

# A LETTER;

MOST RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED

TO THE

ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY AND THE  
SEIGNIORS OF THE PROVINCE  
OF LOWER-CANADA:

RECOMMENDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

SCHOOLS.

*W. L. Delisle (in French) L. L. Delisle*

Καλλιστὸν ἐστὶ κτῆμα παιδεία βροτῶν.  
Ἀναφαίρετον κτῆμ' ἐστὶ παιδεία θεοῦ.  
Καὶ τοῖς ἀγροίοις ἐστὶ παιδείας λόγος.  
Ἄπαντας ἡ παιδεία ἡμέρους ποιεῖ.  
Διπλὺν ὀρῶσιν, οἱ μαθόντες γράμματα.  
Ὁ γραμμάτων ἄπειρος, οὐ βλέπει βλέπων.  
Ὁ γράμματ' ἰδὼς, καὶ περισσὸν νῦν ἔχει.  
ΓΝΩΜΑΙ ΜΟΝΟΣΤΙΧΟΙ ἐκ διαφόρων ποιητῶν.

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## A LETTER, &c.

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GENTLEMEN,

**T**HOUGH this is not the country to which I owe my birth and education ; yet I conceive my interests, and yours, and those of all your countrymen, to be the same. We enjoy, in common, the friendly protection of one government, and of the same laws. Our prosperity is advanced, and retarded by the same means. If we cannot, therefore, call ourselves, *countrymen*, certainly, the names, *fellow-citizens*, and *brothers*, cannot be refused. Impressed with the recollection of so many causes of unanimity and confidence, I have ventured to lay before you, the following reflexions on a subject in which we are all deeply concerned.

NEXT to the desire that our countrymen should be virtuous and good, ought to be the wish that they should possess some portion of knowledge ; of that knowledge which gives a man resources within himself ; which discovers to him the certain, though remote consequences of vile conduct ; and which enables him to employ his talents, to the greatest advantage for himself, his family, and his country.

WE cannot, then, without regret, contemplate the state of knowledge in this Province. That

there should, in this enlightened age, be numbers of persons, proprietors of large tracts of land, who cannot write their names; would, in many parts of Europe, appear incredible. What would be the astonishment of a Swiss peasant, if he saw, as may often be seen here, the proprietor of two hundred acres of land, undertake a journey of four or five miles, to get a letter read? In some parishes, there are probably not more than half a dozen persons who can read. Such is the difficulty of procuring instruction, that the country merchants, those persons who conduct the river craft, and others who necessarily require some knowledge of writing and arithmetic; are obliged to send their children to a great distance, to one of the few places in which they can be educated; or to engage some poor and illiterate pedagogue to reside in their houses for that purpose. The expence, in either case, is such as few are able, and still fewer are willing, to incur.

THE seventeenth act of the first session of the third Provincial Parliament, enabled the majority of the inhabitants of any parish, to erect a school-house and a house for a teacher, at the joint expence of the parish. And the liberality of the British government has, in every instance in which these accommodations have been provided, discovered itself in granting a salary for the support of the Teacher. But, though nine years have elapsed since this law was enacted, twelve parishes only have yet availed themselves of the assistance which it offered them.\* Those

\* See the names of those Parishes in the Provincial Accounts laid before the House of Assembly in 1809.

who, like me, have been accustomed to estimate knowledge above all price, will be astonished at this fact. But, without inquiring into the causes of past neglect, I would only recommend to you to use your utmost efforts in future, to remove as soon as possible, this stigma from the country.

MUCH has been said in favour of knowledge in all ages. And, after the encomiums that have been bestowed upon it by the immortal writers of other times, it cannot be expected that I should advance much that is new, or any thing that is better than has formerly been said in its praise. This circumstance, however, forms no objection to the propriety of the present address on that subject. To render the observations of these illustrious writers useful to ourselves or our cotemporaries, they must be adapted to the peculiar circumstances of our own times. They must be placed in such a light, as to meet the prevailing errors and prejudices of our own age.

My present object is to combat the prejudices which have prevailed in this age against the instruction of the lower orders, and particularly those which have hitherto prevailed against the instruction of the Canadians. In the execution of this duty, I shall consider, First, the consequences which we might naturally suppose to follow from the instruction of a rural people; Next, the consequences that have actually followed from it, in those countries in which it has been accomplished; Lastly, the application of the argument to the particular circumstances and condition of the Canadian people.

**I. OF THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EDUCATION OF A RURAL PEOPLE.**

THESE may be considered as affecting a rural people, either in their political attachments, in their religious sentiments, or their individual happiness.

WITH regard to the attachment which the inhabitants of any country may form for the government under which they live, I would lay it down as a fixed principle, that no attachment of this kind can be depended on, while the people themselves remain in ignorance. While this ignorance continues, they are capable neither of appreciating the merits of their government, nor of foreseeing the fatal consequences of attempting a change.

WHEN a government possesses only a moderate share of excellence, still it is better for the people to submit, than to risk the consequences of a revolution. This is a position of which the experience of all ages proves the truth. History renders it undeniable to all who are fitted to receive historical information. And all those in every country who possess only a moderate portion of knowledge, are convinced of its truth. They are firmly attached to good order, and regard revolutions with horror. But how are the totally ignorant to learn this important lesson? How are they to come to the knowledge of it, who have no means of instruction; who have no records of the past, besides uncertain tradition, and the family tales which they learned almost as soon as they acquired the use of speech? To them the history of nations is sealed up, the experience of other times is lost. The admoni-

tions conveyed in the revolutions of their country, is never heard by them. Their mind remains as fearless of innovation, as if no such events had ever before occurred to illustrate its dreadful consequences.

BUT if general knowledge be advantageous under a government of only moderate excellence; it must be far more advantageous and desirable, under a government so transcendently excellent as the British. Under such a form of government, ignorance is to be deprecated as one of the most dangerous symptoms that can present themselves. Public information is, in such a case, the best possible means for securing good order; the most rational and successful method of promoting that attachment to the established system, on which the only reasonable hope of its permanence can be founded. For in what other way are the generality of its subjects to become acquainted with its merits? How can they be persuaded of its superiority, if they have no means of judging what portion of their happiness is derived from it, and if they are totally ignorant of the consequences that would result from its destruction?

