

The Birkbeck School, London Mechanics' Institution.

Contributors

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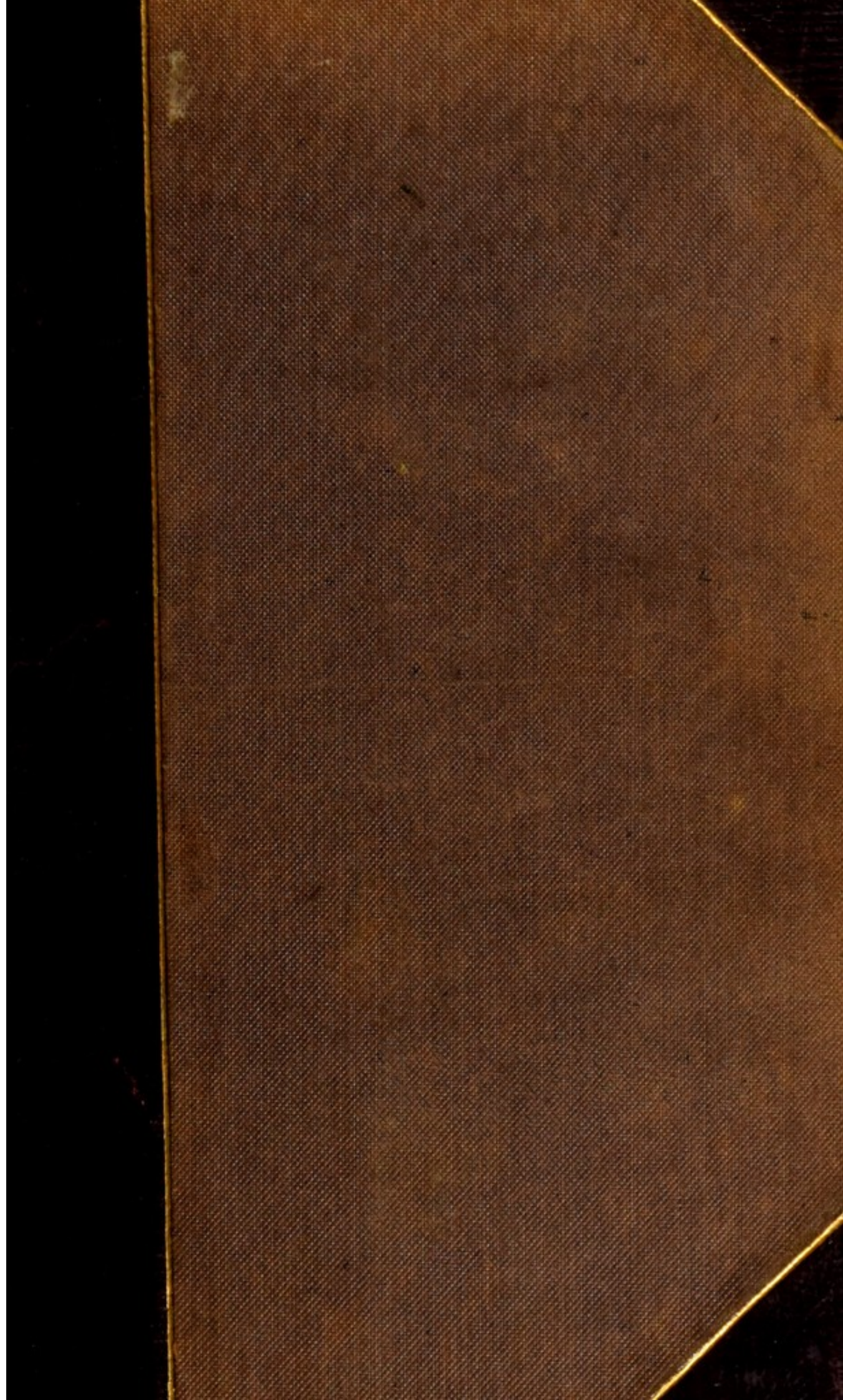
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that the elements and conditions of man's wellbeing in this world are *not exclusively moral*; and in this respect there is a great distinction between temporal and eternal happiness. The elements and conditions of the latter are *wholly moral and religious*; and the Bible is, therefore, in regard to them, generally viewed as the only and all-sufficient guide; but not so with respect to man's temporal interests. These depend on *physical*, on *physiological*, and on *economical* causes, as well as on moral and religious causes; and, in many instances, an individual is not in a condition to judge soundly regarding *what is his duty*, if he be ignorant of the first, second, and third of these departments of causation. For example—The Bible explicitly declares that “he that provideth not for his own is worse than an infidel.” If the individual who reads this injunction be a farmer, he may deduce from it the inference that he is required by Scripture to manage his land in the best manner, that he may draw from it as large a provision as possible for his family; but the Bible tells him nothing concerning the most advantageous method of draining, manuring, labouring, and cropping his fields. Science, however, which means knowledge of God's natural laws and works, will teach him this; and, therefore, before he shall be able competently to fulfil this item of his moral and religious duty, he must study agriculture as well as religion and morality. Again—“providing for his own” implies that he shall rear his children in the best possible health; but the Bible does not fully instruct him concerning the influence of improper diet and clothing, of ill-aired and crowded rooms, of unhealthy localities, of too much study, and other physical and moral influences on the health of his offspring. Physiological science, however, would communicate to him this information, and, therefore, a knowledge of it also is necessary to him before he can successfully fulfil this scriptural precept. Farther, in order to be able to study either religion or science with intelligence, and to practise with advantage the rules of conduct which they dictate, the intellectual faculties must be cultivated and trained to observe, to reason, and to act. But the Bible does not contain an exposition of the art of teaching and training the mental powers. Science, however, does so; and again it appears that in order to cultivate even the religious, moral, and intellectual faculties of children, and to train them to proper action, it is necessary to go beyond the precincts of the Bible. This is no disparagement to the Bible, because apparently it was not designed to absolve man from the duty of studying the Divine will expressed in the constitution of nature, and presented to him for his investigation and guidance. On the contrary, one of the offices of religion and morality, in so far as this world is concerned, appears to be to enforce the study of nature and obedience to her precepts as a duty, in order that we may fulfil the Divine will in regard to our sublunary existence.

