

them in future life. They are able, perhaps, to read, but with so much difficulty that they never do it unless from sheer necessity. The habit is not formed, and in a few years the power is lost. They may have learnt to write—that is, they may know the shapes of the letters, but it is pain and grief to them to use a pen, and, unless inclination or circumstances lead them to improve in later life, the time they have passed at school is to all intents and purposes wasted. The truth in this matter has been spoken out plainly and sensibly by the inspector of schools for this district, in his general report for last year. He says, "We know this, and we know also the cause. It is the shortness of school-life. You cannot cram into the space of two or three years the instruction which ought to occupy five or six, any more than you can eat at two or three meals the food which ought to last for a month. You cannot in months create habits which require years for their formation. * * * Yet this is what is being done now, and must be done so long as the inexorable demands of labour continue."

REMEDIES—EVENING CLASSES AND NIGHT SCHOOLS.

And he points out the remedy,—evening classes, night schools, opportunities of learning given to those whose daily labours cannot be interfered with, but who with that labour are willing (as in these northern towns many thousands are) to combine some pursuits which may keep them from sinking into mere machines for the production of wealth. I apprehend that the want of such opportunities is being more and more felt, and I lay so much stress upon them, and believe so little in the possibility of doing without them, that I don't hesitate to say, if three-fourths of all those who attend day-schools could be sent out into the world knowing thoroughly how to read, write, and cipher, having acquired, in addition, those habits of order, discipline, and neatness which a well-managed school gives, and having been taught either at school or at home the elementary truths of religion, I would gladly compound for their knowing little or nothing else, feeling sure that those who had got so far would not stop on the road.

GOOD FEATURE OF THE NEW EDUCATIONAL CODE.

Various opinions have been and will be expressed on the new educational code which has excited so much sensation. It is not my business to discuss its provisions in this place, but in so far as it tends to confine school-teaching to simple elementary matters, and to test the merit of the teachers by the plain standard of what the pupils have learnt—in so far (not entering into the question of pledges given or expectations disappointed) it seems to me a wise and rational measure.

OVERLENGTH OF SCHOOL HOURS.

There is one defect in most schools with which I am acquainted, to which I am glad to see that attention is being called—I mean the overlength of school hours, the too great portion of each day which children are required to pass in a crowded room, not always well ventilated, and where entire bodily inaction is made compulsory. It is not easy for grown men to go back to the feelings of their earlier years, and to understand how an amount of bodily quiet and mental application which to us is natural and easy can be at an earlier age an absolute violation of the laws of our bodily state. Sundays especially are apt to be made to young people days of torment rather than of rest.

THREE WANTS IN OUR SYSTEM OF PRIMARY INSTRUCTION.

The three wants of our system of primary teaching are—more regular attendance; limitation, in the majority of cases, of school hours to a moderate amount; and limitation of teaching to such subjects as can be thoroughly mastered. It was the custom some years ago to lament over the small number of scholars in proportion to the population. In that respect there is now, I do not say nothing, but comparatively little, to complain of. The evidence given by the Education Commissioners appears to me on that point conclusive. One of their assistants estimates the number of those who attend no school at from 5 to 10 per cent. of the total population of the school age. Another says, "There are very few cases in which children have been at no school whatever." A third, "There are very few who do not see the inside of something that may be called a school." A fourth, "Absolute neglect is almost unknown among respectable working men in the towns." And the commissioners themselves sum up the question by affirming that, with the exception of children whose parents are either paupers or of criminal habits, "almost all the children in the country capable of going to school receive some instruction." It is worth adding, as indicative of the progress that has been made, that whereas in 1851 the scholars were to the whole population as 1 in rather less than 8½, they were in 1858, according to two separate returns, as 1 in rather less or rather more than 7½. We may, therefore, I think, assume that some part of the controversies of 10 years ago is out of date.

COMPULSORY EDUCATION OPPOSED TO ENGLISH FEELING.—REMEDY.