THE truth is, that the attachment of ignorant people, to a good, and to a bad government, is the same. It is, in both cases, equally possible, for it is always accidental. Even under the best forms of government, and the most upright administration, much hardship and many privations must be suffered, in the present condition of men; and the ignorant are never able to distinguish, whether their misfortunes are occasioned by the tyranny of their superiors, or by the

necessary imperfection of human things. Nor do they know that the blessings which they enjoy are separable from their condition, and might be wrested from them by a change of government. Under tyrannical government, on the other hand, they are equally ignorant what portion of their calamities is referable to the tyrant that oppresses them. They feel, indeed, the misery of which he is the remote, though certain cause; but his minions every where proclaim, that this misery cannot be prevented, that it arises from the necessary imperfection of human government, and that no nation in the world is happier than theirs. They have no knowledge and no experience by which they can refute these assertions. And they submit or resist, just as a greater or a less degree of art is employed to deceive them.

THE conduct of the uninformed subjects of every kind of government, appears to be this. If, by chance, they are pleased with the government under which they live, all goes on well. They are contented and happy. They will do every thing in their power for the support of government. They will encounter death in its defence. But if some fit of ill-humour seize them, if some measure of administration give them offence, if some demagogue inspire them with disaffection; their attachment will be extinguished, and most probably will never be revived. They will then become a prey to every pretender who warmly professes an interest in their welfare. Their simplicity and credulity form the foundation of his hopes, and give success to all his schemes. It is vain to oppose

reason and common sense to the torrent with which they proceed. Their passions are inflamed, and cannot be calmed, but by time and the calamities which inevitably follow. Such a people know not their own interest. They cannot be taught it by the example of other nations. They have no means of learning it, except from the fatal experiment which involves them in ruin. It is on ignorance and credulity that the ascendancy of demagogues and revolutionists has always been founded. This is the soil on which they have ever sowed with most success the seeds of anarchy and confusion.

It is however objected, that the small degree of instruction which the lower classes can ever attain, is rather hurtful than salutary. Seditious writings, it is observed, are easily disseminated among a people who have been taught to read. And this, it must be acknowledged, is an engine of discord which could not otherwise be employed. But, there is good reason to believe that the cause which is the instrument of this abuse, is at the same time the means of preventing another and a far greater evil. The art of reading which sometimes gives rise to the purusal of seditious publications, prepares the mind for resisting impressions of a much more dangerous nature. Let us consider only what are the methods usually employed to inflame the minds of a people wholly rude and ignorant. They are neither pamphlets nor newspapers; but contrivances far more destructive than either. They are, at first, secret whispers and insinuations, quietly, but assiduously circulated among the

unthinking multitude; afterwards, more bold, avowed, and animated appeals to their prejudices; and, at last, inflammatory discourses and unqualified declamations, addressed, *viva voce*, to crowds of discontented persons, who swallow every extravagance of the impassioned orator with greediness, repeat it with confidence, and communicate it from one to another, without reflexion, without discrimination, or any regard to truth. But people who are accustomed to read, are more capable of sober reasoning, and more disposed to reflect. If they are to be duped and inflamed, it is certain that much greater talents, at least, and much more art must be employed. And, if experience is to be our guide in this subject, it seems to assure us, that hardly any talents, or any arts, are sufficient for this purpose.

So far, therefore, as political attachments are concerned, we are authorised to conclude, that public and general information is, in the highest degree, advantageous. It renders men patient of the inconveniencies which they suffer under governments that have reached only a moderate degree of excellence; it is the only means of discovering the superiority of those which approach nearest to perfection; and, in all cases, it removes one of the most formidable instruments of faction.

It cannot be denied, however, that many politicians and legislators have discovered an unaccountable antipathy to the diffusion of knowledge. But whatever may have been their reasons for adopting this jealous policy; it must be observed, that those who have adopted it, have

seldom been illustrious characters ; and all tyrants and usurpers range themselves in this number. On the contrary, those who have been at the head of regular, long-established, and enlightened governments, have ever appeared to consider the instruction of the people as highly advantageous. It is well known that the Roman government, whether Republican or Imperial, was always favourable to the civilization of mankind. Among the English monarchs, Alfred the Great paid the utmost attention to the instruction of his people ; and his example was followed by all those among his successors, who have been distinguished either for the greatness of their deeds, or the liberality of their minds. The great number of Colleges and Universities, established a few centuries ago, in all parts of Europe, sufficiently demonstrates, that, even under absolute governments, when they are permanently established, and regularly administered, the sovereigns have found the greatest advantages to be connected with the diffusion of knowledge. And, with respect to the British government, we have already seen, that the principal security for the hope of its permanence, must be, its being well understood. To command the respect of its subjects, it requires only to be known ; and, to secure permanent respect, demands that it should be known.

It must appear surprising that any suspicion should ever have arisen, that Religion might suffer from the diffusion of knowledge. It is certain that the most ignorant nations have ever been the most superstitious, and the most im-

moral. Though Savages may possess many virtues; yet these are to be attributed more to their poverty, than to their ignorance. When plentifully supplied with the necessaries and pleasures of life, they have generally given themselves up to odious vices, and brutal sensuality.† Experience puts it beyond a doubt that knowledge is favourable to religious sentiments, and to moral impressions. .

PERSONS who possess not the art of reading, but who are yet instructed by their teachers in the doctrines of Religion, are certainly far superior to those who enjoy not even this advantage. Still, however, the knowledge of such persons is far inferior to that which they might attain, if, in addition to this instruction, they possessed also the sagacity and reflexion produced by the habit of reading. I speak here of the Christian Religion in general, without regard to any of the particular classes and parties that have been introduced among its professors. And do not, then, all Christians, Greeks, Catholics, Protestants, and all others, with the exception of a few Mystics, admit that the doctrines of their Religion are addressed to the understandings of men? Are not all the arguments which the Gospel offers, either for the encouragement of virtue, the destruction of sin, or the consolation of the afflicted, addressed to our reason? And does it not follow, that, like all other sound arguments, they must be weighed by the judgment, before they can influence our conduct; and that they must be more effectual, in proportion to the extent in which they are understood,

† Robertson's America, Book 2.

and in proportion to the conviction which we have of their truth ?

