

REMARKS

ON

THE PLAN PROPOSED

BY

THE LORD BISHOP OF OSSORY AND FERNS,

FOR

THE SETTLEMENT

OF

THE EDUCATION QUESTION

IN

IRELAND.

BY

A MANAGER OF A NATIONAL SCHOOL.

DUBLIN :

HODGES AND SMITH, GRAFTON-STREET,

BOOKSELLERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

J. W. PARKER, WEST STRAND, LONDON.

1854.

REMARKS

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FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION

IN IRELAND

BY THE HON. G. STANLEY, M.P.

IN PARLIAMENT

AND IN A NATIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION

DUBLIN:

HODGES AND SMITH, GRAFTON-STREET.

ADVERTISERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

J. W. PARKER, WILKINSON, LONDON.

PRINTED BY J. M. O'TOOLE,

13, HAWKINS'-STREET.

## REMARKS,

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AT the present moment, when the question of National Education in Ireland engages so much attention on the part of all who take an interest in the subject, it appears desirable to consider a proposition, in reference to the question, put forward two years ago by the Lord Bishop of Ossory and Ferns, whose high character and talents, no less than his exalted station in the Church, cannot fail to impart to any suggestions proposed or adopted by him, a considerable degree of weight and importance.

The consideration of the high and influential source from which the proposition about to be reviewed has emanated, is calculated to deter one from presuming to criticise a plan sanctioned by so high authority. The writer of these pages ventures, nevertheless, upon this course, impelled by a sense of duty, in defence of a principle which appears to him to be one of paramount importance, and in support of a system under which he considers that principle to be fairly maintained; while, by the adoption of the plan proposed, it would be altogether contravened.

It will be the endeavour of the writer, in the remarks which follow, impartially to consider the different bearings of the proposed plan, in connexion with the views of the various political and religious sections amongst us, whose

principles and feelings are to be regarded in the consideration of the subject. Hence, he has judged it expedient to conceal his name, and not to announce to which of those denominations he belongs, or to which of those political parties he may be attached, except so far as these may be inferred from the principles which will necessarily be advocated, or impugned, in the course of the discussion.

The proposition about to be considered, was put forward in a speech delivered at a general meeting of the Church Education Society, and afterwards published in the form of a pamphlet,\* at a time when it was fully believed that the Earl of Derby's Government was about to appoint a Committee of Inquiry into the working of the National System. That Government, however, declined to institute such an inquiry, nor did any supporter of the Church Education Society propose the appointment of a Committee, although Lord Derby announced his readiness to accede to such a course, if a motion were made to that effect, and supported, in either House of Parliament. Hence, the suggestions of the Bishop of Ossory were, like a similar proposition put forward ten years previously, in the *Christian Examiner*, and universally attributed to the present Bishop of Cashel, nearly forgotten, until, within the last few weeks, a Committee of Inquiry having been granted by the present Government, the subject has been revived; while the circumstance of the Right Rev. Prelate who proposed the plan in 1852, and the noble Earl who presided at the meeting at which the scheme was then propounded, being members of that Committee, has imparted to the subject a new and an additional interest.

Under these circumstances, the plan referred to appears

\* A Speech delivered by the Lord Bishop of Ossory and Ferns, at the Annual Meeting of the Church Education Society for Ireland, held in Dublin, 15th April, 1852; the Earl of Donoughmore in the chair.

to call for some remarks from one who believes it to be liable to the most serious objections, as it respects the principle which it would sanction, and the practical results which would inevitably follow from its adoption; while it is his full conviction that it would utterly fail of providing a settlement of the question, proving alike objectionable to the supporters of the present system and unsatisfactory to the opponents of the National Board; and, moreover, that it could never be adopted by the Government, sanctioned by the Legislature, or accepted by any of the religious denominations in the country.

With a view to a full and fair consideration of the merits of the scheme proposed, it is necessary, in the first place, to state clearly and candidly what the plan is. This we shall briefly set forth, as gathered from the article in the *Christian Examiner*, to which we have referred, and from the speech of the Lord Bishop of Ossory, which is more immediately under consideration.

