

THE GUARDIAN.

"HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD."

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POETRY.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

In the cross of Christ I glory!
Towering o'er the wrecks of time,
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

When the woes of life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me,
Lo! it glows with peace and joy!

When the sun of bliss is beaming
Light and love upon the way,
From the cross the radiance streaming,
Adds more lustre to the day.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there, that knows no measure,
Joys, that through all time abide.

In the cross of Christ I glory!
Towering o'er the wrecks of time,
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

EDUCATION.

ON THE CHOICE OF SUITABLE SCHOOL BOOKS.

The work on which the schoolmasters have entered and in which they so anxiously seek the counsel and encouragement of the Church, is certainly one of the most important and necessary that can be conceived. It is the forming, shaping, and suiting of the instruments of their work, and no time or pains should be spared by the wise workman in obtaining right instruments, and in putting them in proper order for his work. It may perhaps seem to some that the object being to teach children to read, it is a matter of very little consequence by what means this object is accomplished. But surely no one will say that it would be right to teach reading, by lessons which were positively bad; and surely no one will deny that if reading can be as well taught, it is best to teach it by lessons positively good, and deserving to be remembered for ever. To every child, then, it is of vast importance to learn by books which will bring him forward quickly, and which may yet at the same time tend to enlighten the mind and influence the heart. But this is an object of paramount importance to many who attend our schools. They have little time to spend at schools, and still less to improve themselves afterwards. Their early lessons are almost their only lessons. Their "Tyro's Guide," their largest readings in polite literature; and their *Collections*, their *vade mecum*s of knowledge and common-place books of information. Hence it is of vast importance not only that these books should be fitted by easy steps quickly to bring to ease and elegance in reading—not only that, by classification and other means, all the sounds of all the letters should be most plainly and distinctly set forth—not only that pronunciation, and orthography, and grammar, should be most simply and effectually taught by them, but that all this should be done by lessons which should tend to enlighten the mind, to rectify the judgment, and to impress the heart.

Indeed, we cannot but consider the enterprise on which the schoolmasters of Scotland have embarked, as one of the greatest importance, and, if successfully conducted, calculated to have an influence on the well-being of Scotland, the extent of which is more than can be adequately estimated.

He who sits down and writes a common book, writes what may chance to be read by some hundreds of readers, the great majority of whom read without judgement, and forget as soon as they read; but he who writes a popular school-book, writes a book which is studied by thousands and tens of thousands of young and fresh minds; which has all the advantage of a first impression, and which, therefore, stamps lessons which abide for life, and abide surrounded by all the pleasing and indelible associations of the master—the school—the places taken or lost—the comrades—and the jokes of the school. "Give me," said one, "the songs of a country, and I will let any one else make the laws of it." I would say, give me the school books of a country, and I will let any one else make both its songs and its laws. These

little messengers of wisdom will convey to every town, and every close of every town—to every village, and every hamlet, the lessons of wisdom and of truth, to be stamped on the soul with the first dawns of intelligence, and interwoven with the first and dearest feelings of the heart. Every one knows the immense use made of the press by the French philosophers, in bringing about the French revolution; but few have enough attended to the manner in which these far-sighted men—far-sighted into all the snares of evil—brought their dark and ensnaring precepts to bear upon the public mind.—Not only did they spend thousands on the printing of tracts and books for young people—not only had they writers in every newspaper in town and country—not only did they employ every effort to fill all schools and colleges with infidel teachers, but they set themselves, with the utmost care, to provide all schools with school-books more or less directly teaching infidelity. Their efforts for this purpose are recorded in many of their letters; and the full success of their schemes in Germany is announced by Voltaire. Many look at Murat and Robespierre, and such like, and think these were the men who desecrated the nation and defaced even the marred aspects of humanity. These were but the bloody hands—the master-minds sat unseen—the moving powers came from the retired chambers of these philosophers, who seemed to walk in calmness in the high paths of literature and science; and the channels by which they conveyed these poisoned waters to every cottage, were the school-books with which they sought to fill every school, from Paris to Moscow. On the other side, what are the great means by which the schools of the General Assembly are shaking to the foundation the firm confidence of the Hindoos in their Shasters, and fixing every where wedges, which seem to promise the entire dissolution of that system of superstition, which so many ages have cemented with so many bonds?—What but the school-books, which are used in the schools, and the lessons of truth every day taught from them! Every where, therefore, will we find illustrations of the vast importance of good school-books—of the vast influence which in this way may be exercised over the minds of the community, and consequently of the vast responsibility which lies on any individual body of men to whom is committed the care of providing such, or who have any power and control with respect to the use of them.

