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RECENT EDUCATIONAL SPEECHES IN ENGLAND.

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VI. RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF DERBY.

EDUCATION AND CLASSICAL SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND FIFTY YEARS AGO.

In a recent address at the Collegiate Institution, Liverpool, the corner stone of which the Earl of Derby laid twenty-three years previously, he thus referred to the state of education in England fifty years ago:—I need not say to those who know the history of education in this country that fifty years ago—I speak of a time when I myself was a boy at Eton—the education of this country was upon a deplorably low standard; that the amount afforded of public education for any class of society was exceedingly scanty in amount, and exceedingly deficient in character. It is true, indeed, that to a certain portion of the higher, or, at all events, the wealthier classes the public schools afforded a certain degree of instruction and of education; but, at the same time, without in the slightest degree wishing to disparage those classical studies which at that time formed the almost entire and exclusive subject of instruction at Eton—those studies from which I hope that I have myself derived some advantage, and which I am sure have procured for me great enjoyment—I say without in the slightest degree disparaging studies which I hope will always be considered as an essential portion of a liberal education in this country, I am bound to say that at the time of which I speak—things have much improved since—whatever benefit a boy derived from his instruction at Eton was derived much more from the effect produced upon his character by the social influence of that little miniature world of which he was a citizen than by any cultivation of his intellect or expansion of his mental powers which he could derive from the ordinary business of the school. I believe that Eton was a

tolerable representative at that time of the state of the public schools generally, and such as that education was it is quite evident that, with some few exceptions, the education which it did afford was only available to the wealthier classes, and to persons, at all events, in easy circumstances of life.* With regard to the other classes, education was infinitely more deficient still. The ancient grammar schools—excellent as they were in their original intention, and adapted to the times for which they were founded—were insufficient to meet the requirements of the present age, even if they had not, in many cases, from apathy, from neglect, from abuse, and from insufficient endowment become wholly or partially insufficient.

EARLY FEARS OF GIVING EDUCATION TO THE MASSES.

At the time of which I speak—God be praised that a change has taken place since—there were many excellent men who apprehended serious danger from communicating instruction and education to the lower classes of society, and thought it was absolutely essential to the well being of the country that these classes, in order that they might not be dissatisfied with their condition, should be kept in a state of profound ignorance. I am speaking of opinions and feelings which prevailed many years ago. A change, however—a vast change—has come over the feelings of society upon these subjects; and I am not quite sure that we do not, with regard to the lower class of society, run some risk of falling into the opposite error, not of over-educating—for I think it is impossible to over-educate boys who are capable of receiving such an amount of instruction as may be given to them during the short period to which their school attendance is confined; but I am afraid there is some risk with regard to the lower classes that our education should be too ambitious, and that in striving to crowd a vast amount of instruction into a very limited space of time which alone can be afforded, we run the risk of getting not a sound, wholesome, elementary education, but a superficial smattering of a great deal without a solid knowledge of that which is most useful.

PRESENT EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR THE MIDDLE CLASSES.

The great improvement, however, which took place in the education of the lower classes made still more apparent the lamentable deficiency of any proper provision for those whom we call, by a

* The present condition of Eton College, as to numbers, which are steadily increasing year by year, showing the high estimation in which the school is held by the upper and middle classes, is very encouraging. In the year 1800, there were only 357 boys in attendance; and the following numbers for each year during the ten years from 1852 to 1861, both inclusive, will show the steady onward progress of the school:—1852, 597; 1853, 613; 1854, 602; 1855, 614, 1856, 666; 1857, 744; 1858, 758; 1859, 801; 1860, 820; 1861, 828.