

110

1

A LANDLORD'S VIEWS

OF

THE RIGHTS OF CATHOLIC TENANTS

WITH RESPECT TO

THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN.

217  
114  
155  
217

Houses of the Oireachtas

A LANDLORD'S VIEWS  
OF  
THE RIGHTS OF CATHOLIC TENANTS  
WITH RESPECT TO  
THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN.

---

During the life-time of the late Lord Leitrim's father, a school was built on his lordship's property in the townland of Esker, Parish of Bornacoola, County of Leitrim. The site was ceded for the purpose by the tenants then in possession, and the school was built, chiefly, if not entirely, by the contributions of the people, the Parish Priest of this poor parish giving £5. The school having fallen under the management of the late Earl, was, after some time, forsaken by the children, and finally went to ruin, the very roof and windows being removed; and it remained in that state until last winter twelve months, when the present worthy Parish Priest, Rev. John Smyth, wrote to Colonel Clements, who has succeeded the late Lord Leitrim as owner of the property, and expressed his wish to repair the school, if Colonel Clements, as proprietor, would grant the necessary permission. Having received a polite answer, Father Smyth addressed a second letter to Colonel Clements, asking some aid towards re-building the school, as it was

intended mainly for the children of his tenants. To this second letter no answer was returned; but after a short time Colonel Clements' agent, G. F. Stewart, Esq., J.P., of Lough Rynne, set about restoring the ruined school. After some months, when the works were nearly completed, the Parish Priest wrote to Colonel Clements, thanking him for having given to the neighbourhood the advantage of a school, and expressing his willingness to apply to the Board of National Education for its recognition, and for his own appointment as Manager, whenever the school would be ready for the reception of children.

The following correspondence then ensued:—

[COPY.]

*Letter from Colonel Clements to Rev. John Smyth, P.P.,  
Bornacoola.*

ASHFIELD LODGE, COOTEHILL,  
10th January, 1881.

MY DEAR SIR,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 6th inst.

I am happy to say the repairs of the Esker School-house are now nearly finished, and I hope it will soon be ready for use, and that it may prove useful to your parishioners in that district.

Mr. Stewart, who is Manager of the other schools on my property, will make the application for its recognition as a National School.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

H. T. CLEMENTS.

Rev. JOHN SMYTH.

[COPY.]

BORNACoola, DROMOD,

11th January, 1881.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am favoured with your letter of yesterday, and regret to learn from it, for the first time, that it would be your intention to have Mr. Stewart Manager of the Esker School. I beg to remind you that that school having been in a great measure built at the commencement by the Catholics of Bornacoola, and the site given by some of their body, they would naturally expect that their Parish Priest should be the Manager. Moreover, from my knowledge of the views of our Bishop, the Right Rev. Dr. Woodlock, I believe that he would forbid the Catholic children of the parish to frequent the school, if not under the management of their Pastor. Hence, your kind intentions would be frustrated, if Mr. Stewart became Manager. I trust, therefore, that you will not press that point, and that, when announcing the approaching opening of the school, as I purpose to do on Sunday next, I may be able to add, that your generosity has repaired it for their benefit, and that your only desire is, by its being under the care of their Pastor, that it may be in every way suitable for the education of their children.

Believe me, &amp;c.,

(Signed), JOHN SMYTH, P.P.

To Lieut.-Colonel CLEMENTS, D.L.

Another letter from Colonel Clements induced me to address to Father Smyth the following letter, which he forwarded to that gentleman :—

[COPY.]

ST. MARY'S, ATHLONE,

17th January, 1881.

MY DEAR FATHER SMYTH,

With respect to Esker School, I cannot allow you to permit the children of your parish to frequent it, if any person be

Manager, except the Parish Priest for the time being. As the children who might be expected to frequent it, are *all of them Catholics*, I trust that Colonel Clements will see the reasonableness of my requiring that the school should be under the management of their Pastor, who is responsible to God and to me for their Christian education.