We solicit attention to these considerations because, until the points involved in them be decided by public opinion one way or the other, no progress can be made in this momentous question. If Dr Chalmers's view be both sound and complete, the advocates of secular education should succumb; but if Archbishop Whately's principle be sound, then the adherents of dogmatic religious education may be expected to yield something to the claims of the people for a more extended instruction than in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, the Bible, and the Catechism. If the Archbishop be in the right, we are defrauding the labouring classes of an important benefit of reason, by withholding from them an adequate knowledge of the causes of their temporal suffering or wellbeing; and it is unseemly to make zeal for our peculiar interpretations of Scripture an obstacle in the way of communicating this information, seeing that these interpretations have no necessary connection with the constitution of nature; and do not embrace the “*whole counsel of God*.”

In London, the experiment of teaching the children of the working classes the elements of political economy and physiology, in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, and omitting dogmatic religion, has been tried with success; and an additional school embracing these branches of instruction has recently been instituted, under the patronage of the Earl of Radnor, in connection with the London Mechanics' Institution: It is named the Birkbeck School.

The promoters of the School described in the foregoing Prospectus desire to ascertain whether or not parents belonging to the working classes of Edinburgh appreciate the advantages of a more extensive education for their children, than they have at present the opportunity of obtaining; and with this view, the school before mentioned will be opened in the New Trades' Hall, Infirmary Street, Edinburgh, on Monday, the 4th December 1848, at Nine o'clock in the morning.

THE
BIRKBECK SCHOOL,
LONDON MECHANICS' INSTITUTION.

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE
RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF RADNOR.

THE Special Committee appointed to establish a Day-School in connection with the London Mechanics' Institution, beg to inform their fellow members and the public in general, that the Birkbeck School was opened in the Lecture Theatre of the Institution, on the 17th of July 1848, where every facility is afforded for the highest mental development of Boys from the age of seven years and upwards.

The Course of Education is purely secular.

The subjects taught, include Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, Composition, History, Geography, Drawing, and Vocal Music; the elements of Algebra, Geometry, Mensuration, Mechanics, and the Natural Sciences.

In addition to these, the children are made acquainted with *the laws of their own organisation*, in order that they may understand how much their health, general energy, physical happiness, and length of life, are dependent on their own conduct; also with the laws of SOCIAL ECONOMY, that they may properly understand their own position in Society, and their duties towards it. Particular attention will be paid to MORAL TRAINING.

The system of education adopted is that which modern science and experience have shewn to be most in accordance with the constitution of the human mind, and best calculated to strengthen, develop, and rightly direct all its faculties, by presenting to them the objects naturally adapted to call them into varied and healthy activity. Instead of forcing the Boys to commit long sentences to memory, by which so much mental labour is wasted, and the matter generally lost sight of in the effort to retain the words, the subjects of study are presented in a form the most enticing and agreeable to the minds of Children; thus their attention is maintained by the natural activity of the mental faculties, rather than by the fear of physical torture: the School becomes a place of amusement and happiness instead of tears and trembling, and the acquisition of knowledge is permanently regarded not as a laborious task-work, but as the most agreeable as well as the most elevating of pursuits.

