

Recollections of a Scottish Dominie.

(Concluded.)

IN a former article I remarked on the extreme severity of discipline which, some thirty years ago, prevailed in the public schools of Scotland, and endeavored to show that the teacher was not individually responsible for that discipline. It was only a special form of a universal characteristic of the time. The iron hand of *authority* pressed heavily on society in every direction, and the modern doctrine had not yet been learned that both men and children might be over-governed. We must observe, however, that public opinion has already re-bounded to the opposite extreme, and because punishments were wont to be carried to excess, the notion seems to be generally in vogue that there ought to be (almost) no punishment at all. Because John Howard showed that our prisons were shameful dens of famine, squalor and disease, our prisons must now be palaces without and within, and our greatest criminals must be better lodged, better fed, and better attended than an honest working man. Because men and boys were at one time most cruelly and unjustly hanged for stealing a silken handkerchief, the ferocious murderer is now patted on the head, pitied for the hardness of his fate, and the feelings of humanity are thought to be outraged by the fact of an execution. All the pity that used to be bestowed on the poor victim is now transferred to the poor criminal. A weak and foolish sentimentalism has invaded the sacred seat of public justice, and at this moment, throughout England and Scotland, not one murderer in the dozen stands in any danger of losing his own life. So subject is human opinion to the "falsehood of extremes." When a new idea once fairly gets the wind of public opinion into it, it blazes up into a flame and straightway burns itself to ashes; and then we are in as great darkness as before. This excess of sentimentalism has seriously affected the discipline of public schools, and constitutes the great evil against which teachers have to struggle in the faithful discharge of their duties. In Scotland, owing to the peculiarly favored position of the teacher, this evil is little felt; but in England, and in all the British Colonies, it forms a serious barrier to the progress of education. If the authority of the teacher is not firmly supported by the parents, his usefulness is greatly impaired, and the interests of the pupils must suffer in proportion. There is too much truth in the maxim of John Ratto, that "human beings are by nature indolent and depraved," and the mistake of John consisted in blindly carrying this doctrine to excess, and omitting to temper the rigour of discipline with the mildness of sympathy. Let me entreat all those who love their children, to abstain carefully from all undue interference with the teacher, and

to speak in private with the highest respect of that man or woman to whom is entrusted the intellectual and moral training of those whom they hold so dear. The office of the teacher is a noble and dignified one; and until it is universally felt to be so, the interests of education must suffer. We feel grateful to a physician who cures our child of a painful and dangerous disease, even although he is paid for his trouble. Ought we not to feel a deep debt of gratitude to the man through whose enlightened skill and assiduous care the same child is raised out of the helpless ignorance of nature into the perception and the exercise of the highest faculties with which God has endowed him? He who pours light on the dark mind, and throws open the gates of wisdom to the groping soul, is a benefactor of his race. The minister exercises a high and sacred function, but his success and usefulness greatly depend on the pioneer who has gone before him, and that pioneer is the teacher. It had been the fashion in recent times to declaim against the use of corporal punishment in schools, and to maintain that a school may be governed far better without the use of the rod. In former days the rod was employed without discrimination and without mercy. In fact, it was relied on as the only instrument of government. No doubt this was a grievous mistake, but in my opinion it is a still greater mistake to suppose that it can be dispensed with altogether. One circumstance is very noticeable in relation to the new theory of school government, viz.: that no man who has had any practical experience of teaching has ever appeared as an advocate of this doctrine. Theorists and schemers who never knew what it was to conduct a school for any length of time have presumed to dictate how a school should be managed, but all such parties must be dismissed as incompetent to judge the question. When a commission is appointed to investigate any subject, on which a difference of opinion has arisen, the members of that commission are always men who are practically skilled in the matters at issue. If the point to be decided lies within the province of medical science, the witnesses summoned are medical men. If a man entrusted with the administration of a province is charged with mis-government, and a commission of enquiry is instituted, the members of the commission are invariably men who have had personal experience in the art of government, and are capable of appreciating the difficulties of the position. For example, when the recent outcry arose against Governor Eyre on account of the way in which he suppressed the Jamaica insurrection, and an enquiry was demanded by the voice of public opinion, the gentleman selected to conduct the enquiry was himself a Governor. Sir Henry Stork was transferred from the sphere of his own government to the scene of the insurrection, to preside over the commission. When a com-