



Anniversary Of The Salisbury National Schools

The anniversary of the Salisbury National Schools was held on Sunday, Sept. 30, on which occasion the children and their friends and patrons attended Divine worship in the Cathedral. We were happy to notice that the congregation was at once numerous and highly respectable, and we are hence led to hope that the services of that interesting day will have the effect of adding to the number of those who feel an interest in the prosperity of the schools, the funds of which have, unhappily, of late suffered a great and melancholy diminution. Previous to the discourse (of which we subjoin a sketch), the old Hundredth Psalm was solemnly and impressively sung by the children accompanied by the whole congregation – after which, the Rev. W. E. Hony advocated the claims of the Schools to public support in an able and deeply-interesting sermon, from Prov. i.7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

The Preacher commenced by remarking. that Solomon, who was intimately acquainted with the human heart, and had been blessed by the Almighty with wisdom far beyond that of other men, was well qualified to form a correct judgement as to the comparative value of secular and religious knowledge, and he had unhesitatingly given his testimony to the superiority of religious attainments over all merely human wisdom – declaring that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”. A different estimate, however, appeared to have been formed by some in the present day, who thought that secular, or, as it was called “useful” knowledge should be the grand point to be attended to in the education of the young-an object to which religion ought to be rendered subservient-that endeavours should be made for the spread of general information, and that the young were afterwards to acquire a knowledge of religion as best they could, and as opportunity might offer. It thus appeared that the question at the present day was, not whether religious should or should not form part of that instruction. There still appeared to be in some quarters a lurking disinclination to the education of the poor It was not his purpose, however, on that occasion to refute or answer objections founded on such a feeling-the only real question at present at issue being how to give a right direction to the zeal for the acquisition of knowledge which had been awakened in the human mind-and to impress on the minds of the young the important truth, that a God of mercy had sent his Son into the world to redeem his people from sin and death, and to restore lost creatures to the love and favour of a justly-offended Creator. This important point had even formed a part of the instruction afforded by the Church of England; and although but little had for many years been effected in that particular, still during the period in question that little had been effected by the instrumentality of the Church of England. This had been the great end and design aimed at in the establishment of the National Society-to promote among the poor an intelligent knowledge of religious truths, and enable them, if called upon, to give an account of the faith that was in them. There were at present many schools in connexion with the Society, and the number had, during the last twenty- five years, increased in a large degree. Although it had been said by some, that the education of the children of the poor had not been attended with the anticipated results, he was happy t be able to say, that, so far as the schools in connexion with the Church of England were concerned, the assertion was not correct-although at the same time he was far from asserting that the system at present pursued in our National School was altogether free from defects.

The grand subject of education naturally divided itself into the three heads of Instruction, Discipline and Example.

On the first head, that of Instruction, the Preacher spoke of the paramount importance of bringing up the young in the fear of the Lord, and making them good Christians, without which foundation every system of education must fail in its great object – adding, that if the education of the poor had failed in the effect, and in any instances experienced a want of success, it must be owing to the fact, that the vital truths of religion had not been taught, or, if taught, had been conveyed as mere matters of knowledge, and had not reached the heart. Those vital truths formed the

foundation of the instruction afforded in the National Schools; and if in some few instances the task had been imperfectly accomplished, it must be attributed, not to the system itself, but to a want of piety or ability in the teacher. It should also be recollected, that the large masses of children brought together in populous towns did not present so favourable an opportunity for the successful issue of Christian and scriptural education as the smaller schools, since in the former there was not that connexion between the children and their teacher and Minister which existed in small parishes. The children were frequently withdrawn from school at an early age, and lost sight of in larger places – while in the smaller ones, although the children left, the Minister still kept up the connexion, which did not, and ought not to cease until he had brought them to Confirmation – and led them to the table of the Lord.

With regard to the second point – that of Discipline – he did not allude to punishment or severity, but to that constant check and superintendence, which suffered nothing to pass unnoticed – to that regular system which was established in most of the National Schools, the tendency of which was to fix the most valuable habits in the young, and which ought not to be confined merely to school hours, but to be carried on at home by parents, who possessed the best opportunities of ascertaining the tempers and inclinations of their children, and whose neglect of that important particular formed one of the chief causes of the failure of school discipline to effect the permanent improvement of the young.

This led him to the next point – Example – a matter in which school and home ought to be joint workers together, and the want of which was the cause why many were no better for what they had been taught. At school, the children were instructed never to swear or take God's holy name in vain – while at home, it but too frequently happened that the commandment was broken – that the most dreadful oaths and imprecations were uttered by those whose imperative duty it was to set a good example to their children – and that all was wrangling, bitterness, and wrath. Were the lessons taught at school to be exemplified by the conduct of the parents at home, they might hope to see a better result than at present to the efforts making for the education of the young. But the influence of example was not confined to home. When the children were placed out at service, it too often happened that all instruction ceased, and that masters and mistresses proved remiss in their duty to those committed to their charge, so that the children became careless and indifferent, and were at length brought to pay little or no heed to what they had been taught. The careful superintendence of kind and careful masters was a matter of great importance to the young, since, deprived of this, the temptations of the world often proved too powerful, and triumphed over the principles which had been taught at school. Since religion alone could give a child the chance of escaping the snares and temptations of the world, they ought to redouble their efforts for the diffusion of religious principles. Even should the children in after years unhappily swerve from the right path, an hour of reflection might and probably would arrive, in which they would call to mind the peaceful and virtuous lessons of their youth – and they would thus possess a great advantage over those whose minds, for want of instruction, presented only a melancholy blank.