Believe me, my dear Father Smyth,

Yours most sincerely,

✠ BARTH. WOODLOCK,  
*Bishop of Ardagh.*

Rev. JOHN SMYTH, P.P.

The following is Colonel Clements' reply :—

[COPY.]

ASHFIELD LODGE, COOTEHILL,

19th January, 1881.

DEAR SIR,

I have received your letter of the 18th, enclosing that of the Bishop. I am sorry to find that my last letter has not removed your objection to the conditions under which I propose to open Esker School, and that the Bishop would not permit the children of the parish to attend it. Under these circumstances I fear I shall have to give up my intention of opening the school.

I am, dear Sir.

Yours faithfully,

H. T. CLEMENTS.

Rev. JOHN SMYTH, P.P.

The worthy Parish Priest having sent me the foregoing letter, I deemed it my duty to address Colonel Clements, as follows :—

[COPY.]

NEWTOWNFORBES,

5th February, 1881.

DEAR SIR,

The esteemed P.P. of Bornacoola, Rev. John Smyth, has forwarded to me your favor of the 19th Jan. ult., in which you express your regret, that I would not permit the children of the parish to attend the Esker School, if under the management of any one but their Pastor. Having heard from various quarters of your kindness for your tenants and your desire to promote their interests, I beg leave respectfully to ask you to re-consider your intention of placing the school under the management of your agent, Mr. Stewart. I would be sorry to appear in opposition to the spread of education among the poor people of the locality; but in the present case, I feel that there is something more precious for them at stake than education, and that it will be my duty, as their Bishop, to forbid them to frequent the school. I have come to this conclusion for the following reasons, among others; I trust you will find them sufficient to induce you to permit Rev. J. Smyth, P.P., to be appointed manager.

I pass over the fact, which I have on excellent authority, that the site was originally given by Catholic parishioners, tenants of the late Earl of Leitrim, and the school built in a great measure, if not entirely, by the contributions of the people.

1st. I understand, that the children, who may be expected to frequent the school, are, *without a single exception*, Catholics. It seems reasonable, that the Pastor, who is responsible to God and to his bishop, and I may add, in the sight of man too, for the Christian demeanour of his flock, should have charge of the education of the children of his fold, to which they, *all of them*, belong.

2ndly. The parents, being all the day long engaged in toil, have little time or inclination even if they had the capacity, for looking after the education of their little ones; at least this is the general rule. Now in no one have they such confidence for the faithful and efficient discharge of this duty in their behalf, as in their Pastor, who is always in their midst, who, as

the Catholic Church teaches, is the minister of the Word of God, and of the sacraments, and of other holy rites for the salvation of their souls and their children's, from Baptism to the grave, and to whom they naturally look, above all others, that their children may be brought up fully in accordance with the principles of the Catholic Faith and the wishes and feelings of their Catholic parents.

3rdly. I would take the liberty of asking you, whether you would not deem the interference of the Duke of Norfolk or any other Catholic nobleman in England intolerable were he to pretend to dictate to his Protestant tenants as to the education they were to give their children, or to claim the right of naming the teacher, to whom they should entrust their little ones.

I am reluctant to allude to the present sad state of the country; but still, I cannot refrain from saying, that at a crisis like this, when bishops and priests find it so hard to restrain the angry passions of men suffering under admitted grievances of long duration, and when our utmost efforts are at times unable to secure undoubted rights and to prevent deeds of violence and injustice, concessions to the wishes and religious principles of our people, such as the one I ask of you, would, if multiplied, go far towards restoring peace and tranquillity in our disturbed country, and, the Land Question being equitably settled, our poor people would begin to feel that the oppressions and heart-burnings of the past were at an end; that there would henceforth be no interference with their feelings or religious principles in the education of their children or in other matters; and that those, to whom God has given wealth and worldly position, were equally with themselves, interested in the welfare of our common country; I know this would be your wish.

Begging you to excuse the length to which this letter has grown,

I remain, dear Sir,

Very faithfully yours,

✠ BARTH. WOODLOCK,

*Bishop of Ardagh.*

Colonel CLEMENTS, D.L.

