

Selected Articles.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

GREAT SPEECH ON EDUCATION BY MR. ROBERT LOWE, M. P.—WHAT IS REQUIRED OF OUR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS—HOW THE MIND OF YOUTH OUGHT TO BE DIRECTED.

(From the *London Times*, Nov. 4.)

On Friday evening, Mr. Lowe, M. P., opened the Lecture Session of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution by an address on primary education in its relation to the State, and on University education. Mr. Lowe was accompanied to the platform by Mrs. Lowe and a large party of ladies, the Lord Provost, the Lord Advocate, the Earl of Airlie, Lord Dunfermline, Lord Ardmilhan, Lord Ormidale, Sir W. Stirling Maxwell, M. P., Sir James Y. Simpson, Sir Jas. Lacatta, Professors Masson, Lyon Playfair, Sellar, Allman, Balfour, and Blackie; Mr. D. McLaren, M. P., Mr. Adam Black, Rev. Dr. Hanna, Dr. Collier, Dr. Donaldson, Dr. A. K. Johnstone, Mr. J. Campbell Smith, Mr. W. Smith, Vice-President, &c.

Mr. Lowe, in the first part of his address, treated of primary education. He said that as regarded the elementary education of the humbler classes there were certain principles which were now pretty well established and agreed upon—namely: firstly, that the education of the poor ought not to be left wholly to private enterprise, but ought to be undertaken by the State; secondly, that the State represented in education, not the religious, but the secular element; thirdly that the best way of carrying on education was not by a centralized system, but by the calling forth of local energy; fourthly, that the work should be tested and superintended by Government, and not by those who carry on the work; and fifthly, that State aid ought to be given to schools, not merely for being in existence or showing a certain attendance on their books, but for a certain amount of efficiency—that, in short, it was the business of the State to ascertain the results, and to pay in proportion to them. Coming to disputable propositions, the hon. gentleman maintained that the education of the youth was the duty, and, as Plato said the primary object of the State. I am sorry, said Mr. Lowe, that the existing system in England is that the Government shall admit its duty, but that it does not occupy the position enabling it to do its duty. The initiative is not with the Government. We have no Minister of education. The initiative is given to private individuals. The Government cannot create a school where it is wanted; all they can do is to assist it. The consequence is that as money is generally forthcoming in those places where education is most abundant, the Government gives assistance where it is least wanted. Mr. Lowe proceeded to point out the superiority of the English to the American system, where examination, as practiced under the revised code in England, is totally unknown. Another recommendation of the present system was homogenous with the feelings and habits of the people, especially in the country districts, and always secured the best local agency, namely the clergymen and gentlemen

of the parish. But, said the right hon. gentleman, we have now arrived at a time when we ought no longer to deliberate on this question. I will not go into political matters; but we are all of us aware that the Government of the country—the voice potential is the Government—is now placed in the hands of persons in a lower position of life than has hitherto been the case. Now, it is not merely desirable, it is all important and essential, for the preservation of the institutions of this country, that those persons should be able, properly and intelligently, to discharge the duties entrusted to them. (*Cheers.*) Even assuming that those persons who have been enfranchised possess that knowledge which is necessary. I say we require a much better guarantee than we at present possess, that those persons who come after them shall possess that knowledge also—(*hear!*)—and if they do not possess it, as I fear will be the fact in very many cases, there is nothing we ought not to do—there is no effort we ought not make—there is no sacrifice, either of money, or of prejudice and feeling, which we ought not to submit to, rather than allow a generation in whose hands are placed the destinies of us all to grow up in ignorance. (*Cheers.*) We cannot suffer any large number of our citizens, now that they have obtained the right to influence the destinies of the country, to remain uneducated. (*Cheers.*) We must not merely permit, as my friend Mr. Bruce lately proposed, persons to tax themselves for education. We must compel and insist by some means that education shall become general in this country. We must carry out the great scheme of the reformers of Scotland when they placed a school in every parish in the country. (*Cheers.*) Coming to the second branch of the subject the right hon. gentleman said: It seems to me if one could form an abstract idea of what education ought to be, it should be to teach a person everything that it is important he should know, and at the same time to discipline his mind, but, as the period during which education can be communicated is very short, we must qualify that view by saying that business of education is to teach the person so much of that which is important that he should know as he can be taught within a limited time, and with reference to the ordinary faculties of mankind; and also that in so doing care should be taken to discipline the mind of the pupil as far as possible. That being so, we see a question arise of very great difficulty—What is it most important the people should know? Until we can answer that question we cannot satisfactorily solve the question I am now proposing—What is the education that ought to be given to the middle and upper classes? I think it will be admitted by all who hear me that we live in a universe of things and not of words, and that the knowledge of things is more important than the knowledge of words. (*Cheers.*) The first few months and years of a child's existence are employed in learning both, but a great deal more in making itself acquainted with the world into which it has been ushered than with language. That is the form Nature takes. She begins with the knowledge of things, and words follow after. I'll illustrate what I mean. I think it is more important for a man to know where his liver is seated, and what its functions are, than to know it is called *jecur* in Latin and *eiper* in