

**REASONS AGAINST GOVERNMENT  
INTERFERENCE IN EDUCATION, BY AN  
OBSERVER OF THE  
RESULTS OF A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM OF  
EDUCATION DURING THIRTEEN YEARS'  
RESIDENCE IN FRANCE**

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Reasons Against Government Interference in Education, by an Observer of the Results of a  
Centralized System of Education During Thirteen Years' Residence in France by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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REASONS AGAINST  
GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE  
IN  
EDUCATION :

SHOWING  
THE DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES OF ENTRUSTING

A Central Government

WITH THE EDUCATION OF ITS SUBJECTS,

AND  
EXPLAINING THE ADVANTAGES OF LEAVING IT TO BE REGULATED BY INDIVIDUAL  
FAMILY, AND LOCAL INFLUENCE.

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BY  
AN OBSERVER OF THE RESULTS OF A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM  
OF EDUCATION DURING THIRTEEN YEARS'  
RESIDENCE IN FRANCE.

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M DCCC XLIII.

## TO THE PUBLIC.

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THE Author of the following pamphlet died in October 1841, at the age of thirty-four. The subject of Education appeared to his mind to bear so intimately and powerfully on man's temporal happiness, that its investigation became one of the favourite employments of his "short allotted span." The opinions and conclusions which are embodied in the pamphlet may therefore be considered as the result of careful examination; and it is hoped that the arrangement and expression of these ideas may be found sufficient for their elucidation; and, if otherwise, that a liberal public, in the course of their criticism, will not overlook the fact, that part of the pamphlet was brought into its present shape under the influence of disease, and that its final examination and preparation for the press was not accomplished, when the hand of death had brought the author's labours to a close.

The lateness of its appearance must be attributed to the hesitation of his friends regarding its publication, and to other unavoidable circumstances, and its appearance now, after so much delay, to the conviction that has reached them, of its being intimately connected with the present discussion regarding the Education clauses of the Factories Bill. Alterations in some of its passages were at one time meditated, and would have been made, if, after the determination to publish, time had allowed of their judicious accomplishment. The work is now submitted to the perusal of the public, with all its faults, leaving it to their own discrimination to sift and separate its contents, and select whatever they may consider as likely to be of use in the present discussion.

# CONTENTS.

## CHAPTER I.

PAGE

That there is a party in Britain disposed to give up the direction and superintendence of Education to the Government - - - - -	1
Propositions proved by quotations from Mr. Wyse, page 1; from Mr. Simpson, 2; from Professor Pillans and the Educational Magazine, 4; from Robert Owen, 5; from Malthus and others, 7.	

## CHAPTER II.

That education has most prospered in those countries where it has remained a family and a local concern - - - - -	8
The centralised system of education in France, 8; its results, from personal observation and Inspectors' Reports, 10; Education in America and other countries, 12; and in Prussia; its success there accounted for, 14; Education among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans, 16.	

## CHAPTER III.

That a great many inconveniences and even dangers are ever attendant on Government interference in such matters - - - - -	19
Influence of State education upon the people, in the history of France, 19; Centralisation and self-government explained and compared, 21; great democratic argument in favour of centralisation and official teaching answered, 27.	

## CHAPTER IV.

That whatever be the Form of Government, Educational Liberty should be maintained intact - - - - -	34
Two kinds of Government interference, 34; Lord Denman answered, 36; Proposition proved by an appeal to the existing contradictions in religion and moral science, 37; in educational and medical science, 38; in history and natural philosophy, 40; Objections to proposition answered, 43.	

## CHAPTER V.

That the Natural Support of Education is the Fees which the Learner pays the Teacher for his Labours - - - - -	44
Superiority of unendowed schools proved by an appeal to facts, 44; Objections to endowed schools and colleges, 46; School establishment of Scotland, considered, 48; Conclusion, 53; New plan for educating the poor, 54.	

AGAINST  
GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE  
IN  
EDUCATION.

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CHAPTER I.