The following is Colonel Clements' reply :—

[COPY.]

ASHFIELD LODGE, COOTEHILL,  
11th February, 1881

DEAR LORD BISHOP,

I am much obliged for your letter of the 5th inst.

I am sorry I cannot so far meet your wishes as to make over Esker School to the Rev. Mr. Smyth, or whoever may be Parish Priest for the time being, wishing to keep to the rule I have made to retain any school I may establish under my own management. I am aware that all the children who are likely to attend the school are Mr. Smyth's parishioners, and I have informed him that I intend to appoint a Roman Catholic Master, and that he, Mr. Smyth, will be at liberty to give Religious Instruction to the children, subject to the rules of the Board of National Education.

I know a school is much wanted in that neighbourhood, and I am anxious to open it, if I can see a reasonable prospect of a fair attendance of children.

I am much obliged for your offer to call on me, and I should be most happy to see you at Lough Rynn at any time; I do not however intend going there just at present.

Believe me,

Yours very faithfully,

H. T. CLEMENTS

Most Rev Dr. WOODLOCK,  
*Bishop of Ardagh.*

I replied as follows :—

[COPY.]

ST. MARY'S, ATHLONE,  
25th February, 1881.

MY DEAR SIR,

I trust you will pardon my delay in acknowledging your favour of the 11th February, inst.

And now permit me to urge respectfully upon you again to reconsider your intention regarding Esker School. I put it to you, dear Sir, whether, even apart from the P.P.'s sacred office, his judgment, supported by his Bishop's, is not more likely to be correct, when there is question of a Catholic teacher for Catholic children, than the opinion of a gentleman, such as your agent, no matter how estimable in other respects, who differs both from teacher and children in the all-important matter of religion.

In any case, as my decision respecting the school has been arrived at on religious grounds, I cannot in conscience permit the children entrusted to my charge to frequent the school, if under other management than their Pastor's. And thus the people of the locality must be left without the benefit of a school, unless I can make up my mind either to get another built by the parishioners—a burden which I am very reluctant to impose on them in their present straitened circumstances—or to raise the necessary funds by an appeal to the public.

However, I trust we shall find some way out of the dead-lock to which we have come. For instance, I do not ask you to "hand over" the school to the Rev. Mr. Smyth. He and I, or either of us, will be happy to become your tenant, and to take it from you on lease or by the year. Or, if you prefer it, I shall offer myself to the National Board for Manager, if they do not consider my residence at Newtownforbes as too distant from Esker. May I beg the favor of your reply at your convenience, addressed to Newtownforbes, that I may make my final arrangements according to it with Rev. Mr. Smyth and the parishioners.

Believe me to be, dear Sir,

Yours most sincerely,

✠ BARTH. WOODLOCK,  
*Bishop of Ardagh.*

Colonel CLEMENTS, D.L.

The following is Colonel Clements' answer :—

[COPY.]

ASHFIELD LODGE, COOTEHILL,  
22nd March, 1881.

MY DEAR LORD BISHOP,

I was in London when I received your letter, and I hope you will excuse my not having answered it sooner.

I am very sorry that this difficulty should have arisen about the opening of Esker School. I was in hopes that the plan I propose, which would give the Parish Priest full liberty to impart religious instruction to the children of his parishioners, would have met your Lordship's wishes. I am afraid I must let the matter rest for the present, hoping that we may, at some future time, see our way out of the dilemma.

I should not wish to give a lease of the premises ; and will only add that I am quite prepared to undertake all that is necessary for the maintenance of the school in connection with the Board of National Education, and to open it at any time when I can see a prospect of a sufficient attendance of children.

Believe me, dear Lord Bishop,

Yours very faithfully,

H. T. CLEMENTS.

Most Rev. Dr. WOODLOCK,  
*Bishop of Ardagh.*

After receiving the preceding letter, I allowed some weeks to pass, during which I was engaged in endeavouring to secure a site. At length, on the 7th of June I wrote, informing Colonel Clements that I had found one ; but that I was unwilling to put the poor people of the neighbourhood to the expense of building a school without making another appeal to him. He replied as follows :—

[COPY.]

