

who rallied you?

INTRODUCTION.

The title I gave to these lectures ought, like all titles, to have been as definite, as plain, and as significant as possible; now, however, I observe that owing to a certain excess of precision, in its present form it is too short and consequently misleading. My first duty therefore will be to explain the title, together with the object of these lectures, to you, and to apologise for being obliged to do this. When I promised to speak to you concerning the future of our educational institutions, I was not thinking especially of the evolution of our particular institutions in Bâle. However frequently my general observations may seem to bear particular application to our own conditions here, I personally have no desire to draw these inferences, and do not wish to be held responsible if they should be drawn, for the simple reason that I consider myself still far too much an inexperienced stranger among you, and much too superficially acquainted with your methods, to pretend to pass judgment upon any such special order of scholastic establishments, or to predict the probable course their development will follow. On the other hand, I know full well under what distinguished auspices I have to deliver these lectures--namely, in a city which is striving to educate and enlighten its inhabitants on a scale so magnificently out of proportion to its size, that it must put all larger cities to shame. This being so, I presume I am justified in assuming that in a quarter where so much is *done* for the things of which I wish to speak, people must also *think* a good deal about them. My desire--yea, my very first condition, therefore, would be to become united in spirit with those who have not only thought very deeply upon educational problems, but have also the will to promote what they think to be right by all the means in their power. And, in view of the difficulties of my task and the limited time at my disposal, to such listeners, alone, in my audience, shall I be able to make myself understood--and even then, it will be on condition that they shall guess what I can do no more than suggest, that they shall supply what I am compelled to omit; in brief, that they shall need but to be reminded and not to be taught. Thus, while I disclaim all desire of being taken for an uninvited adviser on questions relating to the schools and the University of Bâle, I repudiate even more emphatically still the rôle of a prophet standing on the horizon of civilisation and pretending to predict the future of education and of scholastic organisation. I can no more project my vision through such vast periods of time than I can rely upon its accuracy when it is brought too close to an object under examination. With my title: *Our Educational Institutions*, I wish to refer neither to the establishments in Bâle nor to the incalculably vast number of other scholastic institutions which exist throughout the nations of the world to-day; but I wish to refer to *German institutions* of the kind which we rejoice in here. It is their future that will now engage our attention, *i.e.* the future of German elementary, secondary, and public schools (Gymnasien) and universities. While pursuing our discussion, however, we shall for once avoid all comparisons and valuations, and guard more especially against that flattering illusion that our conditions should be regarded as the standard for all others and as surpassing them. Let it suffice that they are our institutions, that they have not become a part of ourselves by mere accident, and were not laid upon us like a garment; but that they are living monuments of important steps in the progress of civilisation, in some respects even the furniture of a bygone age, and as such link us with the past of our people, and are such a sacred and venerable legacy that I can only undertake to speak of the future of our educational institutions in the sense of their being a most probable approximation to the ideal spirit which gave them birth. I am, moreover, convinced that the numerous alterations which have been introduced into these institutions within recent years, with the view of bringing them up-to-date, are for the most part but distortions and aberrations of the originally sublime tendencies given to them at their foundation. And what we dare to hope from the future, in this behalf, partakes so much of the nature of a rejuvenation, a reviviscence, and a refining of the spirit of Germany that, as a result of this very process, our educational institutions may also be indirectly remoulded and born again, so as to appear at once old and new, whereas now they only profess to be "modern" or "up-to-date."

Now it is only in the spirit of the hope above mentioned that I wish to speak of the future of our educational institutions: and this is the second point in regard to which I must tender an apology from the outset. The "prophet" pose is such a presumptuous one that it seems almost ridiculous to deny that I have the intention of adopting it. No one should attempt to describe the future of our education, and the means and methods of

instruction relating thereto, in a prophetic spirit, unless he can prove that the picture he draws already exists in germ to-day, and that all that is required is the extension and development of this embryo if the necessary modifications are to be produced in schools and other educational institutions. All I ask, is, like a Roman haruspex, to be allowed to steal glimpses of the future out of the very entrails of existing conditions, which, in this case, means no more than to hand the laurels of victory to any one of the many forces tending to make itself felt in our present educational system, despite the fact that the force in question may be neither a favourite, an esteemed, nor a very extensive one. I confidently assert that it will be victorious, however, because it has the strongest and mightiest of all allies in nature herself; and in this respect it were well did we not forget that scores of the very first principles of our modern educational methods are thoroughly artificial, and that the most fatal weaknesses of the present day are to be ascribed to this artificiality. He who feels in complete harmony with the present state of affairs and who acquiesces in it *as something "selbstverständliches,"* [1] excites our envy neither in regard to his faith nor in regard to that egregious word "*selbstverständlich*," so frequently heard in fashionable circles.

He, however, who holds the opposite view and is therefore in despair, does not need to fight any longer: all he requires is to give himself up to solitude in order soon to be alone. Albeit, between those who take everything for granted and these anchorites, there stand the *fighters*--that is to say, those who still have hope, and as the noblest and sublimest example of this class, we recognise Schiller as he is described by Goethe in his "Epilogue to the Bell."