It is admitted that the most illiterate may, by the pains and care of their instructors, acquire some general knowledge of the outlines of moral duty. But, it is evident, that the task of instruction must, in this case, be an exceedingly difficult one. And, after all the pains which it is possible to take, persons so rude and illiterate, generally remain liable to a variety of errors from which a very slight expansion of the reasoning faculty would be sufficient to set them free. They have always been disposed to rest in the external forms of Religion, and to consider the observance of its rites as an atonement for the neglect of moral duty. They talk about sublime doctrines and mysteries, they wonder and are astonished, without ever considering the intimate connexion which these subjects possess with the conduct of human life. Besides, as has been observed by *QUINTILIAN*, the impressions which are made through the medium of the ears, are evanescent and transitory ; those which pass through the eyes, are incomparably more permanent. Were there no other method of teaching Religion and Morals, than oral instruction ; we should then be obliged to confine ourselves to this, and should still have reason to be thankful to Providence for the possession of it. But when, in addition to this, another and more effectual method is in our hands ; who will justify our conduct, if we confine ourselves to the use of an inferior mode of instruction, and entirely neglect that which we know to be better calculated for producing the effect intended ?

By what arguments can we extenuate our neglect of so important a duty to our countrymen and fellow-christians? No diligence on our part, no activity, no labours however great, can prove that we have been faithful to their interest; so long as we entirely overlook the means, which we know to be most effectual for their instruction.

“BUT the publications which many persons read, are trifling, or improper; some so manifestly useless that the perusal of them can be considered as, in no respect, different from idleness; and others directly immoral and flagitious in their tendency. Numbers of the novels and comedies which persons possessing a little information, devour most greedily, are either so completely insignificant, or so pernicious; that it has been doubted, with great appearance of truth, whether those who confine themselves to such reading, would not have been happier, had they never learned to read.”

SUCH is the full extent of one of the strongest objections that have ever been brought against the diffusion of the art of reading. But it must be observed, that the abuses to which this art may be turned, can never prove that it is not, in itself, a most valuable attainment. They can never balance the numerous advantages which this art brings to its possessor. As well might it be said that the gift of reason is useless or pernicious, because thousands every day abuse it, either to the injury of others, or their own destruction. With equal justice, we might decry all civil power, and all political institutions, because many are the disappointments and distress-

ses which they unavoidably occasion to individuals. In the same manner, we might wish the Sun to become invisible to our hemisphere ; because he sometimes scorches, although he much more frequently nourishes, the fruits on which we live.

BUT, independently of this general reasoning, it may easily be shown that this objection does not apply to the case before us. The Canadians are to be considered as an agricultural people ; at least, it is chiefly of those who are so employed, of whom I now speak. Of the people employed in husbandry, it is to be observed, that they have always been found of a graver deportment than the inhabitants of towns, or those who are employed in manufactures. Their amusements are of a graver nature, and all their ideas and reasonings are of a more sober cast. When, therefore, they learn to read, the publications which engage their attention are suitable to the general turn of their minds. They are such as tend, for the most part, to improve the mental powers, and afford useful lessons of morality and virtue. The subjects to which such persons generally confine their reading, are Religion, History, Geography, Voyages and Travels. Such we know to be the case with the inhabitants of Iceland, with the peasantry of Scotland and of Switzerland. And such, no doubt, will be the case with the Canadian husbandmen, whenever they shall have it in their power to participate of such amusement.

If we now bring down our attention to the common occupations of life, we shall find knowledge no less favourable to private happiness,

than to political attachments and religious sentiments.

It has sometimes been objected, that the instruction of the peasantry is accompanied with the disadvantage of raising their ideas above the employments necessary in their condition, and inspiring them with a taste for other occupations, often to their hurt, and sometimes to their ruin. The little knowledge which they acquire, it is said, raises them, in their own esteem, above their former equals and companions; so that they are no longer willing to be confined to the same ignoble pursuits, or the same unpolished society.—In answer to this objection, it is sufficient to say, that this consequence does not follow from education in those countries in which it is generally diffused. Every person who has been in these countries, knows that no people are more happy, or more contented, or more averse to change. The attachment of the Swiss to their country, to their own manners, and their own pursuits, is universally known.—The ground of the objection appears to be this. In countries of which few of the inhabitants can read, any individual who happens to receive a little instruction, finds himself elevated above his former associates. He conceives himself fitted for higher pursuits, and nobler undertakings, than those of which the grovelling herd around him ever dreamed. Hence he becomes discontented with the condition in which his ancestors have left him. He engages in schemes beyond his talents, and unsuitable to his attainments. His projects are perhaps disproportioned to his capital, which is not necessarily augmented by

the accession of the first rays of knowledge. And the result is distress and embarrassment, perhaps, vice and infamy. But all this, whenever it does happen, arises plainly from the imperfect manner in which knowledge is diffused. It is the scarcity of education, that prompts the vanity of him who has received a little, and allures him out of the plain road which his ancestors have beaten, and which his countrymen still tread. The misfortunes which take place in this manner, are consequences of the very evil of which I complain. They arise from the rarity of education, and cannot be prevented but by rendering it more common.

WITH regard to women, it is undeniable, that ignorance, and the thoughtlessness arising from ignorance, are the sources of the greatest number of deviations from virtue and respectability. Ignorance leaves women a prey to the arts of the seducer. It diminishes the effect of those religious sentiments which are the greatest supports of their natural love of modesty and decorum. It begets an improvidence, and an inattention to future honour and respect, which are as fatal to the correct conduct of women, as destructive of the industry and frugality of men. It is an observation of Dr. SMITH's, in his "Wealth of Nations," that those unfortunate women who live in London by prostitution, are chiefly supplied from the least cultivated, and least enlightened parts of the British dominions. In the manufacturing towns throughout Great Britain, they consist in general, of those who have been collected in crowds, and at an early

" period of life, at the manufactories ; in which they are soon able to earn a little money, but are neither taught the lowest elements of education, nor accustomed to think, nor instructed in the nature, or importance of female virtue.