Another important consideration, in so far as regarded the success of the Society, was, did they place their trust in God, or did they rely on their own arm of flesh? – did they wrestle with God in prayer for the objects of their care? What right had they to expect the blessing of God if they did not seek it – if they did not lift up their souls in earnest supplication for it? They might rest satisfied, that if they sought Him in a proper spirit, the Almighty would not withhold his blessing.

While it had been his (the preacher's) object to prove, that if a want of success had attended the efforts of the Society, it was not to be attributed to any defects in the schools, he was not prepared to assert that they did not admit of improvement. They had no wish to undervalue the suggestions which had been given to that end, and were willing to adopt every practicable improvement. It was indisputable that the National Society had been productive of invaluable good. This was fully proved by all investigation that had been entered into three years since, at which period schools in connection with the Society had been opened in 382 places, and a vast number of young persons were receiving the blessings of a religious education.

The Preacher then again adverted in terms of disapprobation to the proposition made in some quarters to separate secular from religious knowledge, and to establish a national system totally unconnected with the Church of England, from which religion was to be wholly excluded – and expressed a wish, that, England had many years ago followed the example set by Scotland with such success, where, in 1696, parochial schools had been by law established throughout the country, which had effected a decided change for the better in the character of the whole people. Happy had it been for England had she at that period established such a system! – for want of which, education in this country had been an up-hill work from that day to the present. The soul of man was immortal, and ought to be fitted for immortality. The great aim of the advocates for general education, to the exclusion of religion, was to qualify man merely for the concerns of this world, forgetting that “godliness is profitable for all things, having promise

of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Attendance on the duties of religion did not incapacitate a man for the affairs of this life. It was not his wish to decry the value of intellectual attainments : he was convinced however, that a man might cultivate his intellectual faculties without effecting the slightest improvement in his heart – an improvement which could alone be effected by the aid of religion. Instead of lowering, then, it was their duty to raise the standards of religious instruction, and forcibly to impress on the minds of children their privileges and duties as Christians and as members of the pure and Apostolic Church of England. At the same time, he would not, in deference of his opinions of those who dislike the communication of this or that particular branch of information, keep back from children the knowledge of any thing that it was right for them to acquire : such conduct would be neither wise nor manly.

That the National Society had not effected more good was to be attributed to a want of co-operation throughout the country. The call made upon the people had not been responded to in a manner that might have been hoped for. The present period was a great crisis in the affairs of education. Let the Church of England, then, take her place as she ought to do – let her take the lead – let not any of her communion remain listless and inactive. They ought not only to improve the system of teaching, but to extend it.

He had two further remarks to offer :- 1, While they paid particular attention to the inculcation of religious instruction, let them not despise intellectual attainments – and, with this object, they ought to provide competent teachers, who should be properly qualified for their office by a more perfect course of training than that at present pursued. 2. Let there not be a parish in the kingdom where the children of Churchmen might not receive a sound religious education. To accomplish this desirable object throughout the land would be attended with great additional labour and expence ; and he called upon all present to yield their time, talents, and substance in aid of any efforts that might be thus made in that diocese for the benefit of their fellow men. Were the effort to be vigorously made. And they were favoured with a blessing from on high, they might justly hope for an increase of the national prosperity, and the stability of their cherished institutions.

The Preacher, then advertising to the object of the present meeting, remarked, that the funds of the Salisbury National Schools stood greatly in need of public support, since it appeared that the expenditure at present far exceeded the receipts. This must without doubt have been occasioned by some necessary additional expenditure which had not otherwise been provided for, since he could not for a moment imagine that the wealthy city of Salisbury was unable to afford adequate support to one institution for the education of the poor in the principles of the Church of England. He particularly reminded them, that personal superintendence was, in establishments of that description, often as valuable as pecuniary aid. He then called upon parents to give that aid to the society's exertions on which so much depended – by setting a good example to their children, so that the lessons taught at school might be acted upon at home. Whatever might be thought upon the subject, parents could not, by the mere act of sending their children to school, get rid of their responsibility. The parent was the natural religious instructor of his children, and he could not delegate his power and authority to others. None could do so much for children in that particular as parents, whose bounden duty it was, and on whom lay an awful responsibility, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He anxiously called upon parents to do their duty in that important respect to their offspring and installed the care of I. H., who did not indeed appear to have set a bad example to his children, but whose sin was, that he had not exerted himself with sufficient energy to restrain them from their evil courses. The Preacher, in conclusion, uttered an affectionate exhortation to the children seated before him, reminding them, that if they were not better they would be worse for the instruction afforded to them, since they would have to give an account of the talents committed to their care. Education was worth nothing unless it made them religious. Let them, then, pray to God for his blessing on the instruction they received; let them call upon Him to teach them their duty, who had promised all thing to sincere and fervent prayer. All could thus lend their aid, by imploring God's blessing on their charitable undertaking – since it was from that source alone that they could entertain a well-grounded and rational expectation of success.

The sum collected was £36 12s. 3d. The plates were held by Mrs. Wyndham and Miss Denison, supported respectively by I. H. Jacob and Wadham Wyndham, Esqs.

Salisbury and Winchester Journal, Monday, 8 October 1838