Such power the Church of Scotland has always, in some degree, had. The responsibility our forefathers fully felt; and they settled the question of moral truth at once, by ordaining that the Bible, the Catechism, and the Proverbs of Solomon, should be standing school-books; and many a good scholar of olden times never had any Primer but the A B C, on the first leaf of his Catechism, and never any Collection but the Old and New Testaments, with the Proverbs. It was soon found, however, that though these books were the best as the end, better might be found as the means of acquiring the power of reading—in a word, that by the use of little manuals, constructed for the purpose, the pupil could be brought more speedily and easily forward.

Hence the almost countless multitudes of primers, second books, collections, &c. of all sorts, sizes, shapes, and forms, which were given to the public.—Among others, the national schoolmasters contributed a set of school-books, which have long been pretty generally used in parish schools. These, however, they are now convinced, are not suited to the advancement which this department in their profession has of late years made. These therefore, they have resolved to withdraw, and have set themselves in good earnest to provide books more suitable in all respects.

Is it asked, what is the defect of the present school-books, and where is the necessity for printing new ones? We answer, that although there were no defects in those already existing, which is far from the truth, yet it is most desirable to have a set which should be generally used in all the parish schools of Scotland, and, if possible, in others also. The very number and variety of books at present in use is a great evil, causing great inconvenience to teachers, to learners, and especially to parents. A parent can scarcely change his residence, and send his children to the school of his new abode, but he must also lay in a set of new school-books, scarcely any two schoolmasters teaching from the same books. If this evil can be at all remedied by a new, superior, and cheaper set of school-books, the advantage to the public will be immense.

But then there are defects in most of the school-

books presently in use, which it is hoped later and fuller experience may enable compilers to avoid in preparing a new set. Most of them, for instance, especially the older ones, are written without any system, and stuffed to the throat with fine sounding pieces of rhetoric, almost as unintelligible to many, who read them fluently, as Greek or Latin. Many of them are polluted with heathen maxims, heathen morality, and unchristian sentiments; and many of them abound in pieces of plays and poetry, where the name of God is profaned, and foolish or wicked things are commended or made the subject of mirth. Again, most of the more modern ones are more or less tinged with the same faults, and almost all are sadly deficient in simplicity and directness. Finally, the price of all of these, whether older or newer, especially when conjoined with the variety of them, is a great evil, calling for instant redress. The best of them—Thomson's, McCulloch's, and Wood's—are all high-priced books, and amongst them a poor man will pay almost as much for the school-books as he pays for the schooling of his children. Now the schoolmasters are deeply convinced of the necessity of cheapness, as well as of superior excellence, and are willing, I believe, to employ the profits of their last set, amounting to about £700, in cheapening the present. The ministers have long felt the same thing, and I trust will be most anxious in uniting with the schoolmasters in producing, not only the best, but the cheapest set of school-books in Scotland.

Notwithstanding all the school-books already in existence then, there is abundant room for the new and improved set proposed by the national teachers, and abundant ground to think, that if they are what we may expect them to be, they will prove a great boon to the whole country, as well as to the parochial schools.

As to superior excellence—the other great requisite—this will, in some degree at least, depend upon the design which the compiler sets before him, and the plan by which he seeks to fulfil this design. If he designs, as seems to have been so often the case before, to gather together all the fine sounding passages in sermons, or in speeches, or books of poetry, which have ever caught his attention, all, in a word, that is most interesting to himself in poetry or oratory, he will fail, as his predecessors have done. He must take a very opposite course if he wishes success in this path. In the selection of all his reading lessons he must again become the boy, enter into the boy's feelings, feel with him and for him. Simplicity and directness—that which attracts the attention and encourages the exertions of children—are the great objects, which every compiler of school-books should always keep in view. But there are also some general principles, as to what these simple and direct lessons shall teach, of vast importance, to be attended to as he proceeds to fill up his plan. There is, first of all, for instance, the necessity of making the lessons thoroughly Christian lessons throughout. Our parish schools, blessed be God, are Christian institutions; and our school-books should all be distinctly Christian. As certainly as we believe Christianity to be the truth of God, and the revelation of the only way of salvation for men, not one jot or tittle should find a place in any school-book inconsistent with it; and, as much as possible, every school-book should be dedicated to the development of its principles, and the enforcement of its lessons. Secondly, As a body, I hope I may say both of the schoolmasters and ministers of Scotland, that they are literary and scientific Christians; all then which emanates from them, and receives their sanction, should be consistent with the advanced state of science, and adorned by the elegance of literature. Thirdly, It may be well also to remember that we are Scottish Christians and Scottish men, and I would have no objections that the school-books should have a good share of information connected with Scotland, and even a good share of national bias infused into them.

Keeping such general principles always in view, the means by which there seems to be the greatest probability of producing books which should exhibit the most successful applications, are next to be inquired into. One method we cannot but think the most likely of all, and that is, to make known the general principles on which the compilation must proceed, and then to request a given number, say, one hundred, of the most successful teachers, to furnish a list of the lessons which they have found best adapted for the purpose of teaching. There are lessons in all school-books, at which when the scholars arrive, the school takes a start, all is life, activity, and