THERE is one argument, which I have sometimes wondered how those who oppose the instruction of the people, would answer. It arises from the pleasure and enjoyment which every person who can read, derives from this source. Is not every person who can read, happy that he can ? Is there a man, who having once acquired this art, would be willing, for any consideration, to unlearn it ? As this question can never be answered but in the negative, every person should be ashamed of endeavouring to conceal from his fellows, an attainment which is never gained without a certain elevation of mind and genuine satisfaction, to both of which the rest of mankind are strangers. Hence it appears, that those who argue against the diffusion of knowledge, proceed upon a system of entire selfishness. Enjoying the advantages of knowledge themselves, they discover no regard whatever for the happiness of the millions who have never had a glimpse of its rays. They resemble those who have argued, that a state of rude barbarity is preferable to a state of refined society ; and who, with equal inconsistency, have, after all their theories, still refused to return to the woods, to the hovel, and the canoe. Just in the same manner, our opponents, however desirous to retard the progress of knowledge among others, have ever been sufficiently eager to advance themselves by its aid.

AMONG all nations, light has been deemed a fit emblem of knowledge. In the English language, to ENLIGHTEN, is to *instruct*; and in French, LUMIÈRE, is equivalent to *knowledge or understanding*. To ILLUSTRATE, and to ILLUMINATE, are words of Latin original, and primarily meant to convey *light* to an object. The Greek word from which the English term, IDEA, is derived, had a similar application to *light* and to *knowledge*. And the Italian, CHIARO, is applied exactly in the same manner. Were we to examine the practice of all languages, we should find traces of the same mode of reasoning in every one of them. By the unanimous consent of the human race, knowledge resembles the perception of light; ignorance is allied to obscurity and darkness. This consent could not be produced by education, nor extorted by power. It would not be occasioned by any exterior cause. It has its foundation in those natural, unrestrained, and undisguised feelings of the soul, which are common to all mankind. They who object to the diffusion of knowledge, ought to extend their objections to those things which the whole human race have connected with it; to the light of the Sun, and to the power of vision.

“EDUCATION,” say the ancient poets quoted in the title-page, “is the fairest inheritance; it is an incorruptible possession; useful even to husbandmen, and humanizing all who obtain it. He who acquires this, sees twice; he alone has the true use of his eyes, and he is possessed of a superior understanding.”

**2. OF THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH HAVE ACTUALLY FOLLOWED FROM GENERAL EDUCATION, IN THOSE COUNTRIES IN WHICH IT HAS TAKEN PLACE.**

PERHAPS it may be thought I have dwelt too long on the probable consequences of education, or what may be termed, the examination of the subject *a priori*. I have been induced to extend my observations to this length, because those who have argued against the diffusion of knowledge, have, for the most part, confined themselves to these general reasonings ; and I wished to meet them on their own ground. But, the propriety and expediency of what I contend for, will more clearly, and I think, undeniably, appear by considering the state of those countries in which this object has been accomplished. The countries which appear to be most deserving of notice, in this view, are Iceland, Denmark, Switzerland, Scotland, and the Northern States of America.

If any of the ancient nations could be cited as examples, Athens seems to be the only one, which can, with any propriety, be mentioned. It is certain, that the Athenian people possessed considerable knowledge with respect to several subjects ; that they had a very delicate ear with regard to the use and pronunciation of their own language ; and that they acquired a degree of political knowledge, probably exceeding that which the common people of any other country, ancient or modern, ever possessed. The delicacy of their ear with regard to language, arose from the close attention which they gave to the public orators, and to dramatic represen-

tation. Their political knowledge also, they derived from their orators, who were obliged to explain to them, in the clearest manner, all public measures, and all their relations with other Grecian States, and with foreign nations. It does not appear, that this diffusion of knowledge among the Athenians, was, in any respect, injurious to public peace and good order, or to the virtue and patriotism, to the sobriety, industry or bravery of the citizens. They were an ingenious and scientific, an enterprising and highly commercial nation. There never was a braver, or a more public-spirited people. Their bravery alone defended Greece against the vast power of the Persian empire ; their patriotism and love of liberty, proved the best, and most formidable obstacles to the usurpation of the Macedonian Princes.—Yet, their means of information were far inferior to those, which such among the moderns as acquire the first elements of education, do, or may derive from the press. Their method of obtaining information was momentary, fluctuating and calculated to inflame the passions : among the moderns, it is permanent, and fitted to improve the reasoning faculty.

BUT, undoubtedly, the most proper examples must be sought for in modern times, and in countries that more nearly resemble our own. And, to remove every shadow of doubt on this subject, nothing shall here be taken upon trust or conjecture : on the contrary, my authority for every statement that is brought forward shall be distinctly noted.

ALL writers who have given us any account of Iceland, are agreed, that a certain degree of

information is possessed by its inhabitants. During their long nights, which sometimes continue several weeks, one of the family frequently reads for the instruction or amusement of the rest, who are employed in certain branches of industry.\* Thus, the habit of reading serves to alleviate the horrors of a most inhospitable climate, and to elevate the ideas and sentiments of a people, who are doomed to subsist on a most sterile soil.

ACCORDINGLY, "The character of the Icelanders is good. They are calm, discreet, orderly, and serious in their religion, capable of great labour of mind and body, and accustomed to live upon little; not abounding much in men of genius; but producing, in the various universities of the North, many zealous and indefatigable scholars, who have struck with successful vigour into the most intricate and untrodden paths of literature."† Some of these virtues are, no doubt, produced by other causes: but it cannot be doubted, that they are all promoted by education, and the habit of reading.

