of course the education should be varied to suit the circumstances of the district; and that which is likely to be of most use to the children in after-life should have precedence. The teaching of girls to sew, iron, bake, &c., should be done at home, as they may be taught without loss of time. I do not think my opinion of the result of our present educational system is too sanguine. I anticipate, amongst other benefits, increased thriftiness and a considerable falling off of pauperism that will more than balance the "cost" of education; a decrease of intemperance, and a better knowledge and more care in sanitary matters, which mean less of fevers and misery. In conclusion, Sir, I will earnestly ask the members of our Family Parliament present in this debate, not only to join with me in expression of approval of our present educational system, but to use their individual influence and ability in getting the labouring class to voluntarily avail themselves of it.

[END OF THE DEBATE ON OVER-EDUCATION.]

In the next Number of the Magazine a Debate on the question, "Ought the State to Provide Healthy Homes for the Poor?" will be opened.

* To this speech has been awarded the Honorarium of One Guinea.