

SERMON XII.

THE ENGINE WITHOUT A DRIVER: OR SECULAR EDUCATION.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."— Proverbs i. 7.

THIS is very true. It cannot, indeed, be otherwise, for it is the Word of God. But, as in the case of many other proverbs, this has become to many persons such a matter of rote that they have well-nigh lost sight of its meaning. The various interpretations consequently put upon this proverb are, for the most part, as false as the proverb itself is true. Thus, when people tell me, as they sometimes do, that no sort of knowledge except religious knowledge is sanctioned in the Bible, and for a proof of it appeal to the words of the text; when referring to this well-known proverb they declare that by "the fear of the Lord" is meant religious knowledge; and that by this being said to be "the beginning of knowledge," is signified that it is knowledge to the exclusion of every other kind of knowledge, my habit is simply to say, I do not believe it. Such, as a matter of fact, is the manner of speaking of those who, especially in the case of the labouring classes, deprecate almost every other kind of knowledge, except that which is strictly religious. Geography, history, grammar, the use of the globes, say they—what have labouring-men to do with these? Let them learn to read their Bibles—that is quite enough. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Now, by "the fear of the Lord," I understand such a practical reverence for the Lord as leads to obedience to His commandments. As in Gen. xxii. 12, the angel said to Abraham, "For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me;" and in Proverbs viii. 13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;" and xvi. 6, "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil;" and Jeremiah xxxii. 40, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." This practical fear of the Lord, then, is not mere religious knowledge, but fear such as generates obedience; is in the text said to be "the beginning of knowledge," or, as it is in the margin, "the principal part of knowledge"—that is to say, it does not exclude all other knowledge, but it is the foundation on which all other knowledge must rest, and the object to which it must tend; as in Eccles. vii. 12, it is called, "the excellency of knowledge;" or, as the same sentiment is still more fully expressed, Eccles. xii. 13, "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

It follows from this, then, that secular instruction, unaccompanied by religious training, is an evil much to be dreaded. To strengthen and improve the intellectual faculty, but communicate no religious bias, is a most dangerous experiment. To unroll in our schools the records of history, to spread open the map, to unfold the mysteries of nature, the wonders of mechanism, the triumphs of art, but to keep the Bible close: to communicate—that is to say, every other variety of knowledge, save that which is the beginning of all knowledge, "the fear of the Lord"—to no such system will I ever be a party. I would as soon put a razor in the hands of an infant, or invite a savage to handle a hair-trigger rifle. I would as soon set an engine without a driver upon the railway by which I approached your town.¹ If I wanted to train up a discontented, profligate, and factious population, who would neither leave others in peace nor enjoy it themselves, I should say, Give me a system of schools in which the Bible is the only book which is not used. Putting wholly out of the question that better country, in preparation for which we are for a season pilgrims here, and with a view solely to being useful members of society in this world, the blood of religious

and moral training must circulate freely through every vein of secular knowledge. Do I wish Englishmen to honour the Queen? I must habituate them to "fear God." Jeremiah viii. 9, "The wise men are ashamed; they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the Word of God, and what wisdom is in them?" On the other hand, men will fear God none the less, but rather much the more: they will take not less, but a great deal more, interest in reading their Bibles: their practice of what they read in the Word of God will be not less but much more consistent and of a much higher order in proportion as their intellectual powers have been cultivated, and the energies of their minds called forth by an introduction to knowledge in all its branches. I have already said that I would not be a party to setting an engine upon a railway without a driver. Neither, though under the guidance of a most skilful driver, will I, if I can avoid it, trust my fortunes to an engine, the mechanism of whose construction is so clumsy as that it may be almost said to be no mechanism at all. I want to get to my journey's end with safety, with speed, and with pleasure. Give me, then, a locomotive of the best and newest design—one on the invention and construction of all whose machinery, on the putting together and polishing of all whose levers, pistons, valves, axles, and wheels, the most scientific head and the most skilful hands have been employed. A sorry figure I should cut, forsooth, even though I had secured the services of the most skilful driver on the line, were I to discover, after I had taken my seat, that I had got a very beautiful shell of an engine, but nothing more—a fire, a boiler, a large and handsome exterior, but within no pistons, cylinders, or valves. I am derogating nothing from the Holy Spirit of God—the only power which can set man in motion Christward and heavenward—I am derogating nothing from the Word of God, the only Driver, to whose guidance the course of man can be safely trusted. All that I am contending for is, if possible, an adequate machinery in conjunction with these. The steam and the driver are indispensable. Machinery of a very rude construction will do. Psalm viii. 2, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength," But a more carefully elaborated machinery will, nevertheless under ordinary circumstances, do much better. No one will ever persuade me but that the cultivation of the intellect which God has given, equally with the heart and the spirit with which it is influenced, and the direction of the mind to the examination of works which for convenience sake are called the works of nature, but which in reality, like man himself, are the works of God, will upon the long run predispose to a much readier and more extensive religious influence. I have, I will suppose, in my Sunday-school, a class of twenty, almost young men. Of these, ten have been carefully educated in a well-taught daily school—the remainder have not had the same advantage. Have you any doubt which of these two divisions are the most apt Bible scholars—which take the most interest in the Word of God—which most justly appreciate the force of the Scripture narratives—and which think of all such things most deeply when they return home at night and strive to put them into practice? An answer in one particular detail will suffice for all the rest. The boy who can put his finger upon Jerusalem in the map of the world will take a much more lively interest in all which happened there, than he whose geographical ideas are so vague that he is not sure whether the holy city is not in the adjoining county. And he who has once tasted the real pleasure of intellectual pursuits will be the least likely to return to that sensual life, which in all classes, but especially the labouring classes, stands between so many and the fear of the Lord. Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, Acts vii. 22, "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Solomon, from whose mouth went forth the Word of God in the text, 1 Kings iv. 33, "spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and

