

Society is gradually awakening to the fact that there are many grave defects in that system of general free education, which, it must be confessed, was somewhat hastily organized—it is beginning to recognize that to grant to young children the great boon of a free education, but at the same time to leave their crude receptive young brains unsweetened by any form of religious instruction, has failed signally in elevating their moral character, while the shameful sectarian discord which renders such a course expedient is sapping the very foundations of the doctrine of Christianity. Yes, and I have full warrant for this assertion from the very remarkable statistics emanating from the International Institute of Sociology, which was held in Paris last October, under the presidency of Sir John Lubbock. In discussing the effect of advanced free education upon crime, he stated that since the passage of the Act of 1870 for providing primary and secondary education in England, the number of children in English free schools has increased from 1,500,000 to 5,000,000, while the number of persons in prison has fallen from 12,000 to 5,000. The yearly average of persons sentenced to penal servitude for the worst crimes has decreased from 3,000 to 800; the number of juvenile offenders and delinquents has decreased from 14,000 to 5,000; and paupers have decreased by over 50 per cent. Let it be remembered that these remarkable results have been produced by an educational system which contains in its curriculum religious instruction of an unsectarian character. But now let us step across the English Channel into France, where the system of free education is quite as elaborate as that of England, but with this important exception: there is no religious instruction of any kind. What is the consequence? We find that crime has increased hand in hand with education. The cry goes up that education is filling the prisons. If we turn to the United States, to the Antipodes, to Australia and New Zealand, the statistics tell the same sad story, that crime increases directly as the increase in the number of godless schools. This offers food for very grave reflection.

But to descend from higher to lower things, I may add, with regard to education, that those unhealthy mental stimulants, frequent competitive examinations, have a tendency to engender conceit in place of sound learning, and they therefore become demoralizing both to the teachers and the taught. Then again, the multitude of subjects which are frequently forced upon the attention of the students are not calculated to strengthen their young and unformed brains; it is equivalent to cramming into the stomach more food than it can possibly digest.

We ought to ask ourselves this question: What is the object of advanced free education? Is it not to develop the latent talent of the child in order that it may become a citizen who, by example as well as by usefulness, may benefit the society to which either he or she may belong. The true end of knowledge should be to "provide a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator and for the relief of man's estate." Therefore, the tendency of advanced free education should be to make the adult refined, that is, human in the best sense; and also practical, that is, capable of doing useful work. The instinct of labour must be cultivated; our intellectual food must be "converted into mental muscle, and not mental fat."

The two important objective points which I have enumerated can only be reached by the student through force of example, derived principally from the conduct of the teacher, and also by a curriculum which comprises practical with theoretical instruction. The eye, the ear and the hand must unite, in order to form and fashion the brain.