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Charles Stewart

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPOSALS

FOR

Building a new GRAMMAR-SCHOOL, in the city of ^{Edinburgh}; setting forth the Inutility of such a SCHEME, and the Prejudice that may result therefrom to EDUCATION.

WITH

A PROPOSAL for the Increase of LATIN-SCHOOLS, and some OBSERVATIONS on the present Mode of TEACHING.

Train up a CHILD in the Way he should go, &c.

EDINBURGH:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

NOthing certainly merits more the attention of the Public than SEMINARIES of LEARNING; nothing adds more to the lustre and reputation of a city than well regulated and commodious schools. The happiness or misery of our lives often depends on the manner of our education; therefore, whenever we see a plan proposed, wherein either of these is concerned, it ought to be maturely examined in all its different views, and not rashly carried into execution.

In the Address, which occasioned the following Considerations, proposals are made for building a larger school, as the present one contains, with difficulty, *only* 400 boys. Though this is evidently intended for the increase of the school, yet the Proposer does not give the least hint, that there ought to be more teachers. This charge of 400 boys among 5 masters, though their interest will not allow them to own it openly, is
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yet acknowledged by them *in private* to be by far too great. In Westminster school, there are two masters, an upper and an under, and six ushers, and the number of scholars is fixed at a very few above 300. This is a fact, and ought to be attended to, by the promoters of the present Scheme. If the number of scholars, therefore, were reduced in the proportion that 5 bears to 8, the high school would be found exceedingly commodious. I remember a teacher* of note in this city, who would not receive more into his school than 60, and for these employed two ushers.

As plans of this sort may probably, instead of promoting the instruction of youth, have a contrary effect, I was led to make the following observations, not with any intention of hindering such schools as are requisite to be built, but merely to prevent the present strong and commodious edifice from being unnecessarily destroyed, and from falling a sacrifice to the private and interested views of some, and the caprice of others.

* The late Mr Mundell.

If, in these observations, there is ought wrong advanced, or any thing misrepresented, I shall cheerfully stand corrected, and be glad of better information ; if they are found just, I shall think myself happy in having been the least instrumental in promoting a more proper and advantageous plan, and at the same time of saving a great expence to the public.

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPOSALS

FOR

Building a new GRAMMAR-SCHOOL:

“Auri sacra fames.”

HAPPENING lately to see an address to the public, containing proposals for rebuilding the grammar-school of this city, and, from perusing it, being convinced of the absurdity of the scheme, I was induced to make the following observations, which, I hope, will not appear altogether ill-founded.

After a few hackneyed observations, on the mode of conducting the education of boys, and alluring them to the pursuit of knowledge, these proposals set forth, ‘That,
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‘ next to the behaviour of the teacher, no-
 ‘ thing is of greater importance than that the
 ‘ boys should be properly accommodated in
 ‘ the rooms where they are taught.’ This is
 readily admitted.

The author of these proposals next ob-
 serves, ‘ That, when a boy is obliged to re-
 ‘ fort daily to a place where he is starved in
 ‘ winter and stewed in summer, he must con-
 ‘ tract an aversion to his school, and can have
 ‘ no pleasure in pursuing his task while there.’
 This observation, at first reading, seems spe-
 cious; but, on being considered, conveys a
 most false insinuation, with regard to the
 present state of the high school.

I received part of my education there, and
 never was sensible of either of these extremes;
 and, if ever the boys were starved in winter,
 it always proceeded from the avarice of the
 masters, who, though they received most li-
 berally, would never exceed their stated
 quantity of coals, unwilling to lose the least
cinder of emolument; and I dare venture to
 affirm, that no other good reason can be af-
 signed by the present masters.

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With regard to the other extreme, it proceeds entirely from the same source. A hundred boys would require the complete attention of three masters; yet we find this number convened under one roof, and under the tuition of one man, who, so far from being able to convey instruction to the whole, can barely do justice to one third of that number; and, were it not from the assistance of his list, could scarce remember the names of half of them.

It appears evident to me, that this part of the proposals is merely calculated to promote the private revenue of the masters. Would a master of that or any school, in conscience, desire more than 100 boys under his single care, when he must be sensible that half the number is more than sufficient for any man of the most confessed abilities?

We agree with the author of the proposals, that children, in a public school, ought to associate together, and should not be permitted to mix with either vicious or idle boys. But, let me inform the sagacious *proposer* or

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propofers, that this is almoft impoffible ; and an area fet apart for the particular purpofe of *their* fports and paftimes, would fo excite the curiofity of thofe vicious and idle boys they would guard againft, that there would be continual broils and warfare carried on between them ; for it has been always the cafe, when boys look upon a particular fpot as their property, that their neighbours, ftirred up by envy, never fail to moleft and break in upon them ; and their area being inclofed by walls, would rather increafe than diminifh thefe difturbances ; fo that parents would be under perpetual anxiety about the fafety of their children.