The Moral Training is based on the principle, that the moral feelings, like the physical and intellectual powers, can only be strengthened by actual exercise; that *the mere teaching of moral precepts* is not sufficient, since they are but intellectual truths for the guidance of the feelings, and their acquisition an intellectual operation: they must therefore be carried out in practice, to which end the School is so organised as to form as nearly as possible a little model of the world without, and the conduct of the boys in their intercourse with each other so regulated, that on leaving the School they may enter society already trained to become worthy and orderly, as well as active and intelligent citizens.

The School hours are from half-past Nine in the Morning till Three in the Afternoon (Saturday excepted), with an interval of half an hour for the children to partake of such refreshments as they may bring with them.

Sons or Brothers of Members of the Institution may be admitted on the payment of Four Shillings per quarter, or Fourpence per week. All other Pupils will be admitted at Six Shillings per quarter, or Sixpence per week. Pupils may be admitted at the half-quarter on the payment of the proportional subscription.

The quarters commence on the first Mondays in the months of January, April, July, and October, the half-quarters at Six weeks after the commencement of the quarters.

All Subscriptions to be paid in advance.

It is expected that the parents will furnish all School Materials, except Reading Books, Drawing Paper, Pens and Ink.

Applications to be addressed to Mr RUNTZ, Schoolmaster, London Mechanics' Institution, Southampton Buildings, Holborn.

W. MATTIEU WILLIAMS,

Hon. Sec. Birkbeck School Committee.

This letter is referred to in the life of Mr Lovett himself, published in 1876

LETTER FROM MR WILLIAM LOVETT, IN EXPLANATION OF THE
NATIONAL HALL SCHOOL, LONDON.

16 South Row, New Road, October 22, 1848.

To GEORGE COMBE, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—I thank you kindly for the Prospectus you sent me of your intended School for the Children of the Working-Classes of Edinburgh. It is exceedingly gratifying to me to hear that practical steps are being taken to promote the great object of General Education, by one who, for so many years, has laboured so earnestly to promote sound and comprehensive views regarding the physical, mental, and moral nature of those who are to be trained and educated. I earnestly hope that good men of all grades of opinion will perceive the necessity of seconding your praiseworthy object, that of establishing a school, on the threshold of which no question shall be asked tending to exclude any of the great brotherhood of man; a school where the children of Jew or Gentile may be taught those great laws of society and lessons of their nature as shall best tend to promote that social harmony, that peace and prosperity in society, we all so ardently desire. I hope, also, that my working-class brethren will especially appreciate your benevolent intentions, and will so aid and encourage you, as not only to lead to the triumphant establishment of this one school, but to enable you to multiply and extend the blessing through every district of Scotland. The just education of the millions is peculiarly their important business. They have hitherto been oppressed, impoverished, and degraded, because they have been ignorant—ignorant of the undeveloped powers of their own nature—ignorant of those laws of society on which their prosperity, freedom, and happiness depend;—and ignorant of the only safe, secure, and lasting means by which they can escape from the thralldom. Those means they may be assured they will find embodied in one word—*Education*! Not the mere means and instruments of knowledge which are found in the school routine of reading, writing, and arithmetic, nor the mere teachings of creeds and sects; but such education as shall best develop their own nature, cause them to understand and appreciate the laws and wonders of the universe, and best qualify them to perform their duties as members of society and citizens of the state. But while I would especially invoke the exertions of the working-classes on behalf of this grand object, because their welfare is so pressingly dependent on it, I could wish to see everything approximating to sectarian or class distinction carefully avoided in the establishment of those schools. Hence I would respectfully suggest to you and your friends, that the title you have adopted of Schools for the Working-

Classes, seems to convey the idea of an exclusive character. Schools for the People, I conceive, should aim at embracing *all*; and the hearts and aspirations of *all* should, if possible, be interested in the work. And though class prejudices may have hitherto, by their broad lines of demarcation in school and college, practically denied that "we are all of one blood," and "the children of one common Parent," yet the wisdom and benevolence which spreading knowledge is generating, are fast dispelling those illusions. The advanced spirit of progress is constantly checking those assumptions of pride, and daily shewing that *mind* and *character* are attributes that lift the children of the hut to an eminence far above those badly-trained exclusives of palaces, whose wealth, rank, or station, are their only pretensions.