THE dominions of the King of Denmark, are, in general, supplied with schools. In each parish, there are two or more, in which children are instructed in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. A house, a small salary, and some other advantages, are allowed to every Teacher.‡

THE history of the Danes, furnishes no reason whatever for supposing or suspecting, that any hurtful consequences, can proceed from this instruction of the people. On the contrary, the

\* *Edinburgh Review* for Jan. 1804. † *Ibid.*

‡ *Pinkerton's Modern Geography.*

Danish government are, by experience, convinced of its beneficial operation; and have given the most striking proofs of this conviction, by not only supporting the former establishment, but by confirming and increasing it. In the month of October of the year one thousand eight hundred and six, a new law was promulgated, which rendered the Danish schools more useful, and more efficacious; than they could ever have formerly been. By this law, the Island of Zealand, the most populous part of the kingdom, is divided into districts so small, that all the children resident in each, may, without inconvenience, attend the school which is established in it: A decent income and house are provided for the Teachers: All parents are compelled to send their children to school, as soon as they reach the age of seven: Instruction is provided in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Religion: None are allowed to leave school, till they understand these branches: And those who have capacity and inclination, are instructed in the history, and geography of their country.\*

I do not quote this law, as a model to be imitated in all respects; for, surely, the compulsory part of it, might have been omitted. But I quote it as an experimental proof of the expediency of general instruction. In reality, what stronger proof of this expediency, can we desire, than to find it attested by the conviction, not only of travellers who may occasionally visit that country; not only of the most intelligent observers resident in it; but of the very persons

\* Monthly Magazine for June 1807, page 473.

who conduct the government, and who are consequently most deeply interested in maintaining its good order, and promoting its prosperity? And what stronger proof can any government give of having such a conviction, than enacting a law, still farther to confirm, extend, and even enforce the instruction of its subjects?

THE romantic country of the Swiss, like that in which we live, is inhabited, partly by Roman Catholics, and partly by Protestants. It appears, that there is here a regular establishment of schools. In some of the Cantons, there is a school in every village.\* The inhabitants of different parishes exult in the superior education of their children, as much as in the beauty of their women, or the bravery of their ancestors.† The peasants, in general, are more intelligent, entertaining, and companionable, than persons of the same rank in almost any other country.‡ In fact, all travellers express pleasure and surprise at the intelligence and penetration which they discover. Their countenance bespeaks ingenuity; and their conversation and manners confirm this prepossession. It would be an endless task to quote all the passages in COXE, MOORE, and other travellers, which confirm this statement. Those which I have mentioned below, are sufficient for my present purpose. Such as wish for farther satisfaction, may consult these authors themselves.

YET the following account of the school-establishment in the country of the Grisons, shows, that the source from which the Swiss

\* Coxe's Travels in Switzerland, Let. 10. † *Ibid*, Let. 24.

‡ *Ibid*, Let. 4.

peasants have derived this elevated character, is of a very limited nature. We may thence judge what advantage would arise from a more extensive and better concerted establishment.

THE country of the Grisons, before it was seized by the French, consisted of three Republics, the League of God's House, the Grey League, and the League of the Ten Jurisdictions. Each of the Leagues was divided into smaller communities. In each community, Mr. COXE informs us, there was a small school in which children were taught to read, write and cypher; but which was open only during Winter, from the ninth of November to the seventh of April. The League of God's House, containing twenty-nine thousand inhabitants, consisted of twenty-two communities; that of the Ten Jurisdictions, having fifteen thousand inhabitants, of eleven communities: The inhabitants of the Grey League, were fifty-four thousand; but the number of communities is not mentioned, and, consequently, the number of schools is not ascertained. But, if we suppose them to have been in the same proportion to the population, as in the other two Leagues; we may take them to have been about forty-one. This gives us for the whole country of the Grisons, seventy-four schools; while the population amounted to nearly one hundred thousand, and the superficial extent of country was between four and five thousand square miles. At an average, therefore, one of these little schools, open for no more than five months in the year, afforded the only school instruction, for a popu-

lation of thirteen hundred and fifty, and for an extent of sixty-three square miles. At any rate, this was the real proportion for the two Leagues of which the number of schools is ascertained. From so limited and imperfect an establishment, did the Swiss peasants derive an education which made them respectable in the eyes of all travellers who visited the country.

THE parochial schools of Scotland were instituted by an Act of the Legislature of that country upwards of a century and a half ago. The legal establishment has given at least one school, open throughout the year, and conducted by a person of proper qualifications, to every Parish; that is, at an average, to a population of sixteen hundred. But so great is the esteem in which education is held by the people in general, that in most parishes, a private school is supported, and frequently two or more, in addition to that established by law. It is certain, therefore, that there is at least one school for every eight hundred inhabitants.\*

THIS institution is known to have been attended with the happiest consequences. None but those who have witnessed, can probably conceive how much the amusement of reading contributes to alleviate the toilsomeness of a most laborious occupation. How respectable does that peasant appear, who relieves the fatigues of the day, by the culture of mental qualities in the evening, in comparison with him who spends his life in the unvaried routine of labouring, eating, and sleeping †

\* Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland.

† See Currie's Life of Burns

THE advantages derived from this admirable institution, are satisfactorily attested by the following extract from a speech of the Lord Justice Clerk, one of the first legal characters in that country, delivered at the conclusion of the Circuit Court in Glasgow, in April eighteen hundred and eight. After some observations relative to the business that had come before the Court, his Lordship said :

“ I must, in justice, say, that the number of criminals in custody for trial, was comparatively small, in reference to the immense population of this district of the country. But, if reference be made to the list of criminals in other countries, even in our sister kingdom of England, we shall see just reason to be proud and thankful, that our lot has been cast in a land, whose inhabitants are so distinguished for the virtuous simplicity of their lives.

“ A few days before I left home, there was transmitted to me, officially, by the Secretary of State, a printed list of all the commitments and prosecutions for criminal offences, in England and Wales, for the last three years, and, horrible to tell, the least number of commitments in any one of these years, was considerably above four thousand, and above three thousand five hundred were actually brought to trial.

“ THIS is a fact, Gentlemen, which I see fills you with astonishment, and I confess that I could not have believed it myself, if I had not read it in an official document.

“ I had not time, and indeed it would be a work of great labour, to make an accurate en-

quiry and comparison ; but, to hazard a guess, I should be disposed to say, that setting aside our two rebellions, the above number of trials in England for one year, is nearly equal to the whole number that has appeared in Scotland since the Union.