He next proceeds to fpecify his objections to the prefent fchool. He fays, the rooms are low-roofed, and *by much* too fmall for the number of boys, which has increafed a full third within thefe five years. The rooms are not low-roofed ; the very contrary is true ; and, fo far from being *too fmall*, that they are more than fufficiently fpacious to contain double the number of boys which ought, with propriety, to be under the eye of one
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man. With respect to the increase of the building, I have only to observe, that (however well the *boasted* merit of the masters may deserve it) the scholars will reap but little advantage from it, without an *adequate* proportion of teachers.

He complains of 'the area of the school being too open, and lying in the neighbourhood of a part of the town inhabited by the lower class of people; hence a number of boys mix with the scholars, whose society they should be excluded from.' This assertion is false. Many very genteel and respectable families reside in the vicinity of the school; and the area is, from its high situation, a most healthful, and might be easily, and at a small expence, rendered, in summer, a most delightful place for the pastimes of the scholars; therefore, this is a most ungenerous remark, and indicates a narrow and pedantic soul. One would think that the proposer meant to exclude children of the lower rank from the benefit of education; but allow me to say, that more than one half of the boys at the school are composed of these, and they are,
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by no means, so wicked as those vulgarly called the better sort : On the contrary, the greatest vices, youth can be tainted with, prevail among the latter. They are so pampered and indulged, that their whole time is spent, not in acquiring knowledge, but in the study and practice of mischief ; for the truth of this, I appeal to the teachers themselves ; (nay there is a crime *, which, I dare not, without offending modesty, express, though it is well known to those who have attended the *rector* † a second year, daily practised *by those only*, equally destructive of their morals and constitutions). Nothing but the ungenerous proposal of depriving the poorer sort of boys of the benefit of instruction, could have extorted this indelicate hint ; after which, I suppose, few will approve of that part of the proposals, should the scheme be even carried into execution.

He then informs, ‘ That the school, at present, stands in much need of repairs, and
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* *Apage et vocem et rem.*

† When *rector* is mentioned, no reflection is intended against any person who may have held that place, it is merely the office itself I quarrel with, as totally unnecessary, if not prejudicial.

that now is the time to think of building a new one of a more commodious form, with an area properly inclosed, and better calculated to answer the purposes he has mentioned as essential to every school.' This scheme, the proposer says, hath been suggested by the masters. This information is perfectly unnecessary; *their suggestion* is displayed through the whole of it. But, if the school needs repairs, why should they be delayed a moment? And, with respect to building a new one, it is absurd; there is not the smallest occasion for it. The five masters are possessed, each of them, of a room, as I have already mentioned, sufficiently commodious for the number of boys which ought to be under the direction of any *single* person. In name of wonder, then, what would they be at? have they no bounds to their avarice? They have been known to boast, that they draw L. 1000 *per annum*, salary included, in their present shop.

If the inhabitants of this metropolis should so multiply, as to occasion a resort of more boys to the school, than it can with convenience contain, it does, by no means,
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follow, that it should be *rebuilt*; for this, however much it might increase the emoluments of the masters, would tend absolutely to retard the progress of the pupils. Instead, therefore, of *rebuilding* the school, would it not be infinitely better, and add more to the advantage of education, that, whatever number of additional schools, according to the increase of boys, may be found necessary, should be built at proper distances, and in places the most central? There would *then* be an emulation stirred up betwixt these masters and the teachers of the present school, which would greatly accelerate the instruction of youth. But, at present, there is little occasion for their paying any extraordinary attention, as they have no competitors for fame, and each master rolls *heavily* along with his class for *four years*, happy, at the end of that period, to throw his charge into the lap of the *rector*, who, ignorant of the dispositions and abilities of the boys the first year, supposing him capable of investigating dispositions and abilities, leaves them, at the end of it, in such a situation, that many are obliged

liged to attend him a second, before they can with decency be sent to college. As this is no doubt a hardship and expence to parents, I would propose, that each master should bring up his class the fifth year also; for, upon maturest consideration, I can see little occasion for a *rector*, unless it be to maintain an *useless* and *expensive* dignity; *useless*, as I shall afterwards show, because it militates strongly against the real interests of the school; *expensive*, because it is a gross *imposition*, that every boy attending it, though not at his class, should pay him a shilling each quarter, exclusive of their own master's fee:

We are next told, ' That the expence of building a school, with such accommodations, would be considerable; and, though the suggestion has appeared reasonable to the *magistrates and town-council*, to whom it has been communicated, the difficulty of affording so large a sum out of the *town's revenues* hath deterred *them* from thinking of putting it in execution at the expence of the city.' We allow that the expence would be
 considerable.

considerable. That the suggestion is approved of by the *magistrates and town-council*, may be true; but I have always considered *them* as, by far, the least competent judges of that, or any other public scheme; That the *town's revenues* cannot bear the expence, needs no elucidation; *they* have, to their shame, long ago, taken care that the *city's funds* shall not be in a condition to assist more useful, and, at this time, far more necessary schemes. Some years ago, proposals were made for rebuilding the university; and, when these were disregarded, shall an unnecessary and interested plan be carried into execution? What a shame is it, that the college, one of the greatest supports this metropolis has, should remain in its present abject and despicable form? It is a disgrace to the city and its inhabitants.