In the face of these facts, arguments for compelling parents by law to send their children to school appear to me as much out of place as the proposition itself is opposed to English feeling and character. Another conclusion, too, is forced upon us—that no scheme for the extension of teaching is likely to succeed which aims at superseding, in any considerable degree, the exertions of those who are already in the field. What we want is, not so much to augment the number of schools as to utilize those we have (hear, hear); and that brings me directly to the object of our meeting here, for I conceive that it is only by giving the means of carrying on instruction in later years that we can create even a wish for it, either among parents or children. Depend upon it a father who has left school at 10 years old (if he ever was there,) and has not looked into a book since, will not, in 99 cases out of 100, care much what kind of teaching his son gets.

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES, THEIR FAILURES AND SUCCESSES.

Now, we all know that it was to supply this want of a more advanced teaching that mechanics' institutions were established 35 years ago. They have met with varying success; a few have succeeded; the majority, unquestionably, have failed. And, looking back, it does not seem difficult to understand why they have failed. They mostly began, as you did here, with trying to teach pure science. Now, that can never be made attractive to the multitude, whether among rich or poor, for thinkers in every class are few. They relied, in many cases, on lectures as means of teaching, and the instruction they gave was desultory and imperfect. They had political and social prejudices to contend against; they rose in days when working men were less well off than now, and had little leisure for thought on matters which did not immediately concern their material interests. Cheap reading did not exist; the public mind was unprepared; and it is fair to add that some of their most prominent advocates, putting forth exaggerated hopes of what might be effected, by that natural display of zeal, discredited the comparatively slight result which was effected. Still, I think they did good. They kept the question of education before the public; they helped the first feeble efforts to spread a sound sanitary knowledge among the people; they materially assisted the first promoters of cheap literature; and, where circumstances have been favourable the crude notions of 1824 have developed into well-considered schemes, supported by all parties and sects, and really reaching the class for which they are meant.

THE PRACTICAL RESULT OF EDUCATION ON OUR NATIONAL LIFE.

And now, gentlemen, after all these things have been said, there remains the question, "Assume the means of teaching to be such as you have described, assume that they are used and appreciated, what will come of it all? What is the practical result on our national manners and life?" That is a question often put, not in a hostile or captious spirit, but with a real wish that it should be answered. And it must be asked, and it must be answered, unless we choose merely to repeat ignorantly and at second-hand the popular cry. As to the advantage of elementary teaching, of those simple acquirements which are the key to all knowledge, and without which it is hardly possible to get on in life, no one raises a dispute; but it is questioned whether anything beyond this is useful in the class of life from which mechanics are taken. Well, I say, first, no man doubts the importance of health. To the poor man it is capital, it is bread, it is independence; with all men it goes far to make the difference between a happy or unhappy life. There is no more real or tangible benefit which you can confer upon a people than when you reduce the rate of mortality and lessen the amount of disease. In the United Kingdom it is estimated that people ought not to die at the yearly rate of more than 17 in 1,000; they do actually die at a rate greatly exceeding this—I think, on an average, 22 or 2 in the 1,000. Now, here we have, with our population of 30,000,000, more than 100,000 lives yearly thrown away. What kills them? Not overwork, not famine, not, in the majority of cases, the hard necessities of their condition; but ignorance—ignorance on their own part, or on that of society, of the physical laws of our being. No doubt there are unhealthy and dangerous trades, there are lives shortened by actual want, but these are comparatively few; every doctor will tell you that an immense saving of life would take place if only some three or four simple things were estimated at their true value—pure air, pure water, sufficient drainage, and healthy bodily exercise for those who lead sedentary lives. Some one may answer me, "These are matters, except the last, with which landlords and local authorities have more to do than the people. We can't choose the house we will live in. We drink the water supplied to us. We breathe the air around us, such as it is." "Well," I reply, "but if the people take interest in these things, if they understand their immense practical importance, there is no danger that landlords or