

**WHAT TO LEARN AND WHAT TO
UNLEARN. SOME ERRORS
POINTED
OUT IN THE TEACHING OF RICH
AND POOR IN THREE LECTURES**

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What to Learn and What to Unlearn. Some Errors Pointed out in the Teaching of Rich and Poor in Three Lectures by Henry Fearon

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HENRY FEARON

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WHAT TO LEARN
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SOME ERRORS POINTED OUT

IN THE

TEACHING OF RICH AND POOR:

IN

THREE LECTURES

ON

COMMON THINGS;

WORKING LIFE;

MENTAL VIGOUR;

BY

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RECTOR OF LOUGHBOROUGH,

AND HONORARY CANON OF PETERBOROUGH.

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PREFACE.

It has lately been the fashion to complain that Mechanics' Institutes and their kindred Societies have not done the good which was expected of them.

It is true that they have not done what some persons expected, nor is this surprising, if we consider how unreasonable those expectations were.

If we imagined that Mechanics' Institutes would be able to produce a total and immediately perceptible change in the working classes, who would universally avail themselves of the facilities thus offered for self-instruction and improvement, we have been much disappointed. If we entertained the more rational expectation, that some, the intelligent portion, of the working class, when induced to join these societies, would have their field of information largely extended, and if we anticipated that their minds would, by means of the lectures delivered and publications disseminated, be directed to subjects of interesting enquiry quite unknown to them before, we have found our expectations most fully realized.

It is admitted that, speaking generally, only the upper portion of the working class has been reached, and that there is a stratum below, which

seems inaccessible to all ameliorating influences. But if on those who constitute this apparently hopeless section of the community an impression is to be made, in no way is it so likely to be effected as by imparting a higher moral and mental cultivation to the class immediately above them. Thus an example will be given them likely to be very influential, because proceeding from those who are their brethren in labour, and their superiors, not in station, but only in diligence and good conduct. In this way individual members even of the lowest section will from time to time become sensible of the value of instruction, and a leaven will be introduced which may operate slowly and gradually on the mass.

If we would rightly appreciate the usefulness of societies which instruct the humbler classes, we need only consider how many branches of knowledge there are in which the educated portions of the community have made great progress of late years, but of which the full practical benefit cannot be reaped, until the subjects are taken up and comprehended by the people at large. I would instance sanitary knowledge. Until the laws of health are understood and *believed in* by the lower orders of the people, we shall have nests of fever and disease in every town: and the best laws for the preservation of public health will be defeated by the dogged ignorance of those for whose benefit they are principally required.

Moreover legislation will proceed slowly on such subjects through the passive resistance of the less enlightened portions of the middle class. *Damnata quod non intelligunt.*

It is therefore of the utmost consequence that this knowledge should not be confined to scientific men, or expressed only in technical phrases, but that it should be widely spread by every available means, thoroughly popularized, inculcated in lectures and simple treatises, explained in the easiest words, and "in a language understood of the people."

Now it cannot be disputed that on questions of sanitary science the Mechanics' Institutes have done essential service. I know of no subject which they have handled so ably and so perseveringly, and I believe that for such popular knowledge as does exist about it, we are mainly indebted to the earnest and well-timed exertions of their lecturers.

We may also reckon it among the advantages conferred by these Institutions that they have placed in the way of the less educated classes new and interesting topics of conversation. Of these our working men had very few till of late years. Those among them who from their desire of mental improvement most deserved aid and sympathy, appeared to have very little conversation which could be called intellectual, if we except the doctrines of religion, and these unfortunately

they were disposed to take up more frequently in a controversial than a devotional spirit. It must surely be right to have introduced, for the humbler classes, as our practice shows we consider it to be for the higher, some variety in the subjects of thought. Through the study of man's past history, and by acquaintance with the laws on which his social progress and happiness depend, we become better citizens and wiser men; while in the ever-extending fields of knowledge which natural science lays open we may find sources of boundless and delightful amusement, exalting immeasurably our ideas of the Almighty attributes, and strengthening the steadfastness of our religious principles. Such studies, moreover, possess this great advantage for the working classes, that they require little or no previous erudition.

In this way Institutions, whether designed for Mechanics, or intended, under the title of Philosophical Societies, for a higher class in the social scale, have proved fruitful means of recreation and of improvement to the inhabitants of every town in which they have been formed.

It was in the hope of giving to these Societies such assistance as I could render, that I delivered the following Lectures, which were published separately; and it is with the same desire, since no copies of them are left, that I am induced to reprint them.

H. F.

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