"Brighter now glow'd his cheek, and still more bright
With that unchanging, ever youthful glow:-- That
courage which o'ercomes, in hard-fought fight,
Sooner or later ev'ry earthly foe,-- That faith which soaring to
the realms of light, Now boldly presseth on, now bendeth low,
So that the good may work, wax, thrive amain,
So that the day the noble may attain." [2]

I should like you to regard all I have just said as a kind of preface, the object of which is to illustrate the title of my lectures and to guard me against any possible misunderstanding and unjustified criticisms. And now, in order to give you a rough outline of the range of ideas from which I shall attempt to form a judgment concerning our educational institutions, before proceeding to disclose my views and turning from the title to the main theme, I shall lay a scheme before you which, like a coat of arms, will serve to warn all strangers who come to my door, as to the nature of the house they are about to enter, in case they may feel inclined, after having examined the device, to turn their backs on the premises that bear it. My scheme is as follows:--

Two seemingly antagonistic forces, equally deleterious in their actions and ultimately combining to produce their results, are at present ruling over our educational institutions, although these were based originally upon very different principles. These forces are: a striving to achieve the greatest possible *extension of education* on the one hand, and a tendency *to minimise and to weaken it* on the other. The first-named would fain spread learning among the greatest possible number of people, the second would compel education to renounce its highest and most independent claims in order to subordinate itself to the service of the State. In the face of these two antagonistic tendencies, we could but give ourselves up to despair, did we not see the possibility of promoting the cause of two other contending factors which are fortunately as completely German as they are rich in promises for the future; I refer to the present movement towards *limiting and concentrating* education as the antithesis of the first of the forces above mentioned, and that other movement towards the *strengthening and the independence* of education as the antithesis of the second force. If we should seek a warrant for our belief in the ultimate victory of the two last-named movements, we could find it in the fact that both of the forces which we hold to be deleterious are so opposed to the eternal purpose of nature as the concentration of education for the few is in harmony with it, and is true, whereas the first two forces could succeed only in founding a culture false to the root.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Selbstverständlich = "granted or self-understood."

[2] *The Poems of Goethe*. Edgar Alfred Bowring's Translation. (Ed. 1853.)

THE FUTURE OF OUR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

FIRST LECTURE.

(*Delivered on the 16th of January 1872.*)

Ladies and Gentlemen,--The subject I now propose to consider with you is such a serious and important one, and is in a sense so disquieting, that, like you, I would gladly turn to any one who could proffer some information concerning it,--were he ever so young, were his ideas ever so improbable--provided that he were able, by the exercise of his own faculties, to furnish some satisfactory and sufficient explanation. It is just possible that he may have had the opportunity of *hearing* sound views expressed in reference to the vexed question of the future of our educational institutions, and that he may wish to repeat them to you; he may even have had distinguished teachers, fully qualified to foretell what is to come, and, like the *haruspices* of Rome, able to do so after an inspection of the entrails of the Present.

Indeed, you yourselves may expect something of this kind from me. I happened once, in strange but perfectly harmless circumstances, to overhear a conversation on this subject between two remarkable men, and the more striking points of the discussion, together with their manner of handling the theme, are so indelibly imprinted on my memory that, whenever I reflect on these matters, I invariably find myself falling into their grooves of thought. I cannot, however, profess to have the same courageous confidence which they displayed, both in their daring utterance of forbidden truths, and in the still more daring conception of the hopes with which they astonished me. It therefore seemed to me to be in the highest degree important that a record of this conversation should be made, so that others might be incited to form a judgment concerning the striking views and conclusions it contains: and, to this end, I had special grounds for believing that I should do well to avail myself of the opportunity afforded by this course of lectures.

I am well aware of the nature of the community to whose serious consideration I now wish to commend that conversation--I know it to be a community which is striving to educate and enlighten its members on a scale so magnificently out of proportion to its size that it must put all larger cities to shame. This being so, I presume I may take it for granted that in a quarter where so much is *done* for the things of which I wish to speak, people must also *think* a good deal about them. In my account of the conversation already mentioned, I shall be able to make myself completely understood only to those among my audience who will be able to guess what I can do no more than suggest, who will supply what I am compelled to omit, and who, above all, need but to be reminded and not taught.

Listen, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, while I recount my harmless experience and the less harmless conversation between the two gentlemen whom, so far, I have not named.

Let us now imagine ourselves in the position of a young student--that is to say, in a position which, in our present age of bewildering movement and feverish excitability, has become an almost impossible one. It is necessary to have lived through it in order to believe that such careless self-lulling and comfortable indifference to the moment, or to time in general, are possible. In this condition I, and a friend about my own age, spent a year at the University of Bonn on the Rhine,--it was a year which, in its complete lack of plans and projects for the future, seems almost like a dream to me now--a dream framed, as it were, by two periods of growth. We two remained quiet and peaceful, although we were surrounded by fellows who in the main were very differently disposed, and from time to time we experienced considerable difficulty in meeting and resisting the somewhat too pressing advances of the young men of our own age. Now, however, that I can look upon the stand we had to take against these opposing forces, I cannot help associating them in my mind with those checks we are wont to receive in our dreams, as, for instance, when we imagine we are able to fly and yet feel ourselves held back by some incomprehensible power.