It was proposed by the Editor of the *Christian Examiner*, that the Government should be satisfied with providing means for secular education, without making any provision for ~~the~~ religious instruction in the schools; and that the Commissioners, to whom the Parliamentary Grants should be entrusted for distribution, should give aid for building and supporting schools, without making any stipulation whatsoever respecting religion, requiring only that suitable secular instruction should be afforded to the pupils; taking care "that the schools shall be so conducted as to raise the intellect, improve the habits, and add to the information of the rising generation, and allowing the zeal of religious instructors to have, at the same time, ample field to work in the religious cultivation of the pupils."\*

\* *Christian Examiner*, January, 1842, p. 3.

The plan, as put forward by the Bishop of Ossory, is this :—“ That the State should prescribe a system of secular education, the best that it can devise, considering the wants and all the circumstances of the country ; that it should enforce this system in all the schools to which it gives aid, and ascertain that it is carried out *bonâ fide* in all the schools, by means of periodical inspections, . . . . . or adopting any other way which may seem better fitted to secure the effective carrying out of the system. But that having done this, it should make no other absolute requirements. That no school should be excluded from connexion with the State on account of its rules as regards religious instruction ; but that every school should be admissible to such connexion, on making an engagement to carry out the prescribed system ; and should be kept in connexion, so long as it faithfully adhered to this engagement.”\*

Such is the outline of the plan proposed as a settlement of the difficulties connected with the Education question in Ireland. With a view to its adoption, it would be only necessary to alter the *Third* general rule of the Board ; which alteration, however, would totally change the essential character of the system, and substitute an opposite principle for that on which it is founded.

The rule, as it now stands, is as follows :—

“ 3. The Patrons of the several Schools have the right of appointing such religious instruction as they may think proper to be given therein. provided, that each School be open to children of all communions ; that *due regard be had to parental right and authority ; that, accordingly, no child be compelled to receive, or to be present at, any religious instruction to which his parents or guardians object ; and that the time for giving it be so fixed that no child shall be thereby, in effect, excluded, directly or indirectly, from the*

\* Speech of the Lord Bishop of Ossory and Ferns, at the Meeting of the Church Education Society, April, 1852, p. 37.

*other advantages which the School affords. Subject to this, religious instruction may be given either during the fixed school-hours or otherwise."*

The alteration required, in order to carry out the proposed plan, would be to omit all the words which we have marked by *Italics*. The result would be, to leave it in the power of the patrons of the several schools to appoint any system of religious instruction which they might think proper, with full authority to compel all the children, of whatsoever persuasion, to receive such instruction, however opposed it might be to their conscientious feelings and to the expressed will of their parents, and to exclude from all the advantages of the school those children who should, in obedience to parental authority, refuse to receive such instruction, so appointed by the patron, be he Protestant or Roman Catholic, Presbyterian or Unitarian—nay, even Swedenborgian or Mormonite, if any such were to be found in Ireland.

I. Our first objection to this scheme is, as we have intimated, one of *principle*. For the last thirty years, every plan of popular education for the laity has been founded on the principle of comprehension, and, with a view to this, of *non-compulsion*, and the absence of all religious tests as the condition of a participation in the advantages of general education in the schools supported by the State. This we believe to be a just and sound principle, in accordance with the spirit of Christian charity, and with the genius of the British constitution. But the plan under consideration is in direct contravention of this principle. There can be no mistake on this point. If compulsion, and the enforcing of peculiar religious instruction on all, without reference to parental right and authority, were not intended, there would be no occasion for demanding an alteration of the existing system, under which it is manifest, from the terms of the rule above quoted, that the patron of a school may com-

municate such religious instruction as he may think fit, to all children whose parents or guardians do not object. Moreover, we are not left to mere inference, to discover the intention to make such instruction compulsory. The Bishop of Ossory expressly states, on behalf of the Church Education Society, "We require not merely that the Bible should be read daily in all our schools, but that all children in attendance who are able to read should be instructed daily in the Bible." And of this essentially Protestant requirement he declares: "We are resolved not to rescind, or to modify, or to relax our rule." And, again, in anticipating objections to the proposed plan, the Bishop states: "Our schools would be the same that they are now, as regards religious instruction. We should not put the Bible out of our schools, or admit any to instruction in our schools except those who consented daily to read the Bible, and to receive instruction daily in the Bible. Nor should we deny admission to any who were willing so to be instructed. We should give the same religious instruction that we do now, and give it under the same rules, and give it to the same persons."

