

**NATIONAL EDUCATION,
THE QUESTION OF
QUESTIONS: BEING AN
APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649295654

National Education, the Question of Questions: Being an Apology for the bible by Henry Dunn

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HENRY DUNN

**NATIONAL EDUCATION,
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NATIONAL EDUCATION,
 THE
 QUESTION OF QUESTIONS;
 BEING
 AN APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE
 IN
Schools for the Nation:
 WITH REMARKS ON
 CENTRALIZATION AND THE VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES,
 AND BRIEF NOTES ON
 LORD BROUGHAM'S BILL.

By HENRY DUNN,
Secretary to the British and Foreign School Society.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
 THOMAS WARD AND Co., 27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1838.

One Shilling.

LC
116
.G7
D9
1838

LONDON:
J. G. KELLY, Printer, 32, Houndsditch.

General lib.

gift

9-18.44

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TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

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A Second Edition of this Pamphlet having been called for, I avail myself of the opportunity thus afforded, to state, that which is I hope already generally understood, —that the Committee of the British and Foreign School Society are not, as a Committee, to be held responsible either for the opinions therein contained, or for any particular form of expression which may have been chosen for their communication. On a subject involving so many considerations, and confessedly embarrassed by peculiar difficulties, it would, perhaps, be impossible to find any body of men inclined to adopt precisely the same views. It is to me a matter of surprise as well as of pleasure, that so many should have expressed their concurrence with the sentiments I have expressed.

H. D.

February 1st, 1838.

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AN APOLOGY,

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SECTION I.

THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

It will scarcely be disputed, that of late an unusual degree of interest has been manifested in various quarters on the subject of National Education. Within the last few months, public meetings have been held in various parts of the empire for the purpose of petitioning Parliament to make some legislative provision for the instruction of the people, and still more recently a bill has been introduced into the House of Lords, by Lord Brougham, for its immediate accomplishment. Under these circumstances, it cannot, I trust, be deemed impertinent to invite the attention of the friends of Education to the principles on which, in the judgment of many, such a measure can alone be safely based.*

That the existing provision for popular instruction is deficient in quantity, and in too many cases, still more defective in quality, must be admitted by all who are acquainted with the actual state of the country. The intellectual condition of the agricultural districts has been well described by a powerful and original writer as "a gloomy monotony ;—death without

* On the particular bill now before Parliament, it would be premature to offer any observations. The country is deeply indebted to Lord Brougham for his indefatigable and enlightened exertions on behalf of the Education of the people. Whatever may be the fate of the present bill, —certainly the best that has yet been presented to the notice of Parliament,—the name of Lord Brougham will always be associated in the annals of the country with the history of its popular Education.

his dance." Shut out from every thing that can sustain or ennoble an intelligent nature, the peasantry of England have long since displayed, in unparalleled degradation, the full effects of knowledge denied, and have now sunk into a state of mental inanition and semi-barbarism, from which, it is to be feared, the present generation can never be recovered. Rude, selfish, superstitious and profane;—their sense of right and wrong limited and often perverted; insensible to enjoyments of a higher order than those which arise from the grosser forms of sensual gratification; and scarcely ever looking beyond the apparent interests of the present hour; the great mass live and die without an effort to raise themselves above the lowest conditions of animal existence.

In the towns a different state of things prevails, yet one scarcely less to be lamented, and probably more perilous to the peace of the community. The bulk of the labourers still remain in utter and hopeless ignorance; while the better class of artizans, only partially enlightened, are seldom found capable of enjoying a scientific lecture, a useful book, or a calm political disquisition. The oracle of the work-shop is the Sunday Newspaper. "Shrewd, intemperate, presumptuous, careless of the truth of their representations, provided they make an impression," the conductors of these mischievous productions too frequently pander to the prejudices, excite the passions, and deprave the imaginations of their readers, without conferring upon them any substantial benefit, beyond the mere communication of passing intelligence. For evils of this description, there is but one remedy;—the cultivation and enlargement of the popular mind.

That the most unlimited dispersion of knowledge could in itself ensure the advancement of wisdom and virtue, it would be absurd to pretend; but it cannot be disputed that "utter ignorance is the most effectual fortification to a vicious state of the mind, not only defeating the ultimate efficacy of the

means for making men wiser and better, but standing in preliminary defiance to the very application."

From these general observations probably few will be found to dissent. It is not on the value of Education itself that men now profess to differ,—in that respect "the darkness is past,"—but on the *nature* of the Education which should be imparted, and on the *means* by which its universality should be secured. The two points interlace each other; the settlement of the one, determining the decision of many in relation to the other.

On the question of MEANS, the friends of Education are divided into two classes:—

I. Those who hold that the spread of Education should be left to the voluntary efforts of the people.

II. Those who consider the promotion of public instruction to be the duty of the Government.

Each of these classes may be again sub-divided. The friends of THE VOLUNTARY SYSTEM into two sections:—

1. Those who dislike the *principle* of Government interference in all matters affecting the *moral* interests of the country.

2. Those who distrust the *working* of such measures.

The *former*, without being prepared to admit that Government can with propriety establish a *scriptural* system of instruction, dread and deprecate any plan by which the Bible should be excluded. The *latter* fear that Government interference would, in its immediate results, be injurious to the interests of religion, and, perhaps, ultimately lead to tyranny, by the controlling power it would give in the inculcation of opinions. By the *first* of these classes a Government education would be opposed as unjust; by the *last* as inexpedient.

The advocates of STATE INTERFERENCE may, in like manner, be divided into two parties:—