

**A FRENCH ETON; OR,
MIDDLE
CLASS EDUCATION AND
THE STATE**

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A French Eton; Or, Middle Class Education and the State by Matthew Arnold

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MATTHEW ARNOLD

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OR,

MIDDLE CLASS EDUCATION AND THE STATE.

*Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching
forth unto those things which are before.—ST. PAUL.*

A

FRENCH ETON;

OR,

MIDDLE CLASS EDUCATION

AND THE STATE.

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD,

*Lately Foreign Assistant Commissioner to the Commissioners appointed to inquire
into the State of Popular Education in England.*

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A FRENCH ETON;

OR,

MIDDLE-CLASS EDUCATION AND THE STATE.

A LIVELY and acute writer, whom English society, indebted to his vigilance for the exposure of a thousand delinquents, salutes with admiration as its Grand Detective, some time ago called public attention to the state of the "College of the Blessed Mary" at Eton. In that famous seat of learning, he said, a vast sum of money was expended on education, and a beggarly account of empty brains was the result. Rich endowments were wasted; parents were giving large sums to have their children taught, and were getting a most inadequate return for their outlay. Science, among those venerable towers in the vale of the Thames, still adored her Henry's holy shade; but she did very little else. These topics, handled with infinite skill and vivacity,

produced a strong effect. Public attention, for a moment, fixed itself upon the state of secondary instruction in England. The great class, which is interested in the improvement of this, imagined that the moment was come for making the first step towards that improvement. The comparatively small class, whose children are educated in the existing public schools, thought that some inquiry into the state of these institutions might do good. A Royal Commission was appointed to report upon the endowments, studies, and management of the nine principal public schools of this country—Eton, Winchester, Westminster, Charterhouse, St. Paul's, Merchant Taylors', Harrow, Rugby, and Shrewsbury.

Eton was really the accused, although eight correspondents were thus summoned to appear with Eton; and in Eton the investigation now completed will probably produce most reform. The reform of an institution which trains so many of the rulers of this country is, no doubt, a matter of considerable importance. That importance is certainly lessened if it is true, as the *Times* tells us, that the real ruler of our country is "The People," although this potentate does not absolutely transact his own business, but delegates that function to the class which Eton

educates. But even those who believe that Mirabeau, when he said, *He who administers, governs*, was a great deal nearer the truth than the *Times*, and to whom, therefore, changes at Eton seem indeed matter of great importance, will hardly be disposed to make those changes very sweeping. If Eton does not teach her pupils profound wisdom, we have Oxenstiern's word for it that the world is governed by very little wisdom. Eton, at any rate, teaches her aristocratic pupils virtues which are among the best virtues of an aristocracy—freedom from affectation, manliness, a high spirit, simplicity. It is to be hoped that she teaches something of these virtues to her other pupils also, who, not of the aristocratic class themselves, enjoy at Eton the benefit of contact with aristocracy. For these other pupils, perhaps, a little more learning as well, a somewhat stronger dose of ideas, might be desirable. Above all, it might be desirable to wean them from the easy habits and profuse notions of expense which Eton generates—habits and notions graceful enough in the lilies of the social field, but inconvenient for its future toilers and spinners. To convey to Eton the knowledge that the wine of Champagne does not water the whole earth, and that