

**THE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF THE  
PEOPLE: AN ORATION DELIVERED  
BEFORE THE ONONDAGA  
TEACHERS' INSTITUTE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649306572

The Public Education of the People: An Oration Delivered Before the Onondaga Teachers'  
Institute by Theodore Parker

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Cover @ 2017

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**THEODORE PARKER**

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The Public Education of the People.

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AN

# ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE ONONDAGA TEACHERS' INSTITUTE,

AT SYRACUSE, N. Y.,

On the 4th of October, 1849.

BY THEODORE PARKER.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BOSTON:

WM. CROSBY & H. P. NICHOLS,

111 WASHINGTON STREET.

1850.

## ORATION.

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EDUCATION is the developing and furnishing of the faculties of man. To educate the people is one of the functions of the State. It is generally allowed in the free States of America, that the community owes each child born into it a chance for education, intellectual, moral and religious. Hence the child has a just and recognized claim on the community for the means of this education, which is to be afforded him, not as a charity, but as a right.

This fact indicates the progress mankind has made in not many years. Once the State only took charge of the Military education of the people; not at all of their intellectual, moral or religious culture. They received their military discipline, not for the special and personal advantage of the individuals, Thomas and Oliver, but for the benefit of the State. They received it not because they were men, claiming it in virtue of their manhood, but as subjects of the State, because their military training was needful for the State, or for its rulers who took the name thereof. Then the only culture which the community took public

pains to bestow on its members was training them to destroy. The Few, destined to command, learned the Science of destruction, and the kindred Science of defence; the Many, doomed to obey, learned only the Art to destroy, and the kindred Art of defence.

The ablest men of the nation were sought out for military teachers, giving practical lessons of the Science and the Art; they were covered with honor and loaded with gold. The wealth of the people and their highest science went to this work. Institutions were founded to promote this education, and carefully watched over by the State, for it was thought the Commonwealth depended on disciplined valor. The soldier was thought to be the type of the State, the archetype of man, accordingly the highest spiritual function of the State was the production of soldiers.

Most of the civilized nations have past through that stage of their development: though the few or the many are still taught the Science or the Art of war in all countries called Christian, there is yet a class of men for whom the State furnishes the means of education that is not military; means of education which the individuals of that class could not provide for themselves. This provision is made at the cost of the State; that is, at the cost of every man in the State, for what the public pays, you pay and I pay, rich or poor, willingly and consciously or otherwise. This class of men is different in different

countries, and the education is modified to suit the form of government, and the Idea of the State. In Rome the State provides for the public education of *PRIESTS*. Rome is an ecclesiastical State; her government is a Theocracy—a government of all the people, but by the Priests, for the sake of the Priests, and in the name of God. Place in the Church is power, bringing honor and wealth; no place out of the Church is of much value. The offices are filled by Priests, the chief magistrate is a Priest, supposed to derive his power and right to rule, not democratically, from the People, or royally, by inheritance;—for in theory the Priest is as if he had no father, as theoretically he has no child,—but theocratically from God.

In Rome the Priesthood is thought to be the flower of the State; the most important spiritual function of the State, therefore, is the production of Priests; accordingly the greatest pains are taken with their education. Institutions are founded at the public cost, to make Priests out of men; these institutions are the favorites of government, well ordered, well watched over, well attended, and richly honored. Institutions for the education of the People are of small account, ill-endowed, watched over but poorly, thinly attended, and not honored at all. The People are designed to be Subjects of the Church, and as little culture is needed for that, though much to make them Citizens thereof, so little is given.

As there are institutions for the education of the



Priests, so there is a class of men devoted to that work; able men, well disciplined, sometimes men born with genius, and always men furnished with the accomplishments of sacerdotal and scientific art; very able men, very well disciplined, the most learned and accomplished men in the land. These men are well paid and abundantly honored, for on their faithfulness the power of the Priesthood, and so the welfare of the State, is thought to depend. Without the allurements of wealth and honors these able men would not come to this work; and without the help of their ability the Priests could not be well educated. Hence their power would decline; the class, tonsured and consecrated but not instructed, would fall into contempt; the Theocracy would end. So the educators of the Priests are held in honor, surrounded by baits for vulgar eyes; but the public educators of the People, chiefly women or ignorant men, are held in small esteem. The very buildings destined to the education of the Priests are conspicuous and stately; the Colleges of the Jesuits, the Propaganda, the Seminaries for the education of Priests, the Monasteries for training the more wealthy and *regular* clergy, are great establishments, provided with libraries, and furnished with all the apparatus needed for their important work. But the Schoolhouses for the People are small and mean buildings, ill made, ill furnished, and designed for a work thought to be of little moment. All this is in strict harmony with the idea of the Theocracy,

where the Priesthood is mighty and the people are subjects of the Church, where the effort of the State is toward producing a Priest.

In England the State takes charge of the education of another class, the Nobility and Gentry; that is, of young men of ancient and historical families, the Nobility, and young men of fortune, the Gentry. England is an oligarchical State; her government an Aristocracy, the government of all, by a few, the Nobility and Gentry, for the sake of a few, and in the name of a King. There the foundation of power is wealth and birth from a noble family. The union of both takes place in the wealthy noble. There, Nobility is the blossom of the State; aristocratic birth brings wealth, office, and their consequent social distinction. Political offices are chiefly monopolized by men of famous birth or great riches. The King, the chief officer of the land must surpass all others in wealth, and the pomp and circumstance which comes thereof, and in aristocracy of birth. He is not merely noble but royal; his right to rule is not at all derived from the People, but from his birth. Thus he has the two essentials of aristocratic influence, birth and wealth, not merely in the heroic degree, but in the supreme degree.

As the State is an Aristocracy, its most important spiritual function is the production of Aristocrats; each noble family transmits the full power of its blood only to a single person—the oldest son; of

the highest form, the royal, only one is supposed to be born in a generation, only one who receives and transmits in full the blood royal.

As the Nobility are the blossom of the State, great pains must be taken with the education of those persons born of patrician or wealthy families. As England is not merely a military or ecclesiastical State, though partaking largely of both, but commercial, agricultural and productive in many ways; as she holds a very prominent place in the politics of the world, so there must be a good general education provided for these persons; otherwise their power would decline, the Nobility and Gentry sink into contempt and the government pass into other hands,—for though a man may be born to rank and wealth, he is not born to knowledge, nor to practical skill. Hence institutions are founded for the education of the aristocratic class: Oxford and Cambridge, “those twins of learning,” with their preparatories and help-meets.

The design of these institutions is to educate the young men of family and fortune. The aim in their academic culture is not as in pagan Rome, a military State, to make Soldiers, nor as in Christian Rome to turn out Priests; it is not as in the German universities, to furnish the world with Scholars and Philosophers, men of letters and science, but to mature and furnish the GENTLEMAN, in the technical sense of that word, a person conventionally fitted to do the work of a complicated aristocratic State, to fill with honor its various offices,