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BIBLE-READING ENGLAND.

(From the Tablet.)

The attention of the civilised world is being every day more and more directed to England. Her military system—her representative institutions—her religious and social condition—furnish each the most ample and interesting subjects of study and of criticism. And somehow—in a most wonderful way—the providence of God seems to be shaping and precipitating events calculated to make, under every one of these heads, the most astonishing and instructive disclosures as to the real condition of a nation the most arrogant in its pretensions—the most insolent and vainglorious that ever held sway among the kingdoms of the earth.

While the war in the Crimea is fast stripping her of all the prestige which hitherto belonged to her army and to her political institutions, the discussions in Parliament on the subject of general education have removed the veil which has been half concealing the awful rottenness of England's social state. Our readers will call to mind the barbarous task which the British Legislature labored at so long, so industriously, and with so much malign ingenuity, in reference to the mass of Ireland's population—the task of extinguishing the light of knowledge among the Catholics of this land.

It was religion that frustrated the operation of the laws which made it penal for a Catholic schoolmaster to teach the alphabet to a Catholic child. Without religion under the operation of those laws this island would now be wading through a sea of mental darkness and barbarism. We should have now no education, and no desire or taste for that great blessing. But thanks to the sacred light of that holy faith, the knowledge of whose mysteries and moral truths elevate the simple child of ten years old in the sphere of enlightenment far above the wisest sages in the schools of Pagan or human philosophy, we have still a religious people, a people among whom the love of truth and the passion for educating their children is as warm and as strong, all the circumstances considered, as in any nation of the civilised world. Though our Church ranks amongst the poorest of the poor, and has so ranked for three centuries—though she has received, till lately, no sort of support from the State—though she now receives but little—though she has to confront the persecuting policy of the most powerful and tyrannical State for centuries, and has still to confront it, it is yet true that she has succeeded in her holy mission, that she has brought the light of revelation to every intellect, and the love of God to every heart, so generally and so particularly that to say there is in this island no child of twelve years old who has not heard of the Saviour's name—who does not know God and the mysteries of religion, and the difference between vice and virtue, wickedness and holiness, were not so much to pay compliment as to offer by an excessive moderation of language an insult to her who is the vigilant guardian of the young and the old, and who is never wearied pointing her finger to Heaven as the home and the destiny of mankind.

Well, it is more in the spirit of deep and Christian sorrow than in that of an empty boast, or an ungracious triumph, that we call attention to a different, a sadly different state of things in England, where the State religion has had power and wealth, and political and social influence to the largest amount at its command and in its hands—where the civil laws made every path smooth, and opened every avenue to the operation of the established religion. It is not over us, but over themselves, that the tide of a strange and unprecedented barbarism has rolled. This wretched country, in which, before it cast off the saving yoke of the Catholic faith, there could have been no single child of ten years old unacquainted with the primary truths of Christianity—this ill-fated land of pride, and lust, and mammon, lies today, by its own confession, deep under a sea of mental, moral, and religious darkness, which makes the condition of millions of souls, for whom the Saviour shed His blood, more pitiable than that of the stolid savages of India or Africa.

In the debate of last week on general education in England and Wales, Sir John Pakington, in a most able, comprehensive, and lucid speech, as admirable for its spirit of deep reflection as for the abundance of information proper to the subject with which it was replete, introduced the following facts and observations. We subjoin them with little or no comment—indeed, they can dispense with that:—

From a very able report of the census by Mr. Horace Mann it appears that in 1851 there were 3,000,000 of children, between three and fifteen years of age, who were attending no school at all. In Manchester alone there were 30,000 children of the same age at no school at all. In eight parishes, the population of which amounts to 662,000 in round numbers—that is, something more than a fourth of

the population of the metropolis—there are not less than 47,532 children of the ages specified who attend no school, public or private. "I can give the House," said Sir John Pakington, "no practical results of the ignorance which thus exists in London; but I think that those conversant with the subject and with the state of the metropolis will have no very great difficulty in arriving at a conclusion as to what must be the state of 47,000 children in London who have no means of education held out to them."

In tracing the causes why so many children are left without education, Sir John ascribes the real cause to the poverty, and partly to the indifference, of the parents, and this indifference, as he thinks, has grown out of the badness of the education which is afforded in England. "The unhappy parents have never been educated themselves."

On the connection between ignorance and crime the right hon. baronet observed:—

"The House will be aware that it is difficult to obtain full information upon this matter. Our own statistics of crime are very imperfect. We have annual returns of the trials at our sessions and assizes, but the returns of summary convictions are very imperfect. The only foreign country with regard to which I have statistical returns of the state of crime is Austria, and I am obliged, in dealing with the case, to draw a comparison between different years. I find that in 1846, when the population of England was 17,018,600, the number of persons committed for trial was 25,107, and the number summarily convicted was 35,749, making altogether 60,856 persons convicted of crime. The population of Austria in the year 1838 was 23,652,000, and the detected crimes amounted to 29,492. The result was, therefore, that while the population of Austria was upwards of 6,500,000 more than that of England, the detected crime in England was double that of Austria. This statement shows that in Austria, which is one of the least educated countries in Europe (and we will add among the most Catholic) crime is greatly less than in England. In fact, the difference is this, that in Austria 1 in 800 of the population is detected in crime, while in England 1 in 300 is detected, making a difference of nearly three to one."