18, PONT-STREET, S.W., LONDON,  
12th June, 1881.

MY DEAR LORD BISHOP,

Your letter of the 7th has been forwarded to me.

I am very sorry we have not been able to come to an understanding about Esker School. I do not see my way to departing from the rule I have made, to retain any school I may establish under my own patronage.

Under the circumstances mentioned in my former letters, may I venture to hope that you will re-consider the matter: it seems a pity to put the parishioners to the expense of building a school, when they can be provided with one free of cost.

Believe me, my dear Lord,

Yours very faithfully,

H. T. CLEMENTS.

The following is my answer:—

[COPY.]

ST. PATRICK'S COLLEGE, MAYNOOTH,  
28th June, 1881.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have been a good deal away from home since I received your favor of the 12th. . . . .

As my resolution respecting Esker School has been arrived at in accordance with what I believe to be my duty to the children of my flock, I cannot change my decision. Having now got possession of another site, and taking into account the poverty of the people of the neighbourhood, I see no alternative for me but to appeal to my friends for help to build a school. When I make known to them the circumstances of the case, I think they will come to my aid.

Within the last few weeks a Protestant gentleman, manager of a school largely attended by Catholic children in another parish of this diocese, has appointed a teacher who has for the

last two years acted, I am told, in flagrant violation of a rule laid down by the Bishops for the guidance of our teachers. Having this recent case before me, I am more and more convinced of the necessity of adhering to my rule, that the Parish Priest should be the Manager of a school, attended exclusively by Catholic children. I regret you will not relax your rule in the present case; I cannot change mine.

Believe me, &c.,

✠ BARTH. WOODLOCK,  
*Bishop of Ardagh.*

To Colonel CLEMENTS, D.L.

To resume in a few words the foregoing correspondence :

Colonel Clements, as landlord of the townland of Esker, wishes that Mr. Stewart (who is, I believe, a member of the family which gives a partner to the respected firm of Messrs. Stewart and Kincaid), should, as his Agent, have the appointment of the teacher of the children of his tenants, *who without a single exception are Catholics*. As Bishop, charged by God to take special care of the children of the fold I object to this arrangement, and plead, that for many obvious reasons, it is expedient, and even necessary, that the Pastor should have this duty imposed upon him as part of his office, the *cura animarum*, the care of his people's souls. I am met by Colonel Clements : *the contrary is the rule of the estate* ; viz. : it is the rule of the estate that the agent shall do this work, no matter how different his views may be from the children's and their parents', as regards a teacher's qualifications on the important point of religion and morality. Had Colonel Clements a Catholic nobleman

or gentleman holding as tenant under him, would he dare to apply this "rule of the estate," and to claim for his agent the right to appoint the teacher and books of study for the son of that gentleman, his equal? And are the poor man's rights as regards his children, less sacred than the nobleman's, nay, than those of the king upon his throne? Shall Irish landlords, whom early education, cherished principles and religion itself separate from the people, be allowed to make and maintain rules subversive of the parent's right and duty to guard his children, and to entrust them in childhood and youth to such guardianship, as he shall deem best under the guidance of the Church which he believes to be "the pillar and the ground of truth?"

I shall leave it to every impartial reader of the foregoing correspondence to answer these questions. And if that answer be, as I think it will be, favorable to the claim I have put forward, I shall ask the friends of the educational liberties of Irish Catholic tenants to aid the worthy Parish Priest of Bornacoola, Dromod, and his poor people—and they are very poor—to erect a school on the site, of which we have just succeeded in getting possession. I shall be happy to receive and acknowledge the smallest contribution, and to hand it to the Rev. John Smyth, P.P.

✠ BARTH. WOODLOCK,

*Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise.*

*St. Mel's, Longford, 6th July, 1881.*