Should the old school be repaired, he says, it never can be rendered commodious. I think this assertion is already fully confuted. However, to obviate all these objections, I beg leave to hint to those concerned, that the present school is a new and substantial

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tial edifice, and needs only to have the side-walls raised two or three feet, and consequently a new roof. This I have from the information of a reputable tradesman, who remembers its re-building, and hath lately carefully examined it. If a new school is absolutely necessary, from the very great number of pupils, I would suggest, that the *under school* be divided by three moveable partitions, which would make 4 *large additional classes*; so that there would be room enough to teach all the youth of the city and its environs. But, if it should appear dangerous and pernicious to their morals, to assemble so large a number of boys in one place, I am of opinion, that the proposed grammar-school should be built at a distance from the present, with such accommodations as shall seem proper to the promoters of the subscription, whose design is laudable, and most certainly merits the approbation and contribution of the public.

The address concludes with informing 'of how *general* a concern *this* scheme is.' This is grossly false and abusive of the un-

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derstandings of the public, who must clearly see, that, so far from being a *general*, it is totally a *private* concern, devised merely to augment the income of the masters, who have, at present, more scholars than they should have, and draw more money than their most sanguine ambition could once have thought of.

After what has been observed, I hope the absurdity of the scheme will sufficiently appear; but, if any considerable sum should be collected in consequence thereof, I wish the contributors, instead of applying it to the purpose suggested, would expend it, as I have hinted above, in erecting so many additional schools as may be necessary, in such different and convenient places of the town as can be agreed on.

As there is some reason to believe that this address to the public has been drawn up by one or other of the masters of the high school, or perhaps by the whole conjunctly, something elegant might have been expected, as a specimen of composition in their *vernacular* language; on the contrary, it
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gave me pain to see, that their united efforts could scarce produce four pages of intelligible English. Many paragraphs in it contain errors, of which their pupils would be ashamed. Though elegance may not be expected, we yet look for grammatical and classical language from those to whom the *first rudiments of literature* are committed; and who term the time of acquiring these the *most important* period of life.

Having examined these proposals, and shown so far the absurdity and inutility of them, I would now beg leave to make a few observations on the mode of education carried on in our grammar school; the folly of each master quitting his class at the end of the fourth year; the little use for a *rector*; and the dangerous tendency of public examinations.

With regard to the first, whenever the master has carried through one class, and is ready to commence another, we find him pothering and making interest for scholars, to a degree of meanness very unbecoming; and, though he may have acquired a proper
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number, we still see him pursuing the same low methods, till he has crammed his school-room. Before he has accomplished this, he industriously keeps back the boys who come first to school, in order that those who come afterwards may be on an equal footing. The loss sustained by the scholars, on this account, is apparent.

Besides, when the master has collected together betwixt 80 and 90 scholars, can he pretend, without assistance, to bring them on equally? It is impossible, for many obvious reasons; among so great a number, capacities must differ; some will be found alert and quick, others dull, and some of middling parts; some attentive, others inattentive. Now, without paying strict attention to each of these, it will be absolutely out of the power of the best master who ever taught, to communicate instruction to either the quick, the dull, or the middling genius. Where boys all learn one lesson, it cannot be expected that the dull can learn so fast as the clever boy; therefore, the latter must necessarily be retarded to wait the slow movements
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of the former, or the one must remain in ignorance, whilst the other makes progress. If the clever are obliged to stay for the slow, it must greatly damp their genius; on the contrary, if they are allowed to go on according to their parts, it must entirely crush the others.

It would, therefore, be highly the interest of parents to consult the dispositions of their children, before they send them where there are a great number of boys; because, if there are upwards of 40 in one class, and no helper, unless they are of bright parts, they will have but little imparted to them from a *single master*. I know several academies in England, and it is a stated rule in every one of them, that, when the boys amount to 50, the master shall employ one, and, if they exceed 80, two assistants. Why ought not the same plan take place here? The fees of teaching are higher than in England; and, not to adopt the same method is therefore inexcusable. After what is said on this head, I hope, those who have the proper education of youth sincerely at heart, will take into
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their serious consideration, and endeavour to rectify this point, before they proceed in any plan whatever.