*That there is a party in Britain disposed to give up the direction and  
superintendence of Education to the Government.*

It will perhaps be necessary that I should adduce a few facts in support of the above proposition, for state direction or guidance in general, and more especially in education, is so inimical to British institutions, so *un-British*, in a word, that some will be inclined to question my assertion. However, that there is such a party, appears evident from the multitude of books and pamphlets which have been published during the last ten or twelve years on the subject of National Education, a topic which has become the daily theme of declamation at our public meetings, and of occasional discussion, even from our pulpits. It is called the all-important question—the momentous question—the “question of questions.” It is looked upon as the panacea, the universal cure for all the ills that betide humanity. We cannot open a newspaper but the words “National Education,” in large capitals, immediately meet the eye. National Education—National Education is echoed and re-echoed throughout the length and breadth of the land. Now all this would be very well if the word “education” were simply used alone. No man has a firmer and fuller faith than I have in education, as a means of improving and moralizing the whole human race; but this can never be done nationally, above all, in Britain. It is the attempt to make a national concern of what should remain a local one—I was going to say, a family concern, and to a certain degree, an individual one—which paralyzes many otherwise praiseworthy exertions.

While it may be doubted whether many of the National Education men know what they would be at, it is manifest that their leaders are quite clear upon the subject. What *they* aim at is, to establish a system of National Education, the direction of which is to be given over to the State. They wish to create a separate ministry for the thing, the chief of which is to be called, “The Minister of Public Instruction.” Mr. Wyse, the able advocate for Educational Reform, now a Lord of the Privy Council, a man with whom I sympathize on



most other points, tells us plainly that his object is to connect education with the State. And he wishes government controlment, not only over elementary and primary education, but also over what he calls the *superior*, the *supplementary*, and the *subsidiary*,—that is, university education, adult education, and the education imparted through the medium of museums and libraries. In justice, however, to this high-minded and warm philanthropist, it must be told, that he would still allow the people, at least for the time being, to have some share in the management of their own educational concerns. But even thus modified, the principle is bad enough, as I hope to shew before I have done. His plan of National Education for Ireland is briefly this :—That a Board be formed under the Secretary of State as its president (Minister of Public Instruction), the Board to be his council, and to consist of a Protestant and Catholic archbishop, a Presbyterian clergyman, and five lay members.

We find the author of this plan, in Manchester, Cheltenham, Sheffield, and other parts of England, haranguing crowded audiences in support of a similar scheme for that kingdom. Such is his present scheme; but he speaks of a *gradual interference of government*, which implies that he would allow the State further power over individual freedom as soon as practicable. "The elements of social progression," says he, "which are now scattered in many directions, must be brought to bear with a concentrated force upon the public, and every British child be provided from infancy with a good, useful, intellectual education by the State, free from superstition and sectarianism." This passage needs no comment.

Mr. Simpson, the author of "Necessity of Popular Education as a National Object," is also an advocate for state interference. He contends for the institution of free schools by the nation. He boldly asserts that government must ultimately have to deal with this great question, and he seems to have no doubt but that both houses of parliament will be brought by the press, petitions, and agitation, to adopt his views of the subject. But let him speak for himself:—

"When the legislature," says he, "have recognised by resolutions, the principles, first, That the education of the people, from two years of age to fourteen, ought to be furnished at the national expense; and, secondly, That the national system should be directed by the government, the way will be paved for the first act of parliament which will empower his Majesty to name commissioners, under the superintendence of his Secretary of State for the Home Department, to constitute a Board of Public Education, whose duty, under the responsibility of a minute report to parliament, it shall be, *first*, after the most extensive inquiries into existing improvements, not merely in this country, where there is yet but little to boast of, but in countries which have made, and are making, popular education a grand national object, such as Prussia and France, and, guided by sound philosophical principle, to prepare a system of primary education, a code or directory for the teachers' guidance, adapted to *all* classes of the community, and with a special eye to the education of the manual labour class, physical, moral, and intellectual. The vital importance of such a book needs no illustration. On the table of

every school in the country, it would be the teachers' rule, guide, warrant, and limit, and secure to the pupil, education on an enlightened plan, and that uniform, from one end of the empire to the other. This is of immense moment. There is a vague talk on the subject of popular education, even among its zealous friends, which appears never to get beyond the machinery, the multiplication of schools, and the methods of teaching; but few seem to think it at all necessary to settle the point, *What* is to be taught? . . . The board," continues Mr. Simpson, in the next page, "will exercise the most rigid surveillance over the schools for teachers, and subsequent parish schools. The teacher ought to be liberally paid, quite as liberally as the parish minister, while his attainments will secure to him an elevation in society far beyond what the 'schoolmaster' has yet enjoyed. But to keep up zeal, and prevent the sedative effect of endowment, all the national school teachers should be appointed triennially; when re-appointment will depend upon previous conduct. The board ought to have the sole appointment of the teachers, and the powers of dismissal for sufficient reason. Returns at stated periods should be made to the board, by the teachers, of the condition and progress of their schools; and these should be countersigned by the justices of the peace and clergy in the parish, who should have power, and be enjoined, to visit the school at all times, and examine it once or twice a-year. Occasional inspections by members of the board, or by qualified persons appointed by them, going in circuit, so that the whole schools may be inspected in the course of a certain number of years, and their state published, would furnish a motive to teachers, justices, and ministers, alike to do their duty."