On the state of general and religious ignorance in the west of England, the speaker made the following alarming disclosures from official sources:—

"In the report of Mr. Ruddock, Inspector of Workhouse Schools, given in 1853, in reference to the counties of Cornwall, Devonshire, Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, and Hampshire, he states:—

"The new children thus admitted were grossly ignorant. I have been painfully struck with the uniformity of ignorance which is shown to prevail among the newly-admitted in all the returns sent to me.

"It is not only that children from twelve to fifteen years of age cannot read or write, but they are not acquainted with the Creed, or with the Lord's Prayer, and scarcely know that there is a God in Heaven. Personally I have made inquiries in most of the unions in my district whether such cases were of frequent occurrence, and the invariable answer has been that they are the rule, not the exception. The most complete and heathenish ignorance seems to prevail among the children of those whom a temporary pressure obliges to apply for parochial relief."

Now here, let our readers observe, here is an official report, carefully made from five counties in the west of England. And surely the state of things it reveals is most appalling. The children of the working classes over five counties are shown to be in a state of complete and heathenish ignorance. When temporary want drives them for a season to the workhouse, it is found that the generality of those grown-up boys from twelve to fifteen know nothing of the Creed—nor therefore of the Saviour—nor of the Lord's Prayer—and scarcely that there is a God in Heaven at all! Whenever a boy presents himself with more religious knowledge than this he is a rarity—an exception to the general rule. But let us pass on.

With respect to the state of education in the country of Worcester, the Chaplain of the county gaol writes:—"The result of my experience is to fill me with sorrow at this worst amount of gross ignorance in moral, religious, and useful subjects in the great majority of cases."

The next piece of evidence is furnished by the Rev. J. Clay, Chaplain of the Preston House of Correction, a man whom Sir John Pakington describes as one known to most of the members in the House of Commons—who has long devoted his attention to the welfare and improvement of the working classes—in fine, as a man thoroughly acquainted with his subject, and of the most unimpeachable character. In one of his reports (dated 1846) Mr. Clay writes thus:—"During three years' observation, the performance of my duty has brought me into contact

with 1,733 men and boys, and 378 women and girls, altogether unable to read; 1,361 men and boys, and 287 women and girls, who knew not the name of the Sovereign; and 1,290 men and boys, and 293 women and girls, so incapable of receiving moral or religious instruction that to speak to them of virtue, vice, iniquity, or holiness was to speak to them in an unknown tongue."

By another report, furnished in 1849 on the state of the education of prisoners committed to Preston Gaol, it appears that out of the 1,949 imprisoned there that year 41 and a fraction per cent were ignorant of the Saviour's name, and unable to read the Lord's Prayer, only ten per cent were acquainted with the elementary truths of religion, sixty-two per cent were ignorant of the words "virtue" and "vice."

From this report we have it that in one gaol, in one year, there were one thousand, seven hundred, and fifty-one persons who were unacquainted with the first principles—the elementary truths of God's religion—that sixty-two out of every one hundred of them were ignorant what is meant by the words virtue or vice, and that fully eight hundred of them did not even know the Saviour's name.

Now, the evidence given by Sir John Pakington was not obtained by exaggerated reports, nor from special cases out of districts, unfortunately or singularly circumstanced in respect to religious or secular education. It is from official, or otherwise most reliable sources, from Clergymen of the Church of England, who could have no motive for overstating, and who had very strong professional reasons for furnishing statements as moderate and extenuated as possible. They are taken too pretty indifferently from several counties in England. A while ago we listened to the startling description of five counties in which the great body of grown-up boys of fifteen years of age, taken from the working classes, were represented as ignorant of the creed and the Saviour's name, and hardly aware that there is a God, and here we have 800 prisoners coming in one year from different districts of one county, and ignorant of the Saviour's name. Now, let us follow those 800 to their homes, and let us go to the homes of the poor boys of the five counties already spoken, and what a state of things shall we find. Why, the parents of these unhappy people must not have been Christians. The name of Christ must not have been heard beneath their ill-starred roofs. Still more, their neighbors must have resembled themselves, else why should these boys not have heard the Saviour's name? What a state should one suppose a county in Ireland, from the different localities of which men, women, boys, and girls, should flock in to the number of 1,800 who knew nothing of the elements of Christianity, and 800 of whom did not in any way know that there was a Christ at all? Why, the whole population must in England be one mass of something worse than Pagans. In every county, even the more savage, there is some Divinity adored, and feared, and worshipped after some fashion, however gross. But in England they scarcely know that there is a God at all. Long ago the Protestant Bishop Burnet wrote in the Preface to the Second Part of his History of the Reformation:—"It cannot be denied, since it is so visible, that universally this whole nation is corrupted, and that the Gospel has not had those effects among us which might have been expected after so long and so free a course as it has had in this island." Matters, it is evident, have not improved since this lament over national corruption and the failure of Protestantism after the most favorable trial on its own chosen and boasted ground. Sir John Pakington is smitten to the core, as every man of a particle of love for religion or society must be, by the hideous moral wildness with which he finds himself confronted, and in the midst of which, to make the blight and the desolation still more frightful, the English Church sits gorgeously enthroned, enjoying its own idle and unprofitable pomp, a splendid mockery, casting a baleful and a blasting shadow upon the barren waste around her. Sir John is apprehensive, in his own words, that instead of setting an example to the civilised world, England, after all her boastings and her dreams of her own greatness and enlightenment, may become a laughing-stock to the other nations of Europe, and then he adds those remarkable and sad words—"I do not believe any man will contend that the state of the African savage or the North American Indian is worse than the state of the men of whom I have spoken. These are not instances of individual cases here and there; we find in one year, in one gaol, 800 persons who never heard the name of the Saviour. It is worse than barbarism, as Mr. Clay is right in declaring, because while these unhappy outcasts know nothing of a Saviour or a God they are conversant with vice, they are familiar with crime, and they are steeped in debauchery."