The next thing which appears wrong and inconsistent, is each master's quitting his charge at the end of the fourth year. Many good arguments could be advanced against this practice (which prevails only in this country). I shall, however, content myself with the following. A man, who has had boys for four years under his care, must be supposed, during that time, to know perfectly their different *parts* and *dispositions*; and must, therefore, be infinitely a fitter person to carry them on the fifth year also, than a man who must be ignorant of both. If the present mode continues, the rector must be, from his imperfect knowledge of the boys, constantly groping in the dark, and can be of no real service to them the first year; and this too often occasions many to attend him a second, which, as I have hinted above, besides expence to the parent, is a year totally lost to the scholar, who, had his own master carried him on the fifth year, would, in all probability,

probability, have been, at the end of it, perfectly ripe for the college.

From what has been observed, it is evident to a demonstration, that a rector, considering the present footing of the school, and the mode of education practised in it, so far from being necessary, is absolutely, in every respect, of real prejudice to it.

The sole design of a rector, in every well regulated school, is to superintend, and examine into the progress the boys, of the different classes, make under their respective masters; but, so far from finding this design answered, we see the rector of the grammar-school of Edinburgh teaching a more numerous, and, at the same time, a class of more importance than the rest. How far he can do justice to both, I mean as rector and public teacher, I leave the candid reader to determine; for my own part, I hold them perfectly incompatible. There is another very bad effect attending the office of a rector, when he practises as a common teacher, unknown to those who have not been at such a school; when boys see the deference
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paid to him, when he deigns to visit the inferior classes, (which, by the way, is seldom and to little purpose), they contract a sort of disrespect for their own master, which renders the instruction *he* conveys sometimes abortive, often disregarded, and of short continuance. Besides, as I hinted before, the shilling paid to him, exclusive of the quarter-salary to their respective masters, is an imposition, and makes too great a distinction between him and the other teachers, who deserve equally well of the public. The address says, that there are 400 at the school; if it is so, the rector must draw annually, excluding Candlemas fees, upwards of L. 100 more than each of the rest; I can by no means perceive any good reason for this. Had I any thing to say, I would propose, for the general good of the school, if this shilling must be collected, to divide it equally among them.

It remains now, to point out the dangerous tendency of public examinations. To every one, who ever bestowed the least thought on this subject, it will be perfectly clear,

clear, that they serve, not to promote, but visibly to retard the business of the school. The time of examination is exactly known, both by master and scholar; it is generally in August, and they have their appointed time for beginning to prepare. During this preparation, which takes up several weeks, there is a total stagnation of all farther progress, till they are sufficiently instructed in certain lessons, which, when examined, they repeat like parrots, ignorant of the meaning. The foolish parade too, attending this affair, is ludicrous and absurd. Besides, very few of the examiners know any thing of the matter, especially *the patrons of the school*, who, on these public occasions, are heartily ridiculed, and laughed at, by both masters and pupils. In short, instead of answering any good purpose, it is merely a time of riot and confusion. And, when they have finished this *farce*, and stuffed themselves at the town's expence, a certificate, notifying the *great abilities* of the *teachers*, and *rapid* progress of the *scholars*, is immediately framed, and next day

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clapped into all the public prints, as a *small testimony* of the faithful discharge of their duty.

Whether this is a proper proof of their abilities, I shall not pretend to say; only, I will aver, that, among all the accounts of examinations of schools in Scotland, which come to public notice, through the channel of the news papers, there is not one which does not bestow the highest encomiums on the teacher, and his *method of teaching*; at the same time, I am certain, there are many of them middling, and not a few indifferent and reprehensible. But the reason of these partial accounts is to me perfectly plain; ministers generally are the examiners, and, *mutatis mutandis*, schoolmasters and ministers are almost synonymous terms.

I do not mean from this, that examinations should be discontinued; they are highly necessary; but I would have the mode entirely altered, and beg leave to suggest the following, as, in every respect, better calculated for scholastic improvement.

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As most of the youth, at the different classes, will, in all probability, attend the university, it would, in my opinion, be much for the advantage of both, that the magistrates of the town of Edinburgh should appoint the professors of Humanity and Greek, (and, if the Principal could, without derogating from *his dignity*, now and then give his presence, so much the better), to visit the different classes once a quarter, and report, not in *general* terms, as usual, but, in *particular*, the progress made in each class. And, to make this method have the greater effect, I would have the masters entirely ignorant of the time they intended to come among them. I submit to every rational man, if this would not be better, and infinitely more to the purpose, than the foolish and absurd parade at present made on these occasions, by a number of people, who are fitter to be pupils than examiners.

If this plan should be adopted, its good effects will soon evince to the public the loss sustained in neglecting it so long.

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