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978-1-108-06634-1 - Improvements in Education, as it Respects the Industrious Classes of the Community: With a Brief Sketch of the Life of Joseph Lancaster by William Corston

Joseph Lancaster

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### **Improvements in Education, as it Respects the Industrious Classes of the Community**

The son of a shopkeeper, Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838) received little formal education himself. In 1798 he set up a school in Southwark, waiving fees for poor children. Originally published in 1803, this work sets out in detail the philosophy and practice of Lancaster's system of education, which relied on peer tutoring. He was always concerned with the education of the underprivileged in industrial cities, lamenting that 'poor children be deprived of even an initiatory share of education, and of almost any attention to their morals'. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw the peak of the popularity of Lancaster's system as his ideas spread and inspired the establishment of schools around the world. His book is still significant in the history of educational methods. This reissue of the revised third edition of 1805 incorporates a brief 1840 biography of Lancaster.

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# Improvements in Education, as it Respects the Industrious Classes of the Community

*With A Brief Sketch  
of the Life of Joseph Lancaster  
by William Corston*

JOSEPH LANCASTER



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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108066341](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108066341)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2014

This edition first published 1805

This digitally printed version 2014

ISBN 978-1-108-06634-1 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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IMPROVEMENTS  
IN  
E D U C A T I O N,  
AS IT RESPECTS THE INDUSTRIOUS CLASSES  
OF THE  
*COMMUNITY,*  
CONTAINING,  
AMONG OTHER IMPORTANT PARTICULARS,  
*An Account of the Institution for the Education of*  
*ONE THOUSAND POOR CHILDREN,*  
BOROUGH ROAD, SOUTHWARK;  
AND OF THE NEW SYSTEM OF EDUCATION ON WHICH IT IS  
CONDUCTED.

BY JOSEPH LANCASTER.

“ All nations, indeed, of which we have any account, in becoming rich, have become profligate; a torrent of depraved morality has, in every opulent state, borne down with irresistible violence those mounds and fences, by which the wisdom of legislators attempted to protect chastity, sobriety, and virtue. If any check can be given to the corruption of a state increasing in riches and declining in morals, it must be given, not by laws enacted to alter the inveterate habits of men, but by education adapted to form the hearts of children to a proper sense of moral and religious excellence.”—*Bishop of Landaff’s Charge, 1788.*

THIRD EDITION, WITH ADDITIONS.

London:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY DARTON AND HARVEY, GRACECHURCH-  
STREET; SOLD ALSO BY W. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY.

1805.

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TO

JOHN DUKE OF BEDFORD,

AND

JOHN LORD SOMERVILLE,

*In Testimony of the cheerful, generous, and im-  
portant Assistance they have repeatedly given to the  
Institution and System of Instruction described in the  
ensuing Pages, this Publication is*

*Most respectfully inscribed,*

*By their obliged and grateful Friend,*

JOSEPH LANCASTER.

FREE SCHOOL, BOROUGH ROAD,  
8th of 7th MONTH, 1805.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following pages contain the result and experience of much personal labour, study, and expence. In one single page is frequently detailed, that which has puzzled me for many months to discover; and which has, ultimately, rendered important services to some hundreds of children. The book is printed on as economical a plan as is consistent with neatness, that more advantage may accrue to the institution, for the benefit of which the profits are to be applied, at my discretion; probably, in uniting some works of industry with education.

It is not to the size of the book, but to its contents that I wish to recommend attention: and if the practical part of the work be read with *precision*, it will be better understood, and afford more satisfaction.

If any benevolent persons, conversant with the subject of education, *from practice*, should  
be

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be disposed to suggest improvements, which they think may be of advantage, in addition to my present system, I shall esteem it a privilege to receive their hints with deference, and pay them a marked attention. My object is *improvement*; and I hope I shall always be attentive to promote it. With these observations, returning thanks to my noble and benevolent friends of every rank, among the subscribers,

I remain,

Their well-wishing friend,

JOSEPH LANCASTER.

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## INTRODUCTION.



THE rich possess ample means to realize any theory they may chuse to adopt in the education of their children, regardless of the cost; but it is not so with him whose subsistence is derived from industry: ignorance and incapacity often prevent his having proper views on the important subject of education, and when he has, slender resources as often prevent their being reduced to practice. Yet, among this class of men, are found many who are not only useful members, but ornaments to society; and from the labours of these it is, that the public derive the conveniencies, and many of the comforts of life: but while they are toiling for the production of those comforts, their children are left destitute of a suitable education. Therefore, it has been acknowledged, that education, as it respects those who are unprovided with it, ought to become a national concern; and this has been so long the public opinion,

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nion, that no doubt it would have become so, had not a mere Pharisaical, sectmaking spirit intervened to prevent it; and that in every party.

A system of education, which would not gratify this disposition in any party, is requisite, in order to obviate the difficulty; and the reader will find a something said to that purpose in perusing this tract —When I view the desolating effects produced amongst the unprotected and unbefriended orders of society, what shall I say? Alas! my brethren and fellow Christians of every denomination, you have been contending whose influence should be greatest in society, while a national benefit has been lost, and the poor objects of it become a prey to vice, to an extent, that all your praiseworthy, but partial benevolence, can never repair.—A national evil requires a national remedy; let not this any longer be delayed: let your minds expand, free from every narrow principle, and let the public good become the sole object of your united Christian efforts.

