

and hauling up a little girl with a sick baby, or a lad as has got a job of work while his father's ill. However, it's the same lot that made that compulsory law that's put out this Free Education idea.

*George.* Then I shall look well at it before I give in to it. You see, Jem, a working-man's first flattered and then snubbed, now-a-days, till he hardly knows where he is. He's told 'one minute he's quite fit to govern the country, and then not allowed to govern his own children. Here's a vexatious law now that doesn't touch the rich man—this compulsory business: *he* can teach his children at home if he pleases, or do what he likes with 'em.

*Jem.* True enough. But, you see, the party with the Free Education cry tack it on to compulsory attendance. 'What a hardship,' they say, 'for a man to pay for schooling when he's forced to send his children to school whether he likes it or not.'

*George.* Let them stop the forcing then—that's where the shoe pinches. Just let one of those Parliament gentlemen go round and hear what is said in poor men's houses about it. They'd a deal rather have freedom in that, and pay twopence or threepence to send their children to any school they please. A man likes his liberty in these things.

*Jem.* I've heard school-teachers say, too, that the children that attend most irregularly are those whose school fees have been excused because of their poverty.

*George.* We're all apt to think what costs nothing is worth nothing. Still, I suppose, Jem, you'd be for paying the school-pence for such starving creatures as really can't afford that much?

*Jem.* Aye, of course—and it should be made easy for them, too, poor souls! But that's a different thing from forcing Free Board Schools down every man's throat, whether he likes them or not.

*George.* I shouldn't like to send my children to a Free Board School.

*Jem.* As to not liking to send one's children to Free Schools, there'll be no choice in that, once the Free Education people get their way.

*George.* How's that, Jem?

*Jem.* Because there'd be no other schools to send 'em to! Don't you see? The Voluntary Schools (whether they belong to the Church, or the Wesleyans, or the Roman Catholics) have had a hard push to make way against these big Board Schools, because Government gives them no share of the school rates; and if they're to lose the school-pence too, why they'll be done up.

*George.* And our little ones forced to go with the whole lot, gutter children and all.

*Jem.* Well, there'll be Private Schools, of course.

*George.* But they charge so dear. I couldn't afford those.

*Jem.* Well, my lad, then you must either send the children to the Free Schools or take the consequence—the prison, or the treadmill, perhaps; who knows?

*George.* All this sounds nasty. Precious little freedom here. When we started talking, Jem, I had no idea Free Education meant all this. How we poor chaps may get hoodwinked if we don't look about us!

*Jem.* Such a talk, too, about fairness! That's what disgusts me. Perfect equality. The Church pulled down. Church Schools abolished. Secular Education all round. That's the cry with these Liberation fellows.

*George.* Secular Education! What's the meaning of that?

*Jem.* Education without God, without religious instruction. The children of our Christian land taught the same as heathen Indians, or Chinese.

*George.* Oh, I say, Jem, they do read the Bible in some Board Schools.

*Jem.* Well, I grant you that, though there's a good many where they don't allow even the Bible. But as soon as Free Schools come in, and there's only one school for all, there will be a hue and cry that *that* is unfair. The Roman Catholics won't like their children to listen to the Protestant Bible, and the Jews will object to the New Testament.

*George.* A pretty mess it will all be, I declare. Jem, don't the electioneering fellows see all these rocks ahead?

*Jem.* See them? As well as you and