

EDUCATION.

(Continued from our last).

The persons, indeed, whom nature has qualified to feel the enjoyments or receive the cultivation of knowledge, may not be a tenth of the entire population; but it is by them that the fountains of public welfare are opened, and on their exertions that the maintenance of public happiness depends. If the aphorism of Lord Bacon be true, that knowledge is power, the extension of knowledge continually augments the means of beneficence which man can confer upon man.

The elevation also of the most intelligent of the middling or lower orders to the highest stations of society, operates as a continual incitement to the poorer classes to emulate their example. Few may be successful in the attempt; but the efforts made by many improve their habits and their usefulness, and render them better members of those humble walks in life from which they are unable to ascend.

If the enjoyment of study could be made universal, and intellectual cultivation rendered the means of weaning men from the grosser pleasures of sense, the warmest anticipations of the friends of public instruction would indeed be realized; but, at the same time, the lower orders would be unfitted to discharge the most important duties which society requires them to perform, and the great machine of civilized life would stand still, for want of persons to attend to the coarser parts of the engine. The wisdom of Nature has confined the gift of intellectual ability to that proportion among mankind whom the public interest requires to be employed in intellectual pursuits, and not suffered either the happiness or the usefulness of the great majority to be disturbed by desires or habits inconsistent with their humble but not less important duties.

Because a part, however, are alone qualified for intellectual exertion or enjoyment, it does not follow that the means of instruction should not be afforded to the whole people. It is impossible to say a priori in whom the power to cultivate or the taste to appropriate the several branches of literature or art are to be found; and unless instruction is generally diffused, the greatest abilities, the most useful powers may be lost to the state. Of the seed which the husbandman sows, the greater part is choked before the powers of vegetation expand; but from the few which take root the whole sustenance of mankind is derived.

Finally, the education of the people is the only method of diffusing generally the blessings of religious instruction. Whatever may be thought of the possibility of making the great majority of mankind appreciate the pleasures of scientific acquirements there can be no doubt, that by the force of religious emotion the most extensive public effects are to be produced. In truth, the only feeling which permanently effects all classes of society is the influence of religion—because it alone addresses itself to the hopes and fears which are common to all. Unlike science or philosophy, which speak a language interesting only to a limited class, its precepts are universally understood, and the necessity for its consolations felt alike by the humblest and the greatest of mankind.

From the earliest times, the experiment had been made upon the widest scale, of the influence of education upon a certain portion of society, without its ever having been found capable either of arresting the progress of national degradation or stopping the corruption of the very classes among whom it prevailed. The higher ranks among the Greeks and Romans were not

only well but highly educated; but nevertheless it was they who corrupted the lower—and long before the ignorant masses were contaminated, corruption, sensuality, and every species of profligacy had utterly poisoned all the sources of public welfare in the dignified portions of society. The same fact is exemplified in every page of European history.

With whom did the corruptions, which brought about the French Revolution, originate? Was it among the millions of ignorant, laborious men who toiled in humble life, not one in fifty of whom could read; or among the thousands of the privileged classes, who were all highly educated, refined, and cultivated? No person will say that their education was based upon religion, for they were, probably, the most infidel generation that ever existed upon the face of the earth, and we have seen to what their intellectual cultivation led. If any person would wish to know to what, in a highly civilized and opulent community, the general extension of simply intellectual cultivation will lead, he has only to look at the books found at Pompeii, ninety-nine hundreds of which relate exclusively to subjects of gastronomy or obscenity; or to the present novels and dramatic literature of France, in which all the effects of genius, and all the powers of fancy are employed only to heighten the desires, prolong the excitement, and throw a romantic cover over the gratification of the senses.

Experience, the great test of truth, tells us, in language which cannot be misunderstood, that hu nature in all ranks is the same; that knowledge is power to all, but wisdom only to those who use it rightly; and that, so far from mere secular education being an antidote to evil, or a preservative against the progress of social corruption, it has the greatest possible tendency to increase both, if not restrained by the force of moral precept, and sanctified by the simultaneous spread of religious instruction.

The capital error of the secular education party, in this matter, is the opinion that the main end of education should be to communicate, or give the means of acquiring knowledge; whereas its real and most important object is, to form the habits and elevate the character. This is the vital point of distinction between the two parties.

Scotland is the great example to which the advocates of secular education constantly point, as illustrating the effect of intellectual cultivation upon the character of mankind, and boundless have been the eulogiums pronounced upon the moral virtues, steady character, and provident habits of that once held the most intellectual portion of the European population. Doubtless, as long as Scotland was an agricultural or pastoral country and education was based upon religion—when the school-house stood beside the church, and both trained up the same population, who afterwards were to repose in the neighbouring church-yard—Scotland was a virtuous country, and its population deservedly stood high in the scale of European morality. But since manufactures have overspread its great towns and a population has grown up in certain places—educated, indeed, but without the means of religious instruction and almost totally destitute of religious principle—the character of the nation, in this respect, has entirely changed: and it is a melancholy fact, that the progress of crime has been more rapid in that part of the British dominions, during the last thirty years, than in any other state in Europe. It appears from the evidence laid before the Combination Committee, last Session of Parliament, that the progress of felonies and serious crimes in Glasgow, dur-

ing the last sixteen years, has been, beyond all precedent, alarming, the population having, during that period, advanced about seventy per cent., while serious crime has increased FIVE HUNDRED per cent. Crime over the whole country is advancing at a very rapid rate, and far beyond the increase of the population. In the last twenty-four years crime has increased THIRTY FOLD."

We have given a long extract from the work of this very talented writer, but the whole chapter he has published on this subject is highly interesting and well deserving of consideration. From the statistics he has given, it appears perfectly manifest, that education, if not based upon religious instruction, is not likely to increase the virtue and happiness of a people. We shall refer to this subject again, and give some interesting information of the results of secular education in Prussia, Sweden, and other states. It is from the results produced by any system, that we are to judge of its utility, and it will also teach us the improvements required in the system.

AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT BY THE EDUCATION OF THOSE WHO ARE ENGAGED IN IT AS A PROFESSION.

BY WILLIAM EVANS,

AUTHOR OF THE "TREATISE ON AGRICULTURE," &c.—LETTER II.

What are the advantages that are likely to result, from the useful, practical, and general education of the agricultural class?

To this question, I reply, that an improved system of agricultural management would inevitably be introduced, by which it would be possible to augment the produce and returns obtained from the cultivated land, and stock in these Provinces, to double what they are at present, and in many instances, much more; and I am firmly persuaded, that no material improvement will ever be effected in the agriculture of the Canadas, until farmers do become usefully and generally educated. I have not arrived at these conclusions, without giving those matters much consideration. I know too well that farmers, above all other classes of men, have an antipathy to change, and object to innovation, and that there is no means of removing their prejudices, but by education, which would enable them to examine thoroughly the changes that would be recommended to their notice, and look steadily at all the bearings of questions that would affect their interests. They would then, from conviction of their own minds, adopt with alacrity all measures that would be likely to augment the means of happiness of themselves and their families. It is then that the natural fertility of this fine country would be taken full advantage of; the fields would be well cultivated, and yield abundant crops; the flocks and herds would be judiciously chosen, well managed and fed; good and ample means of internal communication would be provided. All matters in any way connected with agriculture, would clearly exhibit the industry, the skill, and intelligence of those engaged in husbandry, and raise the yeomanry of these Provinces to that high station they are entitled to occupy in this community. If education can produce these results, and no doubt it would, how highly should it be desired and prized by those engaged in agriculture.