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### NATIONAL EDUCATION IN ENGLAND.

A subject of great social importance has lately occupied the attention of the British Parliament. On the night of the 11th of February, Sir J. Pakington moved in the House of Commons an address to the Queen for the issue of a commission "to enquire into the present state of popular education in England, whether the present system worked efficiently," and to "report what changes are necessary, if any, to extend sound and cheap elementary instruction to all classes of the people." In making this motion Sir J. Pakington drew a sad picture of the ignorance prevalent among the lower classes of England's population. Some of the facts mentioned in evidence of this were remarkable. The chaplain of the goal at Preston, Lancashire, reported that forty per cent. of the inmates of that place, not all criminals, were ignorant of the name of the world's Redeemer, and from sixty to seventy per cent. did not know the name of England's present sovereign. The result of all his inquiries had convinced the speaker, "first, that there were large masses in this country in a state of general ignorance, which was deeply to be lamented: and secondly, that in a considerable portion of the country, whether rural districts or towns, there were either no schools at all, or schools so ineffectual and so inefficient as to be totally inadequate for the purpose of national education."

By a statement drawn up by the Secretary of the Educational Board it appears that the per centage of children under ten years

of age attending school in England, which in 1850 was 37 and a fraction, in 1857 had fallen to 27 and a fraction, a decrease occurring every year, except in 1852. A school atlas, recently officially prepared, contains a diagram showing the estimated per centage of children between seven and fourteen years of age attending school in seventeen different countries, and England stands tenth upon the list. The per centage in Saxony was within a fraction of 100; in New England, 95; in Holland, 92. Next came Prussia, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Belgium, Austria, Scotland and England, with a per centage of only 45. These were facts which justified him (Sir J. Pakington) in asking for an inquiry into the causes of our backwardness, and the remedies which ought to be applied. As representatives of the people they were bound to address themselves to a state of things so little creditable to England, and to endeavour to raise her in this respect, not merely to a par with other countries, but with other parts of Her Majesty's dominions. Scotland stood far above England in this respect. He recollected the noble lord the member for London stating in a former debate that a Scotch clergyman had told him that there was not a child in his parish seven years old who could not read. *In Canada there was an admirable system of education in existence, and the Australian colonies were most anxiously endeavouring to establish a sound system which should reach all parts of the population.* He was sorry to be obliged to think that Parliament took less interest in this question than any other part of the community. Out of doors the promoters of education, though not noisy agitators, were a numerous and zealous body, and the subject excited great interest among extensive and important classes of the community. In proof of this he might refer to the conference which was held in London last summer, under the presidency of the Prince Consort. That conference was held specially to consider the early age at which children left school, and the remedies that were to be devised. For three days, during which that conference lasted, he never saw a greater display of interest than was evinced by the intelligent men from all parts of the country who attended it. As another proof of the large and extended interest which was taken in the matter, he might refer to the large and important meeting which was held a few months since in Birmingham, under the presidency of Lord Brougham, for the establishment of an association for the advancement of social science. He begged to remind the House that a very long time had elapsed since an extensive inquiry of that nature had been made. In 1818 Lord Brougham, whose zealous services in this