It is not easy to discover any difference between this scheme, and the proposition for a separate grant to the Church Education Society; which, however, the Bishop of Ossory considers "a plan open to very serious objections," and of which he states that he "cannot but hope, very earnestly, that this mode of settling the Education question may not be the one adopted;"—a sentiment in which we very heartily concur with his Lordship.

II. Secondly, we object to the proposed plan on account of the *practical* results which would inevitably follow its adoption. It would be a separate grant under another name, and, as such, would be liable to all the "very serious objections," as to practical consequences, which apply to that

plan. It would effectually put an end to united education, except so far as the influence of the landlord, co-operating with the Protestant clergyman, might counteract that of the Roman Catholic priest. It would create rival schools in every district, the number of which would be in proportion to the number of religious denominations in each locality, nay more, must be increased according to the number of the subdivisions of parties. Thus, in some districts half a dozen schools might be established, all receiving aid from the State, and each teaching religion to the pupils on different and opposing systems, not in the way approved by the parents, but according to the views of the respective patrons of the schools. The clergyman of the Established Church might insist upon all receiving a strictly Church of England education; the priest would demand a strictly Roman Catholic system of religious instruction; members of the Scotch Church would require the use of the Assembly's Catechism; other Presbyterians would not allow of its introduction; many would insist on the exclusion of all Catechisms, but would require the use of the Scriptures, with oral and written explanations; while others might prefer the plan of the Kildare-place Society, with the Bible without note or comment; and another party might be disposed to adopt a middle course, as pursued under the present National System of Education, on the principle of no exclusion and no compulsion.

Again, the grants to each party should be in proportion to the number of pupils likely to attend the several schools; which, in some instances, would, under the proposed plan, be kept up for ten or twelve children. And, as these smaller schools would not afford adequate remuneration to the teacher, and would want the stimulus of numbers and emulation to excite the pupils, the minority of any denomination in each district would labour under all the dis-

advantages inseparable from such discouraging circumstances.

But if it be urged that, with a view to prevent such a multiplication of schools, the Board might prescribe certain conditions and limits, to be regulated by the distance at which one school must be situated from another, or having regard to the number of scholars in attendance, then the desired object would be defeated of giving "ample field" to all parties to carry out their own views as respects the religious instruction of the children, and those who might constitute the minority would be left destitute of all means of education, except on the condition of the children virtually abjuring the faith of their parents. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that in this way the plan would be far from beneficial to the Protestant poor in most parts of Ireland.

We fully admit, as we painfully feel, the great difficulty of attaining the desirable object of united education in this country; but the adoption of the plan under consideration would put an end to all hope of union, rendering that impossible which is now difficult of attainment, and promoting discord and dissension in every parish and in every village in Ireland.

III. The third objection to the plan proposed is derived from the conviction, that it would be equally unacceptable to all parties—to the supporters of the present National System and to its opponents, to the Government, and to the various religious denominations in the country.

1. The entire Roman Catholic population, including the vast majority of those to be educated by the State, would be opposed to this scheme. These, as a body, are satisfied with the existing system, and, with the exception of an extreme party amongst them, would deprecate any change; and, more especially, they would feel averse to a scheme emanating from their opponents, and avowedly intended to

be used as an instrument for reviving the old system of compulsion, and as a means of depriving the poor belonging to their communion of the benefits of secular education, except at the sacrifice of their conscientious opinions. It is true that, in the most numerous instances, their great preponderance as to numbers would give the Roman Catholics an advantage, affording them full opportunities of proselytizing the Protestant pupils; but, on the other hand, they would feel that the poverty and dependent position of their humbler brethren would render it difficult to compete with the wealth and power of the Protestant landlords, who might in many cases be disposed to exercise other influences besides those which would naturally belong to a well endowed school, to induce the parents to send their children to the Protestant school.

