

1808

*Brief View of
Improvements
on Londonderry
School*

A

BRIEF VIEW

OF THE

INTENDED IMPROVEMENTS

IN THE

SCHOOL

OF

LONDONDERRY.

BY A NATIVE CITIZEN.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED BY GRAISBERRY AND CAMPBELL, 10, BACK-LANE.

1808.

*5585
55
H94*

Houses of the Oireachtas

TO THE
RIGHT REV. AND HONOURABLE
THE LORD BISHOP OF DERRY.

MY LORD,

THE Conversations with which your Lordship has favoured me, on the subject of the School of Londonderry, could not but greatly interest one who was born in that City, and had resided in it for the greater part of his life.—The following paragraphs were accordingly written, for the purpose of communicating your Lordship's laudable design to the Public, through the medium of a Newspaper.—On farther consideration, I have printed it in this more permanent form—though without altering, as, perhaps, I ought to have done, the Newspaper style. If your Lordship shall, however, not deem it unfit for being handed to your Friends, with your engraved Plan, it will be a sincere gratification to your Lordship's much obliged, and very faithful Servant.

Dublin, Feb. 18, 1808.

Houses of the Oireachtas

SCHOOL
OF
LONDONDERRY.

THE new footing on which the Bishop of Derry is placing the Free Grammar School of that city, highly deserves the attention of the public. His Lordship's plan, as already developed, implies no less than the extension of a very limited Seminary into the most liberal and munificent establishment for Classical Education, that this country has been yet possessed of. It is, in fact, an undertaking from which most important results may be looked for, and which, therefore, reflects high honour, both on his Lordship, and on all who afford efficient co-operation.

It is remarkable that the Bishop of Derry is thus, at the distance of more than two centuries, realizing one of the leading objects which were in contemplation, when the settlement of Ulster was originally resolved upon.

Those who know the history of that period need not be told that James I. on succeeding to the English Crown, found a great part of the North of Ireland, in consequence of recent forfeitures, at his entire disposal. He accordingly determined to colonize it, chiefly with settlers from the West of Scotland; no doubt on account of similarity of soil and identity of climate, as well as of local proximity.

But such colonists could not but, themselves, require to be advanced in civilization, and the provision made for this object reflects credit on the mind which first conceived it.

It was, in fact, resolved upon to establish an English settlement in the centre of the Scottish colony. A leaven of improvement would be thus introduced into the popular mass, while the obvious necessity of erecting a walled

city,

city, to be an asylum in case of sudden insurrection, would tend to repress all feelings of party jealousy.

But what most deserves to be noticed, is the method by which the continued strength and growing prosperity of the English settlement were provided for. By a species of affiliation, rare, if not unexampled, this interior colony was connected with, and given in charge to, the CITIZENS of LONDON. Twelve incorporated companies of that metropolis were constituted proprietors of the district, of which the projected city was to be the municipal head; the district itself being correspondently divided into twelve proportions. An interior incorporation, consisting of representatives elected by those companies, was, at the same time, formed; in which smaller body was vested the proprietorship of the city and its liberties. Thus—DERRY, (so early as A. D. 545 the seat of a celebrated monastery, and a bishop's see from A. D. 1158) became the CITY of LONDONDERRY; so denominated from its parent city, to whose civic privileges

its charter was as much assimilated as difference of circumstances admitted of.*

The first effects of this establishment appear, in no small measure, to have justified the design. The tenures granted by the proprietors were liberal, and a number of respectable settlers were soon brought together. The city was laid out on a plan of English neatness; and enclosed with walls, which form, at this day, one of the pleasantest promenades in the island: a handsome cathedral was erected, and a grammar-school established, and endowed with what were then deemed competent salaries for its master and usher. Thus were the first steps taken toward making the City of Londonderry not less a moral than a municipal head to the surrounding country; and the results have been such, as to make it only to be regretted, that a plan so auspiciously begun did not keep pace with the advance

* For example, as London gives sheriffs to Middlesex, so does Londonderry to the county which belongs to it. The former is the single case of the kind in England, the latter the only one in Ireland.

advance of the times, and the growing state of general society.

But at no distant period, circumstances, which at length convulsed the British Empire, gave a lasting check to the progress of this well conceived local polity. In proportion as misunderstandings arose between Charles I. and his Parliament; and the citizens of London, took what appeared to them, the side of civil and religious liberty against arbitrary government and lawless oppression—in the same proportion, dissensions seem to have sprung up in Londonderry, between the municipal and ecclesiastical powers.

At such a conjuncture, nothing less was to be looked for, in a place so connected with the British metropolis. It was matter of natural necessity for the colonists of Londonderry to catch the spirit of their landlords and patrons; and it is notorious, that Bramhall, who then possessed the see of Derry, was, of all the advocates of the royal cause, the most devoted, as well as the most powerful.

It

It is self-evident that, in this state of things, all co-operation of a beneficial kind would stand suspended. But it is to be regretted, that, after the restoration, the same unhappy effect should have been prolonged, from causes of a different nature. A litigation respecting matters of property, commenced between the Bishop of Derry and the landlords of the city; and the inevitable consequence was, that the two parties, whose joint exertions were essential to the prosperity of their common charge, remained for many years in a situation with respect to each other, which could leave little room for friendly intercourse, much less for effectual co-operation.

It was especially to be lamented, that this misunderstanding should be at its height, while two Bishops filled the see, from whose public spirit and beneficent zeal, every thing might have been looked for—the good HOPKINS, and the active intelligent KING.—Both these worthy men evinced their ardent wish to be useful to their diocese; but hostility with the proprietors of the soil could not but throw
a fatal

a fatal obstacle in the way of such plans of improvement as required a concurrence of interests in order to their accomplishment.