of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." Daniel, had he not made great proficiency in various branches of secular knowledge, could never have discharged the duties of the very high and responsible office to which he was raised by Darius. The Magi, who were among the first to find and worship the infant Jesus, were likewise the most learned men of the East: their favourite study astronomy being the chief instrument in attracting their attention to the wonderful star which went before them and at length stood over where the young child was. Of St. Paul's secular attainments—of his knowledge, for instance, of rhetoric, of history, and even poetry—none who read his epistles can possibly doubt. Can we say, then, that the Bible forbids the attainment of secular knowledge? Can we deny that, in the case of some of the most illustrious of his servants, God has made use of such sort of knowledge as an instrument to carry out His mysterious designs? Can we shut our eyes to the great results which have flowed from the mechanism of secular attainments, with the Word of God for a guide, and the Spirit of God for a moving power?

I know of no more striking proof of the power of secular knowledge as an auxiliary to the right understanding of the Word of God than is exhibited in the Church of Rome. A good deal of the doctrine of the Church of Rome is directly contrary to the written Word of God. A good deal which its members are called upon to believe is downright fabulous and absurd. It is the business of the priests to make the people believe that all these things are true and scriptural. How do they accomplish this? By keeping them, as far as they can, in ignorance. Witness very lately the decree of the Council of Thurles, and the denunciations of the first institutions almost ever set on foot in an enlightened spirit, to bring up the Romanist population of Ireland to the same standard of general information as their Protestant brethren. What is the practical result of all this? That in Roman Catholic countries the whole population, and in Protestant countries the Roman Catholic population, are the worst educated in the world. But then, in proportion as their faculties have been less developed for the searching and attainment of God's truth, their minds are more open for the reception of the Pope's lies. Is it possible that the story of the coat at Treves, or of a Winking Madonna, could find anything like general acceptance with a highly intellectually trained population with the Word of God in their hands?

Ye, then, of the labouring classes, suffer a word of exhortation from one, who, though personally almost a stranger to you, has, nevertheless, for more than twenty years, in the Day as well as in the Sabbath-school, worked amongst and taught the children of the class to which yourselves belong. Believe me, then, the sort of education for which I have been pleading, whether you regard this world or the world to come, is the most valuable inheritance which you can purchase for your children. I do not undervalue Sunday-schools. Several hours every Sunday, for the last twenty years have been spent by me in a Sunday-school, And I thank God that He has not denied His blessing to the work. But I have, nevertheless, no hesitation in saying that I consider Sunday-schools only supplementary ; and, if they be put in the place of that regular and well-organized intellectual cultivation and religious and moral training which the Daily-school can alone supply—if, for instance, your wealthier neighbours² are induced to think that they have done quite enough when they have provided you a room and funds for Sabbath teaching—that by sending them there you have done all that is required of you in behalf of your children—the Sunday-school, instead of a supplementary good, becomes, I have no hesitation in saying it, a positive evil. The deep-rooted corruption of the natural heart, in a great majority of

