

every one must regard as a retrograde step in civilisation. However a vindication of compulsory measures necessarily prejudices many readers, who suppose that an undue attempt against their personal liberty is implied thereby, and think their opinions on all similar questions so surely settled, that there is at least presumption in endeavouring to advocate opposite views. We must indeed, in order to meet with the pretended victims, descend in the scale of society to the lowest class of people, who from more or less culpable motives neglecting their holiest duties towards their families, and careless about the consequences for all their fellow creatures, quietly contemplate through their fault, the germs of future misery, disorder, and crimes growing up and being propagated amongst them, whilst means for preventing these evils are placed within their hands. But although the reader himself, and the great majority of the people may not be immediately interested, there still remains the principle. Whatever be the social position of a person, his rights ought to be respected; any intrusion upon them must excite the just apprehension and opposition of all. Looking then at the question from this point of view as the only one from which an objection can be raised, and admitting on the one hand the undeniably desirable results derived from a system including compulsory measures: the superiority of general instruction, the instilling of sound principles into the youthful minds, training to good habits, and the consequent influence upon the material and moral welfare of the people: we have to examine whether a law imposing upon a father to let his children partake of means offered for acquiring suitable knowledge is opposed to his natural rights as a parent.

RIGHTS OF PARENTS.

For it is obvious that objections are chiefly based upon the supposition that parents have imprescriptible rights, and especially that of disposing according to their own views, of the education of their children, which renders any interference in this matter on the part of government, against their will, unjustifiable.

TWO SIDES TO THE QUESTION.

Here lies the difficulty; there are two conflicting opinions and parties, on the one hand government, or rather the community, requiring a certain share in, or eventually control over, education, on the other hand the promoters of most absolute independence. Our task then will be to weigh these two opinions and the arguments by which they are supported, against each other, in order to come to a decision about the question. Now the most simple expression of the argument upon which a person might rest in refusing to comply with the injunction of a law in this case would be: That is my child, no one has a stronger claim to it than myself. Simple and clear as this sentence may appear, a close examination will perhaps discover a great want of distinctness therein, and that the reasoning contained in it is neither tenable nor conclusive. What does it really mean?

It cannot signify anything like material property in such a sense as it was understood in antiquity, or amongst barbarous nations, where a father had unlimited power over his family, nor anything approaching to such a definition; our Christian principles reject such interpretation of the words. Otherwise, what were to become of the child at the death of his father? On whom should the right of the latter pass over? When, how, and why should the relative position undergo a change as the son grows up? Besides, other persons lay claim to similar appellations, the one calling the same individual "my brother," another "my friend," the Sovereign "my subject," we all "my fellow citizen," thus expressing all a certain right to or expectation from his person or doings. The most vehement exclamation about "my child," or even "my own child" does, therefore, on account of the vague signification of the word "my" not yet carry with itself an absolute conclusion on this point.

In short we must, in order to come to a decision, directly inquire what are the positive claims of a father to his child, how far goes his right to dispose of him according to his own will and pleasure? To so pointed a question an equally sharp answer is ready. A father ought not to speak about claims, he has only duties towards his children. However stern and harsh such a sentence may at first sound, it is fully borne out by a reflection on the nature of the relative position as well as by the spirit of Christianity, and in reality its harsh aspect is softened by the use of milder terms, and by that mutual affection which turns duties into pleasures. The signification of the words "That is my child," so far as the present inquiry is concerned, can therefore only be: Nature and Providence intrusted that child to my particular care, I am to be its special protector, guide, benefactor; I am, as far as I can contribute to it, answerable for its present and future welfare and doings. But even if we would so far abate from the strictness of our sentence as to admit that a father may call respect, obedience and eventually material assistance from his children, things which he has a right to exact from them. There is nothing in all this which gives him a title to dispose of them to his own advantage or according to his pleasure, and still less which exempts him from the strict duties imposed upon him.

Amongst the latter, one of the most prominent and indisputable is that to provide for the future, to educate and instruct; and if, therefore, by the community or otherwise, means are especially provided to that end, which cannot be dispensed with or otherwise compensated for, an exclamation against interference with personal liberty and natural rights loses all its ground, amounts almost to contradiction, and can only be looked upon as a specious pretext for evading imprescriptible duties and gaining selfish objects.

But if we thus reduce or rather entirely deny the right of a father to dispose of his child to his own advantage and according to his own will and pleasure, one might at first sight suppose that any claim of government to exact the sacrifice of time and exertions from the same child, to directly interfere with instruction and education is still less founded, and defensible. If, however, for analogy's sake, we went on in the same way as above, to examine the bearing of expressions like those alluded to, "my fellow citizen," "my subject," the result would be in favour of our views and public education. The relation between government, representing the community, and the individual, is essentially different from that between parents and children. The former is originally, and to some extent always, founded on a kind of voluntary agreement, therefore changeable, varying according to different times and circumstances; the latter based on the natural position between parent and child, and therefore unalterable. The former necessarily partakes of the nature of a mutual compact, each party, the community and the individual, taking upon themselves promises, guarantees, rights and duties. The moment a child is born it is silently received into society, and at once partakes of favours and benefits, just as, in a more ceremonious way it becomes a member of the Christian church. But as the promises given at the christening by the sponsors, are to be considered as binding, although at the time the child was unable to appreciate the respective favours and duties, so all nations agree, that in return for protection and other benefits received from society, the community is justified to expect that every one submit to their laws, and in proper time, far from being a nuisance or cause of disorder, become a useful member of that same society. Opinions as to how far liabilities go in this respect, have in different times and amongst different nations, undergone the most essential changes: they were indeed carried from one extreme to another. At one period the State, disregarding all natural ties, and setting aside every consideration of individual interests, required the exclusive disposal of life, property, all material and intellectual faculties of every one. Those times have long passed by. Then came ages of despotism, feodality, predominant church influence, each regarding the individual in a different light, and shaping their respective pretensions accordingly. Now we are living, as it were, in an age of reaction in favour of personal independence, many going in their zeal so far as to deny that, if we provide for the rising generation means most suitable and of almost absolute necessity for their own personal welfare, as well as that of the community, we may not even require any one to make use of the same. This is certainly another extreme, and truth, as usual, lies in the middle. We are undoubtedly justified to require, if only for the sake of self-preservation, as a kind of guarantee for the stability of our social existence, that the younger members of our community become acquainted with those general moral and religious principles upon which society rests, and that they, as far as public education can contribute to that object, be trained and brought up in the esteem and practice of such principles besides cultivating their minds and acquiring such elementary knowledge as may be most proficient to their own happiness. For it must not be forgotten that the aim of public education, and this refers particularly to National Schools established by Government, is not only to impart to children some primary knowledge and abilities, but to influence their feelings and form their character, keeping them from idleness, bad company and consequent evils, by occupying them suitably for a considerable portion of their time, accustoming them to good morals, and even if we would exclude any reference to a special religious creed, by infusing into their hearts an esteem and love for all that is to be respected and valuable in the private person as well as in social relations. This view of the question renders it necessary once more distinctly to mention what has several times already been hinted at. The request, that a certain proficiency in knowledge be acquired, and a moral and religious training be submitted to, supposes, that means thereto be made available for every one without inadequate inconvenience, or in other words: compulsory measures must be considered not as an isolated regulation, but as the natural result of a whole system of national education. To bring up the rising generation according to the wants of the age ought to be matter of general interest: provisions to that effect ought to be made by Government. Their efficiency controlled, care taken that improvements in the system and its working keep pace with the progress of time. The whole question thus placed is only of comparatively modern date, and owes its origin to the advanced state of national development and social intercourse, or as