

The Lord Advocate on Education.

On Thursday night an educational soiree was held in the Assembly Rooms, Leith, in connection with the completion of an infant school, and other additions to the school, Duncan Place, Links. The Rev. Mr. Thorburn, presided.

The Lord Advocate, said—I felt when requested to attend this meeting that although it did present some topics of a controversial nature which perhaps would not be altogether suited to the position which I hold, it was impossible for me to refuse an invitation to a meeting of my constituents in Leith which had for its object the progress of education, and to discuss and, if possible, come to harmony on those great principles upon which national education should be founded. I have taken a small share of the burden of these controversies. The path, unquestionably, is not one without its thorns. The labour no doubt of breaking up the untrodden ground has been considerable, and will be so; but I am quite satisfied that whether it is to be brought at once under the husbandry of useful efforts, or whether it is to lie fallow for a while, the time is not far distant when it will bring forth goodly fruit. On that subject, however, it is not my task to address you to-night. The subject that has been placed in my hands is one removed from controversy. It is not to propose anything for the future. It is to propose prosperity to existing institutions; and I have to propose "The educational Institutions of Leith." All prosperity and all progress to them—all success in the high interests which they have in their hands, all sympathy for them among their fellow townsmen and the community! And when we talk of schools we are very apt to treat the matter in a generalising spirit. We think of schools in the abstract, education in the abstract, a rising generation being brought up in that nurture and admonition by which alone they can thrive, and a generation growing up to manhood ready to do their duty maintain their country's rights, and walk in the social life with decorum and propriety. But it would be very well for the progress of educational institutions if we did not always generalise quite so much—if we looked a little closer at home, paid a little more attention to the schools immediately within our own reach and to a greater or less extent under our own influence, and lent a hearty hand of sympathy and help to those who there have the labour of training up the young. (Cheers.) And let me, therefore, in the few observations that I shall make this evening, say a word or two on behalf of the schoolmasters. The educational institutions of Leith I believe to be in a very flourishing condition. I believe that those who labour in them are most qualified for their task, and I believe, also, that the attendance upon them is very considerable. I had a list furnished to me of those institutions, but I am not going to detain you with speaking of them in detail, in fact, I think I had better omit special allusion, as that might be invidious. But what I rather want to direct your attention to is, that the position of the schoolmaster among us has never been properly recognised, to my mind, at all events, to this day. There is no man who has so great a charge on his hands. There is no profession to which the country owes so much which is so poorly remunerated, not only on the score of money, but in social position or social advantage. I think it would be well if we were to regard the schoolmaster a little more as a man who is entitled to all the sympathy and all the encouragement that his fellow-men can afford him. No doubt there is a great deal in the profession to raise the enthusiasm of those who at first enter upon it. The great success—the great interest—in the profession itself may no doubt carry on, and does carry on, many a man even to extreme age with interest, with excitement, and with power. But nobody can look at a schoolmaster's task, without seeing that, if he has a good deal to excite him, he has also a good deal to depress him. The poet says it is a delightful task to train the infant mind, to teach the young idea how to shoot—and no doubt in the abstract it is; but when you come to teach the young idea, the young idea is inclined to shoot in so many other directions than those which the schoolmaster wishes it, that it is by no means a sinecure that he has, that it is by no means that delightful task at all times, and that the wearisome contention with dullness and with temper, with waywardness of spirit, with ingratitude, which is their lot would in many instances be quite enough to subdue the strongest heart and unnerve the firmest energy. And then again, all of us who have been at school may recollect the kind of regard with which we viewed our master; it was not exactly as a friend; it was as something rather removed above us; we were accustomed, as Goldsmith says,

"To mark
The day's disaster in his morning face."

He was looked upon as being of a different mould and constitution from ourselves, without feeling, without tender emotions that might

be lost, without sensations that might feel from being vexed too roughly; but an automaton put there to discharge a duty for which we might respect him or might dislike him, exactly as we did our own duty in the place where he presided; forgetting all that time that the schoolmaster was probably a man of as tender a heart as stepped—for a schoolmaster's heart is proverbially tender, whatever schoolboys may think—and that in his calling, the interest which he takes in the young faces that sit in the benches before him, his efforts for their future benefit, his speculations as to how those labours of his would bear fruit in future life, were the things that were occupying his heart, and that our welfare was as near and dear to him as if he had been a relative of our own. Now, I say there is much encouragement that one may give to men so placed other entirely from the mere putting him in a position of pecuniary ease; and I wish very much that in our present social state the schoolmasters of Scotland were more treated on the social footing and level in which they ought to move. I have done what I could to raise their social position by raising them in the scale of pecuniary emoluments; and, no doubt, nothing will ever be sufficiently done in order to give them the influence which they deserve until we cease to pay them at a rate which, I think, is utterly unbecoming a great and free State like this. (Cheers.) But, meanwhile, in proposing the Educational Institutions of Leith, I wish also to propose the schoolmasters of Leith, as belonging to a body to whom Scotland owes so much, upon whom so much of our social and domestic comfort depends, from whom we have derived so much, and to whom as yet, I fear, we have given too little. (Loud cheers.)—*North British Mail.*

The Study of Common Things.

OBJECT LESSONS.

The complaint has been often and well urged against our system of education that it deals too exclusively with remote, scientific truth, and cares too little for common every day things. Pupils study long and diligently the laws of language, while they remain unable to use correctly the idioms of common speech; they are busy with the propositions of higher mathematics or philosophy while they are shamefully ignorant of the commonest facts and business of life. The world revealed in their books, and the world of their every day life are not one and the same, but widely different worlds in their apprehension, and so it comes to pass that many who are wise in book lore, are quite otherwise in practical affairs.

It is true that this complaint is oftenest made by those who, in their blind zeal for the practical in education, would banish all disciplinary studies from the schools, and would replace the volumes of classical learning with treatises on bread making, and farming or mechanic arts. To avoid Scylla, they would rush on Charybdis, and for fear that the generalizations of science should make pupils mere theorists, would condemn them to the endless study of chaotic facts. But we may well give heed to the complaint itself notwithstanding the false conclusions of many that make it. They are not alone in their charge: many of our leading writers on education, and practical teachers, have noticed this too exclusive study of books and the consequent lack of cultivation of the powers of observation.

It should be remarked that the fault of this thing is not wholly the teacher's. The trouble arises from the lack of home instruction. No sufficient effort is made at home to teach children the names and uses of common things. The teacher, too readily, perhaps, takes it for granted that the child knows or will readily learn of itself many things which it does not know, and which should be taught it. He accordingly puts his pupils at once into books, and regards it as the sum total of his duties, to teach them the text books. Thus it happens that our children are engaged, at once, in efforts to comprehend, or, at least, to commit to memory the terms and formulas of abstract science, whilst they are left in pitiable ignorance of thousands of significant and useful facts around them; and thus too it happens that the long and weary years of school study so generally fail to give that ready practical wisdom which alone stands us in stead in the business of life.

An effort has been made to remedy this evil by the introduction, into primary schools, of OBJECT LESSONS, as they have been termed, or exercises for the cultivation of the powers of observation and expression. In the Prussian Schools these lessons constitute the main part of the earlier instruction of the pupils. Says Prof. Stowe, who