instances, needs much more than the desultory labour of a few hours a-week for its eradication. Nor, if the souls of the young are to be won in any numbers to Christ, must their early years, as now, be devoted almost exclusively to the sweat of the brow. I plead earnestly for the daily school. Do you wish to see your children acquire habits which will fit them for happiness both here and hereafter? Do not be content with merely sending them to the Sunday-schools, which, as far at least as you are yourselves concerned, is a sort of sacrificing to God of that which costs you nothing. But put yourselves to some inconvenience, submit to some loss, put up with the deprivation of their earnings, eat a meal less—or, in many cases it might well be spared, drink a cup less—in order to allow your children the inestimable advantage denied, perhaps, in early life to you, but now, by the blessing of God, offered to them—the advantage of good secular instruction combined with sound religious education; the fuller development of those intellectual powers which God has bestowed upon man in order that he may gain a further insight into His will and learn to fear Him more; a knowledge of the heavens, for instance, in order that the heavens may more fully declare the glory of God and the firmament show His handy work; in order that, when he considers God's heavens, the work of His fingers, the moon and the stars which He has ordained, in a true spirit of humility and of leaning upon one mightier than himself, he may be ready to exclaim, Psalm viii. 4, "What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?" It is a comfort for you to know that there are none so unlearned but that, by the grace of God, they may attain to a saving faith in Christ* In the first beginning of the Gospel, God chose, 1 Cor. i. 21, "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;" and so He often does now. That is no reason, however, for our neglecting to improve the talent which He has bestowed upon us; nor any just ground for expecting that, if we refuse to use the ordinary means of grace and improvement, an extraordinary opening will be made for us.

I have a word for the higher classes—amongst the rest for the clergy, not excluding myself. We, brethren, must not only deny ourselves luxuries and comforts; but, what is more important still at the present crisis—for herein assuredly the great drawback to the extension of sound religious education really consists—we must wave prejudices; not insist too sternly upon rights; assume the character of pastors of the flock rather than of "lords over God's heritage;" must walk hand in hand, clergy and laity, together; and even, as far as is possible, without an abandonment of the great truth that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"—Churchmen with Dissenters, we must do all this—we must do nothing less than this—in order to secure to the labouring classes the advantage above described. Thus to do is at once our duty both to God and ourselves. Each soul which perishes for lack of knowledge by reason of either our covetousness, prejudice, or neglect, will undoubtedly cry out against us at the day of judgment. And, if we wish to get rid of Popery without or Puseyism within the Church—if we wish to set up an impregnable barrier against the encroachments of the tide of infidelity which is flowing with greater strength than many suppose, and desire that those who in the sweat of their brow eat bread should grow up a religious, sober, honest, industrious, and thriving population, good Churchmen, good subjects, and useful citizens—not Acts of Parliament, not prisons, not penal settlements, not workhouses, but a sound daily religious and moral education, open to all sects and denominations, combined with the fullest possible development of the intellectual faculties by instruction in every branch of secular knowledge, all based upon the eternal principle that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"—a proverb in itself as

true as many of man's interpretations of it are false—this is the remedy which we must at once, and strenuously, and perseveringly, and with never-ceasing prayer for God's blessing, apply.

Habergham, All Saints', March 2, 1851.

¹ Preached at Habergham, March 2nd, 1851, at the opening of a new Daily Girls' School.

² The reverse of this is the case at Habergham. A simple but extremely beautiful church, with lofty tower and spire, and close by handsome and spacious Daily Boys, Girls, and Infant School-rooms, with teachers' houses, have been built, and are supported chiefly at the expense of Sir James Kay

Note

Shuttleworth, Bart., and Mr. Dugdale—the one the principal landed proprietor, the other the employer of the largest number of hands in the district. On Saturday, March 1st, 1851, the day before this sermon was preached, the completion of the new Girls' School-room was celebrated by a meeting of the parents and friends of the children, when suitable addresses on the subject of education were delivered, and anthems and choruses sung by the school choir with true Lancashire taste and spirit. The interest taken by all present in these proceedings, and the cordiality with which Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth and Mr. Dugdale and his family were received, were a most gratifying proof of the value set upon good daily education, as well as of the happy result of a free and kindly interchange of feeling and intercourse between the higher and lower classes.