In the note accompanying your Prospectus, you have expressed a desire for some information respecting the National Hall and Schools, which I have great pleasure in laying before you. In the year 1841, I made an attempt, in conjunction with others, to establish an Association on the plan set forth in the little pamphlet entitled "Chartism," a copy of which I send you. You will perceive that one of the prominent objects of that work was to induce the working-classes to organise themselves, for the purpose of establishing Halls and Schools of Instruction throughout the kingdom, as one of the best means of peacefully obtaining their just share of political power, and for preparing themselves and brethren for the proper exercise of that power, when obtained; as also for taking their brethren out of the contaminating influences of public-houses and beer-shops, places where too many of their meetings are still held, in which their passions are inflamed, their reason drowned, their families pauperised, and themselves socially degraded and politically enslaved. They were shewn, that if the numbers then petitioning for such political power were united, they could, by the payment of one shilling each, quarterly, erect eighty of such Halls or Schools *every year*, could form annually seven hundred Circulating Libraries, and, in addition, could carry out a variety of other objects for self-improvement. This proposal, while it was warmly greeted by the press, and received the commendations of intelligent men among all parties, was met with falsehood, intolerance, and bitterest rancour, by the most prominent organ of Chartism, the Northern Star. Its proprietor and editor jointly denounced it as a plan intended to destroy Fergus O'Connor's political supremacy, and subvert one which he had previously concocted. Education was ridiculed, knowledge was sneered at, facts perverted, truth suppressed, and the lowest passions and prejudices of the multitude were appealed to, to obtain a clamorous verdict against us. In this state of political feeling, it was deemed desirable to try what good could be locally effected. A large chapel being to be let about that period, we took it on a lease of 21 years; and receiving subscriptions from some liberal friends, we were enabled to fit it up as a Hall. It was opened in July 1842, under the title of the National Hall; since which period it has been occupied as a lecture and concert room, and place of meeting. It may be necessary to state, that two of our fundamental rules are opposed to the introduction of intoxicating drinks, and to its being used for purposes of controversial theology. A Sunday School, on a small scale, was established soon after its opening; but owing to the great expense incurred in the fitting up of the Hall, and a consequent debt of about £300, we were unable, till recently, to establish what we all desired, a Day-School for Children. A kind friend, however, came to our aid, one whose heart warmly sympathises with the millions, and whose head is ever active in promoting plans for their welfare. He generously offered us assistance in establishing a Day-School for Boys, under my superintendence, which offer was gratefully accepted. The School was accordingly fitted up, desks provided, a Master engaged, and the School opened in February last. We opened with nearly 100 pupils, and now we have a daily attendance of about 200. Their ages are from six to fourteen, perhaps the majority being from eight to eleven. It is opened to the public generally, and we have the children of Jews, Unitarians, and Christians of various sects, as well as those of no sects at all; no questions being asked, nor opinions taught calculated to give offence to any. But our objects, terms, and course of instruction, may be best gleaned from our Prospectus. It states that,—
 "In directing public attention to this School, the conductors are hopeful of receiving encouragement and support from *all classes*, and more especially from the friends of education, as their chief object in forming it is to provide for the Children of the Middle and Working Classes, a sound, secular, useful, and moral education,—such as is best calculated to prepare them for the practical business of life, to cause them to under-

stand and perform their duties as members of society, and to enable them to diffuse the greatest amount of happiness among their fellowmen. The Children are classified according to age and attainments, and the payments regulated accordingly; for the highest Classes *Sixpence weekly*; and the lowest Classes *Fourpence*. The Parents provide all writing-books and drawing-materials, which are afforded at cost prices. The Course of Instruction comprises:—

READING.	ALGEBRA.	HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY.
WRITING.	GRAMMAR.	FACTS of TRADES and
SPELLING and DERIVA- TION of WORDS.	COMPOSITION.	MANUFACTURES.
ARITHMETIC.	ELOCUTION.	NATURAL HISTORY.
MENSURATION.	GEOGRAPHY.	DRAWING.
BOOK-KEEPING.	HISTORY.	MAPPING, and
GEOMETRY.	SOCIAL ECONOMY.	VOCAL MUSIC.
	OUTLINES of SCIENCE.	