“ SUPPOSING this calculation to be accurate, or in any remote degree accurate, it calls upon us for very serious reflexions, and to consider if we can discover the causes of this proud inferiority. Allowance must, no doubt, be made for a difference that has always existed in the population of the two countries : for it would be unreasonable to suppose, that the number must not, in a great degree, be in proportion to the number of people in any two countries.

“ IT may be said also, that commerce and manufactures, hardly existed in this country in the earlier part of the last century. True—but, now at least, we are treading fast on the heels of England ; and, yet, thank God, the same consequences do not follow. In this very city and district, commerce and manufactures have long been introduced, to an extent equal to any place or district in the United Kingdoms, the capital alone excepted. And, yet it was stated by a political writer, but a few years ago, that one Quarter Sessions at Manchester, sends more criminals to transportation than all Scotland in a year.

“ WE must, therefore, look to other causes for the good order and morality of our people. And I think, we have not far to look. In my opinion, the cause is to be found, chiefly, in our institutions for the education of youth, and for the maintenance of religion.

"THE institution of parochial schools, in the manner, and to the extent in which they are established in Scotland, is, I believe, peculiar to ourselves; and, it is an institution, to which, however simple in its nature, and unobtrusive in its operation, I am persuaded, we are chiefly to ascribe the regularity of conduct by which we are distinguished. The child of the meanest peasant, of the lowest mechanic, may, and most of them do, receive a virtuous education from their earliest youth. At our parochial schools, they are not only initiated in the principles of our Holy Religion, and in the soundest doctrines of morality, but most of them receive different degrees of education in other respects, which qualify them to earn their bread in various ways, and which, independent even of religious instruction, by enlarging the understanding, necessarily raises a man in his own estimation, and sets him above the mean and dirty crimes, to which the hardships and temptations of life might expose him."\*

No person can surely imagine, that the opinion delivered in this manner by the learned Judge, was peculiar to himself. His Lordship appears evidently to have given an opinion coincident with that of the generality of those who know the subject, and particularly with that of the British government whose servant he is. Thus, as in the case of Denmark, we find the expediency of general instruction, confirmed by those who have witnessed the progress of its operation, and who are most interested in preserving the subordination and good order of so-

\* *Scotts Magazine* for Aug. 1808,

ciety. It cannot, surely, be overlooked, that these arguments are founded, not on theory, but on the immoveable basis of practice and experiment.

BUT, in no country, can we find an example more pertinent to our present purpose, than in the United States of America. That Union exemplifies the effects both of knowledge and of ignorance, in people situated as nearly as possible in the same circumstances, living under the same government, and descended in general, from the same stock. In the Northern States, the education of all the inhabitants is most carefully provided for ; in the Southern, the education of the poor, is entirely neglected. The different effects arising from these two situations, are unequivocally marked in the opposite characters of the people.

A pretty correct idea of the state of education in the different parts of the American Union, may be obtained from the following facts, extracted from WINTERBOTHAM'S American Geography.

IN New-England, education is very generally diffused among people of all ranks, and a person that cannot both read and write, is very rarely to be found. There is a school in almost every township, supported by a public tax, and subject to the direction of a committee elected for the purpose.

IN New-York, much attention has been paid to education in later times. Still, however, many places are destitute of schools, and in many others they are conducted by low and ignorant persons, unfit for the purpose. Know-

ledge is less generally diffused in this State, than in New-England.

IN Pennsylvania, numerous schools are supported by the different religious societies. There are private schools, kept separately by Masters and Mistresses for the youth of both sexes. The Quakers support a school for the instruction of Africans of every different shade of colour ; and into this, persons of every age and sex, whether free, or slaves, are admitted. There are none, whose parents, or guardians, or masters will take the trouble to make application, but may be admitted into one or other of these schools. The means, therefore, for obtaining education, are, in this State, ample. But a more extensive taste for information is wanted, to render these means effectual ; for, it is stated by our Author, that a great proportion of the labouring people are still extremely ignorant.

IN New-Jersey, there is no regular establishment of schools. The usual method of obtaining instruction, is this. The inhabitants of a village, or of any particular part of the country, enter into an agreement to support a school-master upon such terms as may be mutually agreeable. This method is evidently precarious ; and, accordingly, the encouragement is generally so inadequate, that no person of proper qualifications can be found to undertake the task.

IN Maryland, so far from every township's possessing a school, as in New-England, whole counties are destitute of that advantage. Many of the schools formerly established, have been neglected. A great proportion of the people, are therefore, wholly uninstructed.

IN Virginia, in the Carolinas, and in Georgia, we are informed of Colleges, many of which are said to be, in no respect, superior to Grammar Schools ; but no mention is made of Common Schools. From this circumstance, it is plain that little or no information can be diffused among the labouring class of society. Indeed, great part of this class consists of slaves, a race of men so peculiarly unfortunate, as to be seldom within the reach of instruction.

ACCORDING to this statement, the diffusion of knowledge, fantastic as the idea might seem were it not founded in fact, appears gradually to decrease as we proceed from North to South. One might almost determine the latitude of a place by the degree of information diffused among its inhabitants.

A farther proof that this statement is correct, may be taken from the different proportion in which newspapers are published in the Northern and Southern States. A few years ago, the proportion which the population of the New-England States, held to that of all the rest ; was, as one to four and a half. The proportion in the number of newspapers published annually, was, as one to two and a half. So that, while the other States, taken collectively, possessed about four times the population of New-England, they issued only twice the number of newspapers. In other words, they had, in proportion to their population, only half the number of persons who could read.\*

FROM this difference of education, there arises a difference of manners and character, corres-

\* Oliphant's North America.

pendent to the cause. The inhabitants of the Northern parts of the Union, are, comparatively, simple in their manners, virtuous and religious : among those of the Southern parts, immorality and irreligion predominate. The former are, for the most part, in easy circumstances ; few are in affluence, and few reduced to poverty. The latter are divided into two classes, the rich and the poor ; and the distinction is no where more strongly marked. In the Northern States, are few or no slaves. In the Middle States, there are more ; but they are, in many cases, provided with instruction. In the Southern States, they abound ; and, for aught that appears, remain as ignorant, as when they left the coast of Guinea. In the North, is an industrious and enterprising people, lovers of their country, and possessing an ardent attachment to the country from which their ancestors emigrated. In the South, the inhabitants are, in a great measure, destitute of taste for knowledge, addicted to low pleasures ; and, though violent sticklers for liberty, are the very patrons and propagators of slavery. Untaught by facts and experience, they continue attached to the alliance of a Government, under which military power has overturned every civil institution, trampled under foot the unalienable rights of men, and nearly enslaved the nations of Europe.

