

**THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
RAGGED SCHOOLS**

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The Philosophy of Ragged Schools by Caroline Frances Cornwallis

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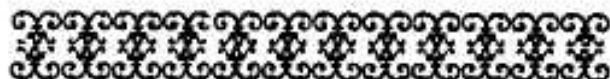


*Caroline Frances Cornwallis*



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## THE PHILOSOPHY OF RAGGED SCHOOLS.

### INTRODUCTION.

**I**T is but a short time since we were all startled by the news that almost every throne in Christendom had been shaken or overturned by popular insurrection; nor were these insurrections, as on former occasions, headed by persons influential in the State, whom the people followed as their leaders—they were not merely for the subversion of an unpopular party, or the removal of an oppressive law—they aimed at the re-construction of the whole system of society; but where successful, theories so wild were propounded and acted on, that it was at once perceivable that a class of persons very little aware of the duties or the difficulties of government, had for the time taken the management of affairs.

This outbreak of popular discontent, — ay, and this demonstration too, of popular power, which frightened all Europe from its propriety, is just now lulled : but is it quieted altogether ? — has military execution sweetened the bitter cup of poverty, or can we expect that a tranquillity so procured will be lasting ? This is a question which all ask themselves, from the throne to the cottage : — can any one give a satisfactory answer ? — Even while the writer is preparing these sheets for the press, events may solve the problem, and then, will England, whose anchors held firm during the strain of the last storm, ride out another equally well ? The question is no light one, and deserves, not *more* attention, but *wiser* attention than has yet been bestowed upon it.

There are few probably who have not of late years become aware that the state of society is not a healthy one : that there is much of misery and vice, and of luxury and vice also in such close juxta position, that it can hardly fail to awaken discontent in the class which is subjected to the rigour of the law for offences of no deeper dye, though different in kind, from those daily perpetrated by persons of the so-called *better* classes. Furthermore, it has be-

come painfully apparent that when these discontents reach a certain pitch, revolutions very distasteful to those better and higher classes, are apt to take place. All this is well known, and a variety of remedies have from time to time been proposed for the social evils whose existence all acknowledge. Ireland was groaning under the effects of ignorance and faction: "Give us Catholic Emancipation," cried certain demagogues, and the cry was echoed by the people. Some persons ventured to suggest that whatever might be the abstract justice of the demand, the country was suffering from other evils than those produced by the disability to sit in Parliament, which prevented some thirty or forty gentlemen of the Romish faith from lending their aid to the national councils. These unenthusiastic persons, however, were disregarded;—"Catholic Emancipation" was the one thing needful:—*that* would quiet all disturbances, make a lawless population obedient to their rulers, and fill a starving people with bread. It was given; what followed? Were the evils of Ireland cured? On the contrary; they have increased ten fold; and the coffers of England have been drained to supply food for its famishing inhabitants, perishing under the



consequences of the very evils which Catholic Emancipation was vainly expected to cure.\*

There was much in England which called for amendment: and with a like confidence "Parliamentary Reform" was held out as the panacea which would cure all evils. The people figured to themselves all sorts of impossible benefits which they were to derive from it, and were ready to rise in insurrection to force on "the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill;" not because they recognized its principle, but because they were anxious to clutch these visionary advantages. The bill passed:—what did the masses gain by it? Their own answer may be heard now by those who choose to ask them; and with a frowning brow, and a bitter sneer, they reply—"Nothing."

Another political nostrum quickly followed this:—a New Poor Law was to do everything;

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\* At the time when the above measure was in progress, the writer was in company with a Member of the House of Commons who was one of its strenuous supporters. "Now is your time to lay out your money to advantage," said he, "land is comparatively cheap now in Ireland on account of the disturbed state of the country. When this bill is passed, estates will be double in value, and if I had £20,000 to lay out I would become an Irish proprietor." The state of Ireland for many years past forms the best comment on this too sanguine prophecy.

the poor's rates were weighing down the energies of the country, and fostering crowds of sturdy idle labourers: "the workhouse test" was to set everything right, and it would soon be found that a man, with a wife and seven children, could maintain all upon the average wages of from ten to twelve shillings per week, even though the increasing extent of grass land left agricultural labourers frequently without work during many weeks. Workhouses arose every where, stately, and vast, and prison-like; outdoor relief was prohibited, and no doubt was entertained that the poor were at once to become well conducted, contented, and happy. What was the result? The alternative offered to the honest and industrious labourer was either starvation, or entrance into the Union Workhouse; where every dear domestic tie was at once torn asunder: where the children were separated from parents whose small mental resources generally render the family bond closer, and even more essential to comfort than among the rich: where the husband was placed among the idle and the reprobate; the wife among the dissolute of her own sex. They left the workhouse, probably, when summer work began; but were they what they were when they entered it? That law has been amended since, or perhaps England, like France,

might have witnessed another servile war; but the spirit which pervaded originally, and in which it was first administered, has branded its mark deeply in the wounded feelings of the poor.

Again a cry has been raised: the corn laws, it was said, stood in the way of the comforts of the poorer classes: they have been abolished; but the most sanguine of the Free Trade party has not seen, nor will he ever see accomplished the great results which he imagined were to follow.

What next?—are we to have a new nostrum every Session or two to cure the diseases of the body politic, like the quackeries which are depended on with equal faith in the cure of the diseases of the body natural, and which sometimes leave things worse, never better, than they were before? Economical Reform; the Five Points of the Charter; a Paper Currency; the Abolition of the Irish Church Establishment; all have their supporters; none of whom yield to the others in the magniloquence of their talk, while descanting on the wonders of their specifics; yet in the mean time, there the poor patient lies, dosed with course after course of new medicines of which no one can guess the