We cannot wonder that, from circumstances like these, a patronage, which was intended to be a lasting source of beneficial influence, should become, in a great measure, inoperative, and almost sink into disuse. It is not meant to be insinuated, that the proprietors of the City and County of Londonderry at any time, when properly applied to, treated the public interests of their tenantry with disregard ; all that is intimated is, that, through want of some adequate medium for bringing the capabilities, as well as exigencies, of their trust duly before them, those liberal dispositions, whose existence we cannot question, have in few, if any instances, heretofore, been fairly called into exercise.

That this is the just state of the case, appears from this gratifying fact, that no sooner were the respectable Citizens of London fully apprized

apprized of what yet remained to be done, to fill up the original design of their Irish settlement, and of what might be expected from their co-operation, than they afforded a prompt and liberal concurrence. Happily, the present Bishop of Derry, possessed perspicacity to discover those resources as well as capabilities, which had been overlooked by some of his predecessors; while he found himself free from those impediments which had stood in the way of others of them. He saw that the most important objects of the primary plan had too generally been least pursued: and that, particularly, the making the City of Londonderry a place of liberal education for the surrounding country, had not been so much as adequately attempted.

To the accomplishment, therefore, of this very important object, his Lordship has zealously applied himself. His intention is to place the present Grammar School of Londonderry in such enlarged and improved circumstances, as may induce the gentlemen of the surrounding country to prefer it as a place
of

of education for their sons, to those more distant seminaries, to which they have been hitherto in the habit of sending them.

This effect his Lordship hopes to ensure not only by such interior arrangements as will be the pledge of accurate and effectual tuition, but also by removing the school itself to an airy and pleasant situation, at a convenient distance without the city-walls, where the several advantages of town and country will be united; and particularly where the boys will have ample space for exercise, without those hazards to their morals, which the present local circumstances of the school notoriously and unavoidably imply.

The chief object, however, which his Lordship aims at in his present undertaking, is the diffusion of education through that most important and rapidly increasing class of individuals, whom the successful industry of a manufacturing district, is continually sending up from the more obscure, into the higher and more influential ranks of society.

The

The advantage which well conducted classical education gives to persons of this description, is obvious to every enlightened observer of human society. The superior power of giving utterance to thought, whether with the tongue or pen, comparative correctness of expression in those instances where propriety depends on observing the laws of grammatical construction—these are the obvious benefits which classical institution confers. But where the mind has been formed on a higher scale, where it possesses natural capacity and taste, what other earthly means could be found of equal efficacy, for ensuring elegant pleasure, enlarged habits of thought, humanized manners, refined and polished conversation?

In addition to these mental advantages, it is self-evident, that the free intermixture of youths of the class referred to, with those of higher birth and longer ancestry, in that ductile season of life when the most lasting impressions are given, is one of the likeliest methods of naturalizing them to that station on
which

which their circumstances will give them a right to enter; and of forming for them the most unforced and kindest connexion with those persons, to equal intercourse with whom, it will be so natural for them to aspire.

With these and similar views, the Bishop of Derry has conceived the plan of annexing to his institution, such prospective advantages as may make it worth the while of respectable parents to put the literary abilities of their sons to actual trial. It is his Lordship's intention to establish in the Irish University, twelve exhibitions of Forty pounds per annum each, so as to admit of three youths, whose talents and conduct shall deserve such a preference, being every year sent to College, upon this foundation. This advantage will be enjoyed by them, during the whole of the undergraduate course; and his Lordship expects to be able to make a farther provision, in order that such of those youths, as are elected Scholars, may have the same benefit continued to them till the expiration of their Scholarships.

His

His Lordship is understood to have it also in view, if circumstances shall admit of it, to establish a certain number of exhibitions within the school itself, to be obtained by best answerers of a certain standing: the examination to be held yearly, in the presence of the Clergy of the Diocese, at their annual visitation.

The funds for these purposes are to arise from the joint liberality of the Bishop himself, the London Society and Companies, and the Corporation of Londonderry. His Lordship has, in the first instance, contributed a thousand pounds toward the expence of the building; a donation, which it may be expected, will ensure from the grand jury of the County, as much co-operative exertion, as lies within their province. Already the site of the building is fixed upon, and a plan and elevation approved of—engravings of which, are in the hands of his Lordship's friends.

To the donation just mentioned, the Bishop
has

has resolved to add an annual contribution of one hundred pounds, a practice which it cannot be doubted will by this means be entailed upon the see ; it being impossible that the circumstances of the case should not engage all succeeding Bishops to follow the example thus placed before them.

By these first measures of his own, his Lordship gave himself the justest right to call for the co-operation of all other parties, similarly interested—and with sincere pleasure the writer of these paragraphs has to state, that in no instance has the appeal been unsuccessful. But the most signal aid comes, as might have been anticipated, from the proprietors of the soil. The Hon. the Society of Governor and Assistants, and such of the Incorporations as have had opportunity to deliberate fully on the subject, having already met his Lordship's wishes in a manner worthy of the enlightened Citizens of that metropolis, which, in point of solid disinterested virtue, has ever been the capital, not merely of Britain, but of the world.

The

The entire amount of the contributions cannot as yet be ascertained, but his Lordship appears to entertain no doubt—and every public-spirited person will join with him in the hope—that an undertaking thus liberal in its plan, and thus beneficial in its object, may obtain every kind of support, which shall be necessary to its perfect and permanent accomplishment.