

**THE SACRIFICE OF EDUCATION
TO EXAMINATION:
LETTERS FROM "ALL SORTS
AND CONDITIONS OF MEN"**

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The sacrifice of education to examination: letters from "all sorts and conditions of men" by
Auberon Herbert

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AUBERON HERBERT

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*Letters from "all sorts and conditions
of men."*

EDITED BY
AUBERON HERBERT.

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PREFACE.

I ought to say that the letters in this volume—received in connection with the Protest—should be looked upon as an expression, not only of educational opinion but also of general opinion. Many of them were not written in the first instance for publication, but, perhaps, are not the less interesting on that account. My friend, Mr. Knowles, has kindly handed me over such letters as he himself received, and of these—with permission of the writers—I have added many to the collection. I have tried to hold the balance fairly by printing all the adverse letters I received, and I do not think I have kept back any criticism that seemed of value. I have also added—acting on the courteous suggestion of the Editor, Mr. Barr Ferree—some extracts from an interesting pamphlet that has lately been published in America, "Examination and Education," (Leonard Scott Publication Co., New York). It is a record of the opinions of well-known men engaged in American education, and contains, as I venture to think, an even stronger indictment than that made in England against examination, considering that in America the special cause of mischief, that has grown to such proportions with us, seems hardly to exist,—I mean, the separation of the teacher and the examiner into two distinct persons.*

This distinction should be clearly borne in mind, since it is only where A. is appointed to examine the work of B. that the real powers for mischief, which are latent in examination, become fully developed. The American letters are very interesting, just because some of them shew the bad side of examination, even when

* "The conditions here are very different from those in England, as we have no special examiners in our Colleges and Universities, with reference to degrees and prizes, but the Professors examine the pupils in the departments in which they have given them instruction."—President CARTER, Williams' College. See also other passages.

left in the hands of the teachers themselves; but the evils from which our American friends suffer, though well worthy of careful attention, and very instructive as regards this controversy, seem light by the side of our own.

On two criticisms of a rather popular kind I should like to touch. It has been said that we, who have protested, desire to protect education from the competition that prevails everywhere in the world. If we did, we should undoubtedly fail in our effort, and deserve to fail. Competition is the path by which all improvement comes to us. But the natural and healthy competition of method against method, each seeking for the approval of the public, and a highly artificial competition, that assimilates all methods to one pattern, and draws its principal inspirations from the race-course, are two very different things, that must not be confused together. It is, I think, from a failure to make this distinction that one writer, slashing at us in rather desperate fashion, speaks of some of the proposals of the Protest as "reactionary and anti-democratic."

Again, it has been urged that we should have advanced against each great branch of education in detail, and not have delivered our attack along the whole line. To have done so would have been to have given up the advantage of our position, and to have missed the opportunity of impressing upon the public mind the common lesson, which is presented, everywhere alike, by the condition of the different parts of education to-day. Everywhere alike there is pain and feverish action instead of healthy action, because everywhere alike we are depending on stimulants, are subordinating teachers to system, and treating those who learn only too much after the fashion in which we treat sheep or oxen, that are to be fattened for the market, and are expected to realize so much by the score. It is because general principles, which underlie the successful treatment of human nature, have been disregarded, that the resulting evils are in common, and that the protest should be in common.

It now only remains for me to add some expression of my sense of my own unfitness to take any prominent part in this great controversy. I have felt this many times, whilst fighting side

by side with those whose knowledge as regards many parts of the subject was of so thorough a character, and so different from mine. At the same time I see that in our world, such as it is, very unworthy instruments are used for great causes ; and it is best on the whole that such instruments should not waste time in discussing their own unworthiness, but rather give themselves up, in such fashion as they can, to the work that lies in front of them.

I am afraid in one respect I may seem an idle editor. I have not tried to arrange the letters in any special order, but with a few exceptions as regards foreign countries, &c., have decided to print them pretty nearly as they lay in their packets. I should also perhaps take this opportunity of saying that the canvass for signatures was necessarily made in a very insufficient manner. Had it been conducted with more expensive machinery, and on a wider and more systematic plan, the signatures would in all probability have been much more numerous. Those who did not receive the Protest, and yet had every right to expect that it should have been sent to them, will, I hope, under the circumstances make excuses for the very imperfect circulation of it.

I have inserted in the volume a few extracts sent to me. These might have been indefinitely multiplied.

AUBERON HERBERT.

OLD HOUSE, RINGWOOD.

July, 1889.

ABSTRACT OF PROTEST.

The following is a free summary of the Protest which was signed by those whose names follow, and which was kindly published by Mr. Knowles in the *Nineteenth Century*, Nov., 1888. I have simply attempted to give the general drift of the Protest.

The Protest began by attacking the prevailing spirit of place-getting and prize-winning in education, and, in the words used in another part of the Protest, the dominant position assigned to examination, as the master instead of the servant of the teacher. Whether in the case of elementary schools, of scholarships, or of the class list at the Universities, it affirmed that evils of the same type tended to follow in every case the subjection of teaching to examination.

It went on to notice some of the evils that result from the intellectual racing of boys against each other, warning parents that the physical ill-effects were often not disclosed at the moment; it described the centralising influence which great prizes had on education, leading all schools to adopt the same methods and thus cutting one deep rut in which all those engaged in education travelled; and it then laid special stress on the narrowing and depressing effect which reading with a view to satisfy the examiner's mind necessarily has on the student. As regards this last point, it was impossible to discuss all the hurtful consequences that arose, such as "the temporary strengthening of the rote-faculties to the neglect of the rational faculties, the rapid forgetfulness of knowledge acquired, the cultivation of a quick superficiality and power of cleverly skimming a subject, the consequent incapacity for undertaking original work, the desire to appear to know rather