

them which you will, one thing is indispensable—namely, a low condition of intelligence and cultivation in those who are to be their dupes.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE SUBJECT.

And this brings me to the practical point which I have seen all along before me looming in the distance, and towards which I have been tending throughout the course of this to you, I fear, tedious exordium. But before we proceed to examine it, let us sum up the results we have already obtained. We have ascertained that there is such a thing as smattering—that it even prevails pretty extensively—that under certain conditions it is productive of much evil, but that it is innocuous if reserved for purposes of ornament or dalliance exclusively, if treated, as Madame de Staël assumes that Providence intends flowers to be treated when, in sublime contempt for the materialistic tendencies of the age in which she lives, she thus apostrophises them “*les inutiles fleurs qui destines a plaire ne l'abaissent pas à servir.*” But how are we to guard against the mischiefs which smattering, when the circumstances are favourable, may unquestionably entail? Not most assuredly by vociferating the scottish cry “*Drink deep or taste not.*” We know that this advice would be tendered in vain, and that it would be cruel to give it if it had even a chance of being followed. There is nothing for it, I apprehend, but to raise the standard of general knowledge and cultivation so high that smatterers will be little likely to mistake their own shallowness for profundity in matters affecting themselves, or where the interests of others are concerned to induce them to commit that blunder.

LORD ELGIN'S EXPERIENCE IN VARIOUS COMMUNITIES.

Now, it has been my lot for some years past to be placed in very favourable positions for watching, not always as a merely passive spectator, the progress of certain communities in which, from their earliest beginning, the duty of preserving the common weal against perverse influences of this description has been deemed a State obligation of the highest order. The communities to which I refer were founded by men of our race, religion, and language; and at the time when this conviction of duty dawned upon them, were all, what some of them still continue to be, subject to the same Sovereign as ourselves. To extirpate, root and branch, the whole race of impostors, and by this summary proceeding to accomplish the end in view, was obviously an impracticable undertaking.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE EARLY NEW ENGLANDERS.

The New Englanders, indeed, made, at one time, an attempt in this direction, by consigning to the flames those whom they were pleased to regard as quacks or smatterers in religion. But they found to their cost that the faggot and the stake only serve to propagate such mischiefs, and were forced, after trial, to admit that the experiment was a failure, and that Patrick Hamilton was not the only victim of whom it might with truth be said that his smoke infected all those on whom it blew. It was no less impossible in their case to adopt the expedient so much relied on elsewhere, of vesting all political power and social influence in the hands of a select minority, who might be assumed, for the sake of argument, at least, to be above the reach of these noxious influences. The passengers by the Mayflower were, in birth, education, fortune, and zeal, coequal; and on this dead level of social equality, it was soon discovered that no institutions, except such as conferred equal rights and privileges on all, could be made to stand. There was absolutely nothing for it, therefore, except to endeavour, by extending to the utmost the benefit of intellectual culture, to limit as much as possible the number of those who, if left to themselves, would be likely, through adverse circumstances or lack of opportunity, to swell the list of dupes. The earnest and patriotic men to whom the rising fortunes of these young communities were intrusted, desisted this truth from afar, and, hailing it with joy, set diligently and from the first to work to secure, against all risks and casualties, those interests of popular education, which in their peculiar circumstances, they had justly brought themselves to consider the palladium of the State. (Cheers.)

COTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS IN SCOTLAND AND NEW ENGLAND.

To us Scotchmen the experiment to which I have referred is especially interesting, because of the close resemblance which it bears to one of the same character made at about the same period in our own country. At the very time when the settlers in the New World were looking to the establishment of an organised system of general education as their best available security against delusions that might obstruct the progress of a free community, the people of Scotland were having recourse to the same expedient to protect themselves from the danger of again falling under the yoke of impostures which they had only recently shaken off. There are many striking analogies, and some not less striking contrasts, in the educational histories of the two peoples; and although I cannot now venture on a field of inquiry so extensive, I am confident that nothing would be more likely to throw light on the obscurer points of the educational controversy than a searching examination into these analogies and contrasts, and a truly