2. Neither would the proposed plan meet with the concurrence of the Presbyterians. These, although constituting a numerous, respectable, and influential body, are not possessed of the same means for carrying out the education of their poorer members as are enjoyed by the Established Church, comprising the large landed proprietors and a well endowed clergy. Hence, they would feel that they could not compete with the Church Education Society, possessing, in addition to £40,000 per annum raised by subscriptions, and £12,000 a-year in the shape of parish clerks' salaries applicable to their school-masters, a large share of the parliamentary grant, and enjoying all the advantages of inspection and books provided by the National Board, together with the support and influence of the landlords and the clergy of the National Church, the representatives of the wealth and power of the country. Schools thus supported, in which the patrons would be at liberty to enforce their own religious teaching on all the pupils, would be even more to be dreaded by the Presby-

terian ministers than by the Roman Catholic clergy. The peculiar influence of the latter, added to the strong feelings of their flocks against Protestantism, and the antagonism of creed, race, and class, would give to the Roman Catholics a measure of security against proselytizing schools which the Presbyterians could not enjoy; and it cannot be supposed that their clergy would be insensible to the danger which would arise from the establishment, in the midst of their flocks, of rival schools, with all the advantages referred to, in which "the zeal of religious instructors," who might be earnest Episcopalians looking on Presbyterians as at the best but objects of "covenanted mercies," should be allowed to have "ample field to work in the religious cultivation of the pupils" in the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England.

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We are fully convinced that both Roman Catholics and Presbyterians, as well as all the Protestant dissenting bodies, unitedly comprising, as they do, five-sixths of the nation, would equally oppose this plan, on the double ground that it would be utterly inconsistent with religious liberty, so far as its *principle* is concerned, and that, *practically*, it would be fraught with danger and injustice to themselves, as religious bodies exposed to the incessant competition of the Established Church. They would, furthermore, regard the plan as not only opposed to justice and to their own interests, but they would denounce it—not without show of reason—as a "delusion and a snare," as intended not only to introduce denominational grants, *under the name of a grant for a general system*, but to give to the Established Church all the unlimited power over its own schools that it could obtain under a system of separate grants, with about three times as much of the Parliamentary grant as it could obtain were the amount of that grant allotted to each Church in a fair pro-

portion, according to the relative numbers of its population in the country at large. The stratagem would thus be, to a certainty, detected and defeated by the other Churches; but even if it were to succeed for a season, it would be sure to be defeated in the end, and to bring down danger and discredit on the Established Church. It would share the fate of the many plans formerly adopted in this country for proselytizing the children of Roman Catholics, under the pretext of educating them, all of which signally failed. It would turn out to be one of those "ingenious devices" which, being opposed to true principle and honest dealing, helps once and hinders ever afterwards, which, though they may seem to be strength in the beginning, are weakness in the end.

3. We next proceed to consider how far the plan proposed would be likely to be approved by the members of the Established Church. These must here be divided into supporters of the National Board, and opponents to the System. With regard to the former of these, it is clear that they could not adopt the plan under consideration. They are persuaded, both laymen and clergy, that the present National Board is founded upon a sound principle, opposed to the compulsory system which would be sanctioned under the plan suggested. Such a system as that now proposed they would consider as inconsistent with all their ideas of toleration, of civil and religious liberty, and of parental right and authority. They would not like that the children of their own communion should be exposed to its influence in the case of schools under a Roman Catholic manager and teacher; and they feel that, however desirous they may be to propagate their own faith by all legitimate means, they must not do unto others what they would not should be done unto themselves. Such are their professed principles,

and they are entitled to the credit of sincerity in their professions. We see many of this class proving themselves very earnest Protestants, warm advocates of Bible Societies and similar institutions. But they, at the same time, protest against the use of coercion, under any form, in furtherance of what they believe to be truth; and in this light they view the refusal to admit to the advantages of the school the children of parents who object to their receiving religious instruction in accordance with the principles of the patron of the school, where that instruction is opposed to their own creed.