The School Hours are from half-past nine in the morning till three in the afternoon, with an interval of half an hour for the Children to take such refreshments as they may bring with them. This plan is adopted to accommodate those who come from a distance, as well as to guard the Children against the pernicious consequences, that too often occur from their playing in the public streets. Instead of the usual two half holidays, there is no schooling on Saturday; lessons are given for that day to practise at home. Regularity of attendance, and punctuality at the school hours, are especially required, as best contributing to the efforts of the teacher and the attainments of the children; and in all cases of illness, or unavoidable absence, a note from the parent is required. The Superintendent, Principal Master, Assistant Master, and other Teachers for particular Classes, conduct the business of the Boys' School.

Such has been the success attending the Boys' School, and so many the applications for the admission of Girls, that we have engaged a Female Teacher and Assistant, and have resolved on opening a Girls' School, in a large commodious room in the Institution, on the 13th of next month. The course of instruction will be similar to that in the Boys' School, with the addition of their being taught needlework, and such domestic matters as are suited for the other sex. The Payments, School Hours, &c., will be the same as for the Boys.

You will perceive, that our School is purely secular: not that we undervalue religious instruction; but as the attempt to introduce any particular form or creed, or religious teaching, would naturally call forth distrust among those parents whose feelings were opposed, or whose own peculiar views were rejected, we deem it wise to exclude from education all such questions of dispute. If the great precept of "Love one another," be made the basis of educational discipline, and if the moral and intellectual virtues be developed in the minds of the children, we think parents will perceive, that more genuine Christian charity is likely to result than if they were drilled in the constant reading of what they could scarcely comprehend, or by repeating precepts by rote, without their importance being exemplified by practice. We think that when abundant time can be found for imparting religious instruction beyond that dedicated to the School, and when so many religious instructors of all denominations are willing to impart their peculiar views, it would seem more in accordance with the teachings of Christ to remove all sources of contention, and endeavour to *dwell in peace and union*, which are the great essentials of religion, than, by our selfish desires and sectarian jealousies, suffer ignorance, vice, and disunion to prevail.

Trusting that you will pardon this long letter, and wishing your object may be realised, I remain yours very truly,

WM. LOVETT.

SCHOOL FOR SECULAR EDUCATION.

(From the Scotsman of 2d December 1848.)

A meeting of such of the working classes as take an interest in secular education, was held in the Freemasons' Hall, Niddry Street, on Monday evening the 27th November. The meeting was called at the instance of Mr George Combe and Mr James Simpson, and the call was most heartily responded to, the room being crowded by a most respectable assemblage of the working classes.

Mr COMBE stated that the object of the meeting was to consider the subject of secular education. It was not intended as a meeting for discussion, or to put any resolution, or to pledge them to anything; but his design was to present to them the project of a school for the education of boys, on an improved plan, which it was intended to open in Infirmary Street, in the course of next week. In explaining the views which he held on education, they were not to understand that he was asking their concurrence in any particular views which he might state. He allowed every man to judge for himself. All that he proposed doing was to submit certain propositions, which he left to their own disposal. If they thought them useful, he claimed their support. If they dissented from them, he submitted to their right of private judgment, and did not find fault with them for not following him. Before explaining the nature of the school which it was intended to institute, he proposed to make a few remarks on the subject of education itself.

Education was generally divided into secular and spiritual; and in their day, they had had an extraordinary extent of discussion on the merits of secular education, and whether there should be an education given to children apart from religious instruction. As he should use the word secular on the present occasion, it would mean instruction concerning the things of this world, and it was intended to stand in opposition to spiritual instruction rather than religious instruction, for religious instruction might embrace the things of this world. Secular education, then, referred to the things connected with this life, and spiritual instruction referred to the interests of eternity. They would understand that his present observations referred to the things of this world and to its interests.

The first question which he wished to submit to their consideration was this—what need had men of education at all? It might appear to many to be unnecessary to enter on this subject, but doing so, would enable him the better to introduce the views on which this school was to be founded. Some of them were aware that, since he had last the honour of addressing a public audience in Edinburgh, he had made a visit to the United States, and had lectured to numerous audiences in that part of the world. About eighteen months ago, he received a letter from a person in Lowell, in Massachusetts, where there were a great many cotton and spinning mills, as in Glasgow and Manchester. This individual put the question to him—"As you have taken a great interest in the welfare of all classes, can you tell me how we, the working men of Lowell, are to be delivered from the iron hoof of capital; for we find ourselves here in the midst of great mill-owners who are dividing yearly 15 and 20 per cent. from the profits of our earnings, while we have only a bare subsistence for our labour?" He (Mr Combe) sent an answer, and the first point which he endeavoured to explain was, what constituted capital. Capital, he understood, consisted of everything that was useful to man, produced by human skill and labour. He did not count water capital in a country like this where we had a superabun-