conscientious appreciation of the results which have flowed from them. There is, in the first place, a most remarkable coincidence in the date at which the two systems came into being. Dr. McCreie says of the General Assembly which sat in 1638, that it first enacted the system of our parochial schools. It was in the month of April of the year 1635 that the inhabitants of Boston entreated Brother Philemon Porrmont to become schoolmaster for the nurturing and teaching children among them; and the earliest statute for the establishment of common schools passed in Massachusetts bears the date of 1647. Although, therefore, the fact that the scheme of the Scottish parochial schools is sketched in John Knox's Book of Discipline, published in 1560, entitles Scotland to the credit of having been first in the field, it is clear that neither system has much to boast of on the score of priority, while there rests unmistakably on the birth of both the dew of the womb of our Protestant morning. Both systems, too, and this is another strong point of resemblance between them, have proved themselves in the day of their strength alike instrumental, not only in raising to a level unprecedentedly high the standard for general morality and intelligence in the communities in which they have been respectively established, but also in sending forth year after year surplus bands of trained youths exercised and breathed for the conflicts of life, and prepared, when home wants were fully supplied, to seek its honours and its prizes in distant battlefields.

THE SCOT ABROAD.

The talent of Scotchmen for self-expatiation has been at all times a theme for sarcasm; and jealous rivals, beaten on their own ground, have borne in this shape ungracious testimony to superiorities which they could not otherwise contest. (Cheers.) So far back as the beginning of the seventeenth century, we find such men as Patrick Gordon, who rose to high command in the Russian service, and of whom it is recorded that he received his education at a common country school in Aberdeenshire. No one who has had experience in those new countries towards which an instinctive genius for colonisation impels so many of our race can have failed to perceive the advantages which on that field, where there is neither favour nor affection, and where all compete on terms of the most entire fairness and equality, Scotchmen have in times past derived from their superior early training. It is not unfortunately essential to historical accuracy that in making this observation I should restrict myself to the times that are past?

COMPETITION—(1.) IRELAND.

Can I close my eyes to truths which competitive examinations have recently revealed? Can I conceal the fact that even in those quarters to which I have more particularly referred, Scotchmen can no longer boast a monopoly of the advantages which at one time they possessed almost exclusively?—that while they are stationary or retrograde others are advancing?—that, above all, the national schools of Ireland are beginning to tell sensibly in the more developed intelligence of that quick-witted and ingenious people? But to proceed with the parallel which I was instituting.

(2.) NEW ENGLAND.

In the history of New England we observe precisely the same phenomenon; here, however, not only in the past, but in the present tense likewise. The stream of mental cultivation and intelligence, issuing forth from its common schools, spreads over the whole surface of the vast confederacy of which New England is a part, transporting into the wilderness, among alien races and barbarous tribes, the traditions, moral, religious, and political, of the early homes of the Puritans. Dark as is the cloud which now hangs over America—and no one knows how dark it is better than I do myself—I make bold to say that any one who undertakes to speculate on the probable duration of the American Union, or to determine the issue of the desperate conflict between right and wrong now waging in that country, without taking into account the humanising and cementing influence of the New England schools, will arrive at results very wide of the truth. I have adverted to these points as instances of the resemblances which an attentive observer may detect between the two systems. Let me conclude with one of contrast. In this year, 1856, when we in Scotland are seriously considering the expediency of abandoning our national system altogether, and of committing the educational interests of our people to the fitful mercies of denominationalism, the common schools of New England, more prosperous, more useful, more popular, more liberally supported than ever by the self-imposed taxation of a grateful people, are more than ever felt by that people to be *decus et tutamen*, their safeguard and their glory. (Applause.) But what is the testimony of strangers on these points?

(3.) UNITED STATES.

An intelligent traveller, writing a short time ago from New York, observes that the willingness of the people to tax themselves for educational purposes seems almost to run to excess in that country; and, he adds, the wealthier classes on whom this burden falls, in proportion to their fortunes, bear it without grudging, because experience has