We will take leave of this painful but instructive

subject. Incordaire, the great preacher, says that religion should be studied, like science, by its phenomena, and this, in one sense at least, is perfectly true. The day is gone by when we need discuss texts of Scripture with Protestants. We should rather now ask what have they done? What are the fruits? The story of death we have been telling, and which Sir J. Pakington told much better to the assembled representatives of British pride and Protestantism, on last Friday week in the House of Commons, affords a too abundant answer to such inquiries. The evil is too great for Parliament to cope with it. Parliament has created the Established Church, and the Established Church has made England lower than the savage wilds of Africa in the scale of religion.

DIARY OF THE SIEGE.

March 4.—A severe brush between the English and Russians. The volleys of musketry lasted an hour. The sortie was repulsed. A council of war was held to-day; it was resolved to commence active operations.

March 5.—A very fine, warm, bright day. Another sortie repelled by the French. The whole of the light French division moved to-day to strengthen the right, which the enemy menaced evidently every day.

March 6.—There is now enough to spare of warm clothing. Boots are the only deficiency. The health of the troops is better. Mortality and sickness decreased. The spirits of the men good. Lord Raglan is about the camp every day. Generals Estcourt and Airey are equally active. The railway extends its lines by night and by day. Fresh provisions are becoming abundant, and the scurvy-stricken are supplied with vegetables. The siege works are in a state of completion, and are admirably made. A great quantity of mules and ponies, with a staff of drivers, have been collected. The mortality among the horses has ceased. The French had not renewed their attack on the Russian works near Malakoff Tower. There were 3,000 Russians at Tchergoum. The Russians were advancing towards Inkermann, and were constructing new batteries. The English position is well fortified.

The following dispatch has been received from Lord Raglan:—

"BEFORE SEBASTOPOL, March 8, 1855.—My Lord—The enemy continue to manifest great activity in preparing the works which I mentioned to your lordship in a previous dispatch, and are now bringing up platform timber and guns for the equipment and arming of it. Vast convoys are daily observed arriving on the north side of the town; and I learn, from information entitled to credit, that the road leading from Simpheropol is covered with waggons laden with provisions and munitions of war. This morning, three British guns, placed in a battery overhanging the Tchernaya, opened upon two small steamers anchored at the head of the harbor, and after a fire of about an hour obliged them to take refuge behind a point. One of them appeared to have sustained considerable damage, and is supposed to have been deserted by her crew. The weather was fine yesterday, and is particularly so to-day, and the country is becoming quite dry. I have reason to hope that the sick are deriving material benefit from this change. I have established a convalescent hospital on the heights immediately above Balaklava, near a fine spring of water. The Inspector-General of Hospitals entertains great expectations of the advantages that will result from placing the huts in so healthy a locality. Lieutenant-General Pennefather has assumed the command of the Second Division, and is, I am happy to be able to report, looking remarkably well. I enclose the return of casualties to the 4th instant.

"RAGLAN."

(From the Special Correspondent of the London Herald.)

March 3.—Both allies and Russians are straining every nerve for a final struggle. Every day, and all through the day, numbers of the enemy's troops are incessantly employed in their earthworks, and seem not only to be preparing measures for a vigorous defence, but actually for advancing, as if to besiege us in our own parallels. The advanced work near Gordon's Hill, which the French made such an unsuccessful attempt to capture, still remains in the possession of the Russians, who have now almost entirely repaired the damages which it sustained during the cannonade on the night of the 24th Feb. As yet there appear no preparations made for mounting it with ordnance, but, from the movements going forward, there is little doubt they are now employed in "sapping" down the hill in the direction of Gordon's Battery. At first it was intended to renew the attack on this work on the following night, and for this purpose no less than ten thousand men—Zouaves, Chasseurs, and volunteers—were told off, but a more minute inspection of the place led some of our en-