### 3. OF THE EXPEDIENCY OF INSTRUCTION IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CANADIAN PEOPLE.

The reasonings contained in the first part of this Letter, and the facts brought forward in the second; are sufficient, I humbly conceive, to establish the certainty of this general principle, That the diffusion of knowledge, whether considered in a political, religious, or moral point of view, is of the highest importance. It is now time to consider whether there is any thing peculiar to the Canadians which is likely to prevent education from producing the same beneficial effects upon them, which it is calculated to have upon human nature in general, and which it is certainly found to have upon the inhabitants of those countries in which it is generally diffused. An attentive survey of the particular situation of the inhabitants of Canada, will show that they form no exception to the general principle here laid down; but that, on the contrary, every circumstance in their condition corroborates the truth of it, and even affords new proofs of its universality.

THE discussion of this part of the subject, is the more necessary; because many general rules have exceptions; and general truths are often acknowledged, even while objections are found and sustained, against their particular application.

THE Canadians, as we have already observed, are to be regarded as an agricultural people. And it is among such a people, that education may, in general, be most easily introduced, and also its advantages most safely enjoyed. The

rural inhabitants of most countries possess a simplicity and an ingenuousness in their manners, which dispose them for the sober enjoyments of reading, and which, at the same time, prevent them from abusing their knowledge to dangerous or licentious purposes.

I have all along been speaking chiefly of the inhabitants of the country as distinguished from those of the larger towns. With regard to the latter, however, I would recommend to your attention the plan of instruction, most probably invented, and certainly carried to the utmost practical perfection, by Mr. JOSEPH LANCASTER. It is impossible to say too much in praise of a system which possesses every advantage with respect to the labouring classes ; which combines mildness, order, and virtuous tendency, with the highest efficacy in the real business of making scholars ; which joins almost incredible economy, to practicability in every situation in which numbers of people are collected into one neighbourhood. I cannot help remarking farther, that the countenance which this plan has received in England from persons of the very highest rank, is no inconsiderable proof, among others, of the liberality of the British government, and of its disposition to promote general information.

THE general employment of the Canadians, as it shows the practicability and safety of their instruction, suggests also an additional reason for endeavouring to introduce it. To what cause are we to attribute the small progress which the Canadians have made in the improve-

ment of their lands, and in all the arts connected with agriculture? Why does even the small portion of land which is cleared, still yield so small a part of the riches which might be drawn from it? Why is it so difficult to promote the raising of hemp, even after all competent judges are satisfied of its being advantageous to the proprietor, and suitable to the climate of the country? The answer to all these questions, must be the same. It is the entire ignorance of the land-cultivators that arrests the progress of these necessary arts. Their general ignorance cuts them off from all knowledge of the new and superior methods of treating the soil, or the grain, or of improving the breed of domestic animals. It does more than even preclude them from the knowledge of improvements. It confirms their prejudices in favour of all previous habits, and of all ancient errors. It prevents them from adopting even those improvements, which they see introduced by others.

Of all the diseases which afflict the human race, that which cuts off the greatest number of lives prematurely, is understood to be the small-pox. And yet, there is not another, of which the means of prevention are so certain, or so easily applied. It is, therefore, melancholy to reflect, that ignorance, and the prejudices arising from it, should deprive vast numbers of men of almost every nation, of the means of escaping this fatal calamity. Till the Canadian peasantry shall receive some portion of instruction, it is not to be expected, that they can derive any considerable advantage from the Jennerian Discovery. A practice which would annually save

a number of lives to this Province, and prevent the distress of a much greater number of suffering infants and anxious parents, must, as to Canada, remain almost wholly inefficacious.

THE very thin and limited population of this Province, and the comparative ease with which its inhabitants can procure the necessaries of life, render the diffusion of knowledge more practicable here, than in many other countries. In many of the great nations of Europe, the crowded state of population, and the prevalence of poverty, will, in all probability, for ever exclude multitudes from the benefits of education. But the vast extent of unappropriated lands in Canada, opens a more cheering prospect for our posterity. They need not fear a crowded population, or a monopoly of the soil for centuries to come. Now, therefore, while our number is small, and while land is cheap and plentiful ; now is the time to plant the germ of knowledge, which will enlighten, enrich, and felicitate the future multitudes, that will one day cover this fertile portion of the globe. Being once fixed in the soil, and having once struck a firm root, this plant will not soon wither or decay. Knowledge has a natural tendency to propagate itself ; and having once found a favourable soil, will not be easily eradicated : But, if we delay to disseminate its seeds, till vice and luxury shall have poisoned the soil ; we shall in vain expect to cultivate it, with the same prospect of success.

I hold it to be a very reasonable expectation, that the riches and population of this country should long continue to increase. Our climate, indeed, is severe : but the soil is excellent ; the

air pure ; the situation admirably adapted to commercial pursuits. These are permanent advantages, and may reasonably be expected to be attended with permanent effects. In consequence of their operation, the country may long be expected to rise in opulence, and in number of inhabitants. With this increase, however, of commerce and riches, we must look for the same disadvantages which other countries have derived from the same causes. Vices will multiply, and all sorts of degeneracy commonly arising from increased affluence and abundance of the conveniencies of life. It is, therefore, highly necessary to make some provision against this certain and coming evil. Instruction is the only means that can be devised, for preparing the minds of the lower orders to resist the additional temptations which they will then have, to imitate the increasing prodigality and debauchery of their superiors. This is the only means that can be expected to cure that improvident spirit, for which they are already but too remarkable, and which will certainly grow upon them by imitation and example. And though this remedy cannot be expected to remove the evil entirely ; it is yet the only one which can be employed with any prospect of success, and, at all events, it will most certainly be attended with numerous, and permanent advantages.