4. But neither do we believe that the proposed plan would prove generally acceptable or satisfactory to members of the Established Church who are opposed to the National Board. All the evils which they apprehend under the present system would be rendered inevitable in the great majority of the schools in Ireland, under the plan proposed as a modification of that system—a plan by which means would be provided by the State to enable the Roman Catholic Clergy to enforce the inculcation of the doctrines of their church upon the children of such Protestants as they could induce to attend their schools, and whereby power would be given to the priest, which he does not now possess, of *compelling*, under pain of expulsion from the school, the children of Roman Catholics also to receive such religious instruction as he may think fit to prescribe. Many of the opponents of the National Board, as well as others, believe that multitudes of the Roman Catholics in this country are ready to shake off the authority of their clergy, and are indisposed to the inculcation of ultramontane doctrines upon the minds of their children. It is not necessary here to discuss the correctness of this opinion; but the fact that it is the conviction of the greater number of the class now referred to, renders it highly improbable that, under such

circumstances, they would consent to give, for the first time, power to the priests to insist upon the reception of such a system of religious instruction as they may choose to prescribe, as the condition upon which the children of inquiring Roman Catholics shall receive secular education in the schools supported by the State.

We have observed that there is no evil apprehended by the supporters of the Church Education Society, under the existing system, which would not be rendered inevitable, and be greatly aggravated under the plan now under consideration. In proof of this, it will suffice to glance at a few of the objections made to the present system, and the bearing upon them of the proposed plan.

It is urged as an objection that religious instruction is too much lost sight of by the National Board; and the remedy proposed to meet this evil is, for the State to give up religious education altogether! The opposers of the present system have been loud in their declamation against mere secular education, which they have described as fraught with evils of the most destructive character and tendency, political and religious; and yet, it is now only required, that the State shall take care "that the schools shall be so conducted as to raise the intellect, improve the habits, and add to the information of the rising generation," allowing, at the same time, "the zeal of religious instruction to have ample field to work in the religious cultivation of the pupils;" or, permitting the indifference or irreligion of patrons to neglect or to prohibit all religious instruction, just as, in each case, they may think fit!

Again, it has been objected that facilities are afforded, under the present system, for the teaching of Roman Catholic and other errors, so far as it relates to the children whose parents profess those erroneous doctrines; and the remedy proposed is, to remove all the existing safeguards

and impediments to the extension of those doctrines beyond the pale of those who profess them, and "to allow the zeal of religious instructors" of all denominations to be left "*without any restrictions*;" so that the priest may teach the Protestant children the Roman Catholic Catechisms and prayers, and the Presbyterian minister may instil into the minds of the children of Episcopalians his opinions on Church government, and other Dissenters teach them their peculiar doctrines; for all this must be permitted, no less than that the clergyman of the Established Church may instruct Roman Catholics and Presbyterians, and other denominations, in the Church Catechism.

Once more, it has been said, that there is great danger of the few Protestant children attending, in Roman Catholic districts, the present National Schools, being led to adopt the errors of the more numerous class, notwithstanding the strict regulations of the Board to prevent it; and the remedy proposed is to remove all "restrictions," and to allow "the zeal of religious instructors" (whether priests, monks, or nuns), "to have *ample field* to work in the religious cultivation of the pupils," of all denominations!

IV. Having thus pointed out the objections to the plan proposed as a settlement of this long-vexed question,—as respects the principles which its adoption would sanction and those which it would contravene, as regards the practical results to be anticipated from its operation, and with reference to the view likely to be taken of it by the various parties whose interests and feelings are to be consulted—little need be added to prove our last position, that the plan could never be adopted by the Government, or sanctioned by the Legislature. The plan being opposed to the great and fundamental principle of non-compulsion, and this being the principle upon which statesmen of all political parties have long been acting, in reference to the education of the