Above all things, education ought not to be subservient to the propagation of the peculiar tenets of any sect. Beyond the number of that sect, it becomes undue influence; like the strong taking advantage of the weak. Yet, a reverence for the sacred name of God and the Scriptures of Truth; a detestation of vice; a love of veracity; a due attention to duties to parents, relations, and to society; carefulness

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carefulness to avoid bad company; civility without flattery; and a peaceable demeanor; may be inculcated in every seminary for youth, without violating the sanctuary of private religious opinion in any mind.

When obedience to the Divine precepts keeps pace with knowledge, in the mind of any man, that man is a Christian; and when the fruits of Christianity are produced, that man is evidently a disciple of our Blessed Lord, let his profession of religion be what it may. The propagation of this knowledge, and the production of those fruits, increase the number of true Christians, which is far better than the increase of party to any extent; and, at the same time, proves beneficial to society, in the improved principles and conduct of its members; and in private life, by the steadiness and amiable disposition of parents, masters, and children, who are influenced by its mild and benignant precepts.

Impressed with these sentiments, I feel a wish, as every friend to mankind must, that names may perish, but truth prosper.

That the profession of Christianity would cultivate a spirit of unity, brotherly love, and peace; bearing one with another, in love; avoiding all differences from party spirit; and when they cannot  
unite

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unite in religious opinions, let their dissent be with Christian meekness, and respect to the opinions of others.

What a beautiful effect this would produce among those who are so unhappy as to live without religion; and how would mankind gradually be allured into that spirit of “charity, which suffereth long, and is kind; which envieth not, is not puffed up, and vaunteth not itself; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; *believeth* all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.—*Charity which never faileth.*”

This spirit of charity is a spirit of love; but the sectmaking spirit of party is cruel, full of rancour and bitterness. The object of our Holy Religion is to exalt the Kingdom of Heaven; to bring into subjection every evil act of the will in man, to the will of God. In the spirit of sect and party, it is the object, though often blended with something better, to exalt a peculiar creed, to establish a name, to gain a degree of worldly honour, to set up the will and wisdom of man, and make an idol of it, and compel all to bow down and worship it. This is the harbinger of discord, the source of evil, and has often led the martyr to the stake, or unsheathed the cruel sword.—Oh! that all, who really love and fear God,

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God, in every profession, would remember, that God, and not man, is the object of our worship; and consider how to *please him*, and do *his will*, who is a God of love and of peace. Then the solicitude would not be, to make men nominal Catholics or Protestants, Churchmen or Dissenters, but to exalt, by precept and example, the beauty and excellency of our Holy Religion. The desire would not be the increase of proselytes to this name or the other, but to the only name given under heaven, whereby mankind can be saved—the name of Jesus; to which all must bow, in *mercy* or in *judgment*. The floods of wickedness which inundate the world, have their spring in the malevolent dispositions of mankind. Christianity was intended, by its Divine Author, to counteract and subdue these; to humble the most ferocious dispositions into meekness, causing the lion to lie down with the lamb; and if any man, or body of men, want to do good, this is the most noble principle on which they can act. The professors of the Christian name, are, alas! lamentably out of the Christian spirit. The cause which they are pledged in duty to support, suffers by their divisions, like a besieged city, whose enemies are at its gates, or within its walls, and the citizens at daggers-drawing one with another; whereas, if they would all unite, and follow their Captain, they would *turn the battle to the gate*, and drive the enemies from their walls. I long to see men, who profess Christianity, contend not for  
creeds

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creeds of faith, words, and names, but in the practice of every heavenly virtue. "Let your light so shine before men, as to glorify your Father which is in heaven," is an injunction that commands our endeavours to obey it. How happy will that day be, when men strive to show their *faith* by their works—that faith which works by *love*, and which coveteth no man's gold, silver, or apparel; but that all may follow that Holiness, without which none can please God.

It is proper the reader should know why I take up so much of his time on this subject. I consider a sectarian spirit as the source of dissension and persecution. I write thus, not only to expose its evil tendency, and caution others, but as a declaration of my own sentiments, which become of a little importance to the reader, as connected with my peculiar plan of education, and the institution in which it hath pleased Providence to place me. Yet I believe a man may *espouse* and *defend* religious opinions peculiar to himself and his friends, in that charity which is not puffed up, which thinketh no evil, and which vaunteth not itself; but that same charity will teach him to avoid controversy, strife, and all that leads to bitterness. It is on this principle I have hitherto acted, and wish to continue to act. I desire to avoid making the education given to such a large number of children in my institution, a means of instilling my own *peculiar* religious tenets



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tenets into their minds, and prefer the more noble grounds which I have recommended. I am a member of the society of Friends called Quakers\*. I wish to avoid bringing my peculiar religious opinions into public controversy, and do not intend to do so, unless compelled; though I hope I may say, without ostentation, that I shall not be ashamed or afraid to vindicate them. Yet I sincerely hope, the moderation of my Christian brethren in other societies will spare me this trial. I am not vain enough to set up as arbiter of the religious opinions of others, but wish all men would agree, as much as it is in their power, to do good; and, when doing so, cast all their sectarian opinions out of sight. For, whenever the Divine legacy of peace shall prevail on earth, it will be preceded by mutual condescension, love and unity, among men; without which, proper care cannot be taken of their youth in general. As an additional inducement to make the preceding observations, I have at times been involved, much against my will, in more private controversy and argument on religious topics than was at all agreeable to my feelings.

\* A name originally given to the society in contempt and reproach.

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