THE education of the people at large in this Province, is the only means of uniting the inhabitants of Canada. It is by this means that they may be blended into one people. While the lower classes remain wholly ignorant, there will never be wanting among their superiors,

persons who will abuse their credulity and their prejudices to the purposes of faction. Ignorance is the means of perpetuating national antipathies, of keeping alive the remembrance of unreasonable jealousy and suspicion. Let light arise among the people, and these bitter animosities will die. Why should the inhabitants of Canada consider themselves as of two distinct nations? Though their ancestors were descended from different originals, have not they themselves, the most serious reasons for unanimity and concord? Do they not breathe the same air? Are they not nourished by the same benignant soil; and all enriched by the commerce of the same River? Are they not protected by the same Government? Have they not the same laws, the same rights, and one common interest? The happiness of the one cannot be injured without impairing that of the other. The welfare of both is promoted by the same means. Though their languages are different, their interests cannot be separated.

It is ignorance alone that perpetuates the dissensions that disturb this Province. It is ignorance that, in all countries, has preserved alive the seeds of contention. Ireland has, for seven centuries, been connected with the English Government. But the greater part of the inhabitants, being wholly ignorant, have not in all that time, laid aside their national antipathy against the inhabitants of Britain. The more enlightened peasantry of Scotland, in the course of one century, entirely dropped the most deadly animosities that one people ever entertained against another. At this moment, they are

happy and proud to consider, that the British Isles contain but one nation. The mists of prejudice are dissipated before the light of knowledge.

THE disturbances which, a few years ago, agitated Ireland, are a memorable proof of the miserable effects of general ignorance. They were a consequence of that darkness which affords the inhabitants of any country, no knowledge of the dangers of civil discord, nor any conviction of the necessity of good order ; but which leaves them a prey to the interested and the factious, to those who would establish their own power on the ruin of public happiness. The same cause gave rise to all the miseries which France has suffered. In the beginning of the Revolution, the total ignorance of the great mass of the people, laid them open to be duped by a multitude and a succession of tyrants. And, at a later period, the nation, from the same reason, fell a victim to one of the most tyrannical military despotisms, that ever disgraced the history of nations. These examples are yet fresh in our memory. They have been recorded in the blood of thousands, for the admonition of distant posterity. Let us not, then, conceal these salutary lessons from the eyes of our countrymen. It is possible to open the eyes of their children, at least ; that these may see the dismal consequences of civil disorder, and attach themselves to regularity and peace. If we discharge not our duty in this respect, we become blameable for whatever disasters may, at any future period, arise from their want of this necessary knowledge. And, of what dis-

asters may not the memory of the past, lead us to dread the recurrence, by the operation of the same causes ?

PERHAPS, you will ask me, Why address all this reasoning to us ? How useful soever the establishment of schools may be, why is it necessary, that we should be the principal promoters of it ? If the people wish to have this advantage, let them make the necessary application themselves. The bounty of Government is open. The way to obtain it, is clear, and cannot be mistaken.

BUT, I would request you, Gentlemen, to consider, that the people in general never can be so sensible as you are of the value and importance of knowledge. As the ignorant never experienced, and never can comprehend, the pleasures of an enlightened understanding, no more can they properly estimate the permanent advantages which it brings. To make use of a figure that is admitted into all languages, the ignorant can be no better judges of the importance of knowledge, than the blind are of the use of vision. All conviction, in either case, must arise from report.

In fact, the prejudices of ignorant people run strongly against all kinds of knowledge and science. Perhaps, no prejudices are more general, or more inveterate than these. The Indian, the Kampschadale, or the Laplander, regards the rest of mankind, with contempt ; and considers his own peculiar habits and mode of life, as his greatest pride, and his greatest happiness. In a polished and enlightened country, the pre-

judices of the uninstructed part of the community, against all kinds of education, are not quite so violent as those which a savage entertains against civilization and refinement. They are, however, of the same nature, and have always been sufficient to form a powerful obstacle to all improvement. And if these prejudices are sometimes overcome, it must generally be in consequence of the conversation and influence of the better informed members of society.

By no means, therefore, let it be left to the people to enlighten themselves, or even to ask for the means of instruction. If education never be introduced, till sought for by those who are to enjoy the benefit of it; they will, in all probability, remain destitute of it to the latest posterity. In no country has it ever been introduced in that manner; and, without the spirit of prophecy, we may venture to affirm that it never will be. They who introduce it, must be those who know its advantages, who feel the happiness which it imparts, and who have experienced the delightful sensations that accompany the perception of truth.

UPON you, Gentlemen, it depends, whether the future generations of the inhabitants of Canada, shall be an ignorant and boorish race, gradually assimilating to their neighbours the savages; or assume a more respectable character, and become an intelligent and ingenious peasantry, capable of comprehending the best methods of improving the soil, by which they must support themselves and us, of appreciating the blessings of their condition, and of relieving the fatigues of a most laborious occupation by

the higher, and more engaging exercises of the mind. If the latter supposition should never be realised, the fault will not attach to them. Nor can any part of the blame fall upon the Government. You alone must be chargeable. You alone are, at once, able to discern the extent of the evil, and to bring about the application of the remedy. The country inhabitants, are themselves able to remove the evil ; but they are not sufficiently sensible of its existence, and, therefore, will not be at the trouble to attempt its removal. The British Government is sensible of the evil ; but cannot, without deviating from its accustomed liberality and moderation, enforce the remedy. You alone, are, at once, perfectly acquainted with the disadvantages under which the Canadians labour ; and able, by your influence and advice, to do much towards accomplishing the necessary reform.

PERMIT me, Gentlemen, to say farther, that if this desirable event should never take place ; neither shall I bear any part of the blame. With respect to this matter, I have discharged my duty. It will remain upon record, that I have been the advocate of the Canadian People.

With sentiments of the highest respect,

I am, GENTLEMEN,

Your devoted friend,

And most obedient servant,

DANIEL WILKIE.

QUEBEC, 22d }  
June, 1810. }