Such extracts need no comment. The thing aimed at is evidently the establishment of government direction, both in *what* is to be taught, and in the *methods* of teaching it. Alas! for Britain, if ever this takes place.

In a note we read what follows:—"Prussia and France have each a Minister of Public Instruction, and the magnitude of the national object would warrant a similar appointment in this country. In this proposition I am anticipated by the *Edinburgh Review*, No. 117, p. 30.—'In England, where almost everything is to do, and a great deal to be undone, we doubt whether anything can be effected of permanent utility, without a Minister of Public Instruction. The duties of the Home Office are already too heavy. The only way to secure unity, promptitude, energy, and, we may add, impartiality, in any organized system of national education, is to lodge the undivided responsibility in the hands of a public officer, and to limit his duties to that great object.' Perhaps the reviewer and Mr. Simpson are not aware that a considerable number of Frenchmen, of different political opinions, are at this very moment anxious to get rid of their Minister of Public Instruction and his department, altogether. It is rather odd, that about the time Mr. Simpson was contending for the creation of an office of public instruction, such as that in France, three educational societies in Paris (*La Société de la Morale Chrétienne*, *La Société des Methodes*, and *La Société de l'Enseignement Élémentaire*,) actually crowned a work of M. Prosper Lucas; one of the

chief objects of which is the abolition of this very office; "L'abolition du Ministère de l'Instruction Publique," are the author's own words.

Professor Pillans is also an advocate for state education, although he does not go so far as his countryman, Mr. Simpson. Nevertheless, in his lectures "On the Proper Object and Methods of Education," he commends the systems adopted in the German states, and in France, and principally the Prussian system. Now all the world knows what these are. With France I am particularly acquainted, as I have been a resident there for the last thirteen years. The truth is, the entire education of the country is regulated, and imposed, by royal ordinances and acts of parliament, and is, moreover, openly avowed to be an engine of the State. Every French politician maintains that this should be so; that government has the right to form the public mind after its own image, in order to create and keep up unity of ideas among the whole body of the people. In recommending such systems, it is therefore evident, that Professor Pillans is an advocate for State education. But that there may be no doubt about the matter, let us attend to the following paragraphs from his lectures:—

"The admirable results of the Prussian system have been obtained by a long course of prudent and pains-taking legislation, founded upon the great principle, that government is responsible for the right education of the people; and this principle the Prussian lawgiver has followed out to its legitimate consequence, by making it incumbent on parents either to send their children to school, or to give security that means are taken to educate them elsewhere." . . .

"In our own island, there is a movement in the public mind on the subject of popular education, which bids fair to lead, ere long, to a similar, perhaps even to a still happier result. The question of a national education for the English people, is one that must now rise in importance every succeeding year. Parliament, when it bestowed the elective franchise on so large a portion of the people, came virtually under a pledge to make them more and more worthy of the new privilege, by improving their moral and intellectual condition. The obstacles in the way to a final settlement of the great question, How the whole body of the English people shall be comprehended in one general system of sound and wholesome instruction? are no doubt formidable, and will unavoidably postpone it for many a day; but it can scarcely be deemed extravagant to expect that, out of the free institutions of this country, under the influence of that unquenchable energy, practical wisdom, and indomitable spirit of enterprise, which have kept Great Britain so long at the head of European civilization and improvement, there will at last emerge, sanctioned and partially endowed by the State, a system of instruction for the people of England, superior alike to the Prussian and to the French."

In the Educational Magazine of January 1838, this doctrine is also clearly taught. One of the writers deploras "the want of fixed principles for the treatment of the national mind;" another tells us plainly that "Education must be made a government measure, which should be as ready to prevent crime as to punish it. Let societies exist, and let the government work through them, with a proviso that certain