poor, it cannot be supposed that a scheme will now be accepted, the adoption of which would involve an abandonment of this principle. Moreover, it is not to be doubted that this very plan was rejected by the Earl of Derby's Government, when it was propounded in 1852, even as a similar proposition was disregarded by Sir Robert Peel's Government, when put forward in 1842. There cannot be a doubt that this plan, as proposed by the Bishop of Ossory, was duly brought under the notice of the Government at the time, and yet, a few months subsequently to the publication of the Bishop's speech, Lord Derby made an announcement in the House of Lords, to the effect that, after an anxious and careful consideration of the whole subject, and of the various modifications proposed by the opponents to the system, by himself and the then Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland (the Earl of Eglinton), they had come to the conclusion that the several changes which had been proposed would be open to objections no less serious, if not even greater, than those which they were intended to remove; and that any alteration of the system would be certain to prove injurious to its efficient and beneficial working; and that, consequently, the Government had no intention of proposing any change, nay more, would not institute any inquiry into the principles or working of the system.

And if a Government, comprising amongst its members, and reckoning amongst its supporters, politicians whose public career has not generally been marked by zeal in favour of religious freedom, felt indisposed to revert to the exploded system of religious tests in the matter of National Education, it cannot be thought likely that it will meet with a more favourable reception from a Government like the present, comprising, as it does, statesmen whose names will be for ever associated with the repeal of all such tests as a qualification for civil rights, and with the triumph of

the great principles of civil and religious liberty, and presided over by one of the most distinguished of the former colleagues of the eminent statesman who made so many and so great sacrifices for the furtherance of the great cause of religious freedom, and to whom Ireland is indebted for the advantages of Collegiate Education for the middle classes, on the principle of non-compulsion and of non-interference with the rights of conscience.

If these principles be given up in the case of the National Schools for the poorer classes, in order to meet the views of the Church Education party amongst Protestants, a similar abandonment of the same principles cannot be refused, as it respects the Queen's Colleges, in compliance with the demands of the Ultramontane party amongst the Roman Catholics. If arrangements be made for taking the Church Education Society's Schools, as at present constituted, into connexion with the National Board, we must be prepared to admit the "Catholic University" to all the privileges of the Queen's Colleges.

We can never believe that, at a time of auspicious tranquillity in Ireland, and at the moment when we look for the brave hearts and vigorous arms of the Irish people to assist in fighting the battles of the country, any Government will adopt a plan which would so alter the character of the system of National Education in Ireland, as to convert it from being, as described by the present Premier, the most valuable of the boons of late years conferred on this country by the Imperial Legislature, into an engine for fomenting religious discord, and stirring up political strife in every parish in Ireland.

The Bishop of Ossory acknowledges that the Government itself cannot be expected to adopt the rule of compulsion in reference to religious instruction in the schools, at the same time that he looks to them for power to enforce it in

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schools supported by the State. But we cannot understand how the Government can be expected to give power and authority to others, to carry out, with the aid of the public funds, that principle which, it is admitted, they cannot themselves enforce. We have always been taught, that for a man to authorize and empower another to carry an object into effect, is virtually the same as to do the work himself, according to the recognized maxim that what is done by an agent is to be considered as done by the principal.

In conclusion, the result of a full, and, we trust, a fair consideration of the scheme proposed, is the conviction, that the proposition will not meet with the favour of any party, religious or political; while we consider it to be so objectionable in principle, and calculated to prove so mischievous if carried into practice, that we must adopt, with regard to this plan, the sentiment and language applied by the Right Rev. Prelate to the proposition of a separate grant, and "cannot but hope, very earnestly, that *this* mode of settling the Education Question may not be the one adopted."

THE END.

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themselves execute. What has already been done, that for  
a man to make a law and carry it out, is to carry an object  
into effect, is to carry the law into effect, is to carry it  
according to the law, and what is done is done  
by virtue of the law.

In conclusion, the result of a bill, and we trust a fair  
consideration of the subject, is the conviction  
that the proposition will not be carried in the favour of any  
party, religious or political, unless it is to be  
considered in principle, and it is to be so  
viewed if carried into effect, and we trust about which  
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right Rev. Bishop, and we trust the  
grant, and we trust the hope, and we trust the  
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THE END.