

**EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF PREVENTING
DESTITUTION: WITH EXEMPLIFICATIONS
FROM THE TEACHING OF THE CONDITIONS
OF WELL-BEING AND THE PRINCIPLES AND
APPLICATIONS OF ECONOMICAL SCIENCE
AT THE BIRKBECK SCHOOLS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649568727

Education as a Means of Preventing Destitution: With Exemplifications from the Teaching of the Conditions of Well-Being and the Principles and Applications of Economical Science at the Birkbeck Schools by William Ellis

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WILLIAM ELLIS

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EXEMPLIFICATIONS FROM THE TEACHING OF THE
CONDITIONS OF WELL-BEING AND THE PRINCIPLES
AND APPLICATIONS OF ECONOMICAL SCIENCE

AT THE

BIRKBECK SCHOOLS.

PREFACED BY A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. LORD JOHN RUSSELL, M.P.

By WILLIAM ELLIS,

AUTHOR OF THE "OUTLINES OF SOCIAL ECONOMY," ETC.



LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1851.

232. b. 13.

C O N T E N T S.

Letter to the Right Honourable LORD JOHN RUSSELL, M.P.	PAGE 1
--	-----------

I.

Thoughts upon Education as a means of Preventing or Diminishing Destitution	9
---	---

II.

The Conditions of Well-being as taught in the Birkbeck Schools, and as they ought to be taught everywhere	33
---	----

III.

The Morality of Expenditure, or of the disposal of Wealth in general	63
--	----

IV.

What is Competition?	93
----------------------------	----

V.

	PAGE
Not over-population, but under-education, the cause of Destitution ; not more Emigration, but more Education, and of better quality, the remedy for Destitution	115

VI.

Reasons for insisting that Instruction in Economical Science shall no longer be excluded from our Schools	131
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EDUCATION
AS A MEANS OF
PREVENTING DESTITUTION.

TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD JOHN RUSSELL, M.P.

MY LORD,

I AM aware that it must be matter of more than ordinary importance, which alone can justify an obscure individual in trespassing upon your time and attention. When I state that the subject upon which I would trouble you is "Education," I think I may flatter myself, that you will not disdain to spare a few minutes for the consideration of what I would now venture to bring under your notice—especially if I add, what is well known to many in this metropolis and elsewhere, that I am not merely a talker or writer, but an actual worker in the great Educational harvest-field.

There is, I believe, among all who are taking an active part in the diffusion and improvement of Education, a common feeling of regret, for the deficiency, both in quality and quantity, of the Education acces-

sible to the masses of the people, and also for the backwardness and inability of parents to avail themselves, in behalf of their children, of the indifferent education offered for their acceptance.

No greater difficulty presents itself to the Educational philanthropist than this parental inability. It was dwelt upon at the late annual meeting of the British and Foreign School Society, presided over by your Lordship, and drew forth from you some observations far too valuable to be allowed to pass into oblivion, and which I beg to introduce here as reported in the *Times* newspaper of the following morning (13th May).

“ It has been said by some who have spoken to-day, and with great truth, that a parent is responsible for his children, and he should be called on to see that no son or daughter of his was ignorant of the truth of religion, nor of their duty to God and man. But, on the other hand, I think it might be said with great justice that the parent has had some excuse who was unable, without the aid of his children, to obtain sufficient bread for his family, or a home to shelter them from the inclemency of the weather, or clothes to dress them. These are wants which a parent might justly allege as grounds why he could not afford to give his children that education which they might otherwise reasonably demand. But I trust and hope, that as comforts are increasing, and I believe the means of the great mass of the people are greater than they have been, of providing for their necessaries and comforts of life—I trust and hope that you will perceive them more anxious for education. I think that there is not wanting in the people of this country the desire

of all moral and spiritual good, and that they will be anxious, when they have the means, to confer those blessings upon their children."

If it had been compatible with the narrow limits within which you were obliged to compress your remarks, you would, I dare say, have drawn a distinction between the parents of the present and the parents of the future. At all events, I entertain little doubt that you will agree with me that, among the parents of the present, most of those who are unable to do their duty by their children are the victims of neglected, indifferent, or mistaken education, as are the vagrants and criminals of society. They are, as your observations indirectly imply, deserving of the deepest commiseration from all right-minded people. Nevertheless, it is our duty to use every effort to circumscribe the misery which must result to society from the misconduct of these several parties. We apprehend vagrants, we confine criminals, we extend the hand of charity to unprotected children, and while smarting under the suffering thus inflicted upon us, and which we can do no more than mitigate in the present, ought we not to take precautions against the recurrence of similar suffering in the future?

As the existence of parents unable adequately to perform the parental duties is mostly a consequence of insufficient teaching and training, so a succession of improved parents can only be looked for after the means of education shall have been both improved and extended. I am not insensible to the difficulties that surround this question of the extension of education—the jealousies of the different religious denominations, and the dislike prevalent among most of them of seeing the secular

separated from the religious portion of education. But, surely, there ought to be no disinclination anywhere so to improve the secular portion of education as to make it as conducive as possible to the diminution, if not to the prevention, of destitution. The purpose of the following pages is to direct attention to what must be embraced by education, to make it effective for this work of circumscribing or preventing destitution.

A topic of minor importance to that of parental forethought, and yet not to be overlooked with impunity, is incidentally referred to in your speech. You remark that "the means of the great mass of the people are greater than they have been." Granted. We have had three abundant harvests in succession; but bad harvests await us. Potato-rots, even, are to be looked for again. When these causes of comparative scarcity visit our land, are the masses of the people to be badly off—to be unable to fulfil their duties as parents?—or are they to be prepared for these inevitable alternations of good and bad seasons, by saving from the superabundance of good seasons to supply the deficiencies of the bad ones, and thus feel themselves shielded from suffering, and competent to fulfil their duties as parents? What the answers must be to these questions greatly depends upon the character of the secular portion of Education—upon the general prevalence among the people of a knowledge of what they ought to do, how they ought to conduct themselves, and upon an equally prevalent disposition to make their conduct conform with their knowledge.

You have assisted largely in removing the shackles from industry; and for this effort your name will be