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Tract on
National
Schools

ON NATIONAL SCHOOLS. 6

A TRACT FOR THE TIMES

IN IRELAND.

ADDRESSED TO HIS PARISHIONERS,

BY

AN ULSTER CLERGYMAN.

WITH AN

APPENDIX OF PROOFS.

DUBLIN

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ON
NATIONAL SCHOOLS.

PROTESTANT BRETHERN,

If you love your Bibles, and are thankful that you have liberty to read God's Holy Scriptures, you will read with attention the following words:—

You have all heard of the schools called National Schools, which are supported by money from the Government, and have been quickly spreading through the country.

It is believed by many good and wise men, that to join these schools, or to send children to them, is contrary to the principles of our religion.

It is time that every Protestant in the land should understand this question, and know clearly the reasons which show it to be wrong to favour this new plan of education; for there are many who are opposed to these schools who do not understand the case well enough to defend their opinion properly, and are thus liable to be imposed on (and some have been imposed on) by the plausible arguments brought forward in favour of these new schools.

The design of this address to you is, to lay the real state of the case before you in a plain and simple way, so as to afford you the means of coming to a safe and fair judgment about it.

The great principle of Protestants is this, that the Bible is sufficient, and that nothing else is sufficient, to teach the way of salvation; on the contrary, the principle of the Church of Rome is, that the Bible is not sufficient, nor necessary, nor even safe, for this end. Accordingly, the Church of Rome does not allow all to read this book of God. Romanists are not permitted to do so without special leave. Any attempt on their parts to claim a right to read it has always been strongly resisted, and nothing appears to be more disliked, opposed, and, in fact, *feared* by the clergy of Rome, than the general study of the Holy Scriptures by the people.

And the reason they fear it must be this, that a man who fairly studies them for himself, will be more likely to give up the doctrines of Rome than to persevere in them.

There was a time (when the Church of Rome had power) that any man found out in reading the Bible was severely punished. This time has passed away—let us pray that may it never return; for, in all our liberty in this free country, there is nothing greater than this liberty of reading at all times the truth which God has revealed; and what worse tyranny can exist than keeping his word in chains?

The system of scriptural education which formerly prevailed was given up by the Government, because it was at variance with these Romish principles; and the National Schools were established in order to assist and defend the clergy of Rome in this very object, which we believe to be wrong and tyrannical, of keeping the Scriptures out of the hands of the children.

And in order to effect this, rules were made which, while they aid the principles of Romanism, are injurious to the principles of Protestantism.

Bear this in mind, and observe in what follows how all pains are taken not to offend a Roman Catholic conscience, while very little care is taken not to wound a Protestant conscience.

A pious Protestant is jealous with a godly jealousy over his sacred right to a free Bible; he will allow no encroachment—no indignity—no restrictions, or fetters to be put upon God's Word.

Suppose a law were made that you were not to read the Bible at certain hours in the day, would not your fears and suspicions be roused? Would you not feel your Christian liberty in danger, and the honour of God's Word in danger too? Such a law would be as tyrannical as if you were commanded to refrain *from breathing* at certain times; for you have as certain a right to the Word of God as to the air of heaven. Protestant rights require that there should be no time at which the opening of the book of truth should be unlawful.

Now the question is, will you assent and agree to rules by which it shall be, for many hours in the day, a thing unlawful and forbidden, for your child to open this book? To agree to obey such a law and keep the Bible shut from your children at certain hours, would be to betray your Christian rights, and to do dishonour to God's Word.

But this is the law of the National Schools; *there are many hours during which the Bible is a forbidden book, and a child dare not read it.*

Again, the schoolmaster who is under the rules of the National Board, cannot discharge his duties in a manner that ought to satisfy the conscience of a Christian parent.

It is not enough that reading and writing should be taught, and literary education in general; for a good schoolmaster will

also watch the conduct of the children, and he should have full liberty to train them in right principles, and teach them the true foundations of morality. Now the true foundations of morality are to be found, as Protestants believe, only in the Scriptures; nothing short of Scriptural morality should be taught to a Protestant child.

Suppose a child is guilty of a lie, or an oath, or a theft, the good schoolmaster inflicts punishment; but does he stop there? No, he causes the Bible to be opened, and one of the children to read out the history of Ananias, (Acts v.) or of the son of Shelomith, (Lev. xxiv. 10-16,) or of Achan, (Josh. vii.) to show God's vengeance on the liar, the blasphemer, or the thief; nay, he goes further, and points out from Scripture God's mercy as well as his wrath, his promises of forgiveness, and how the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.

Would this be too much for a Christian father to expect and claim to be done for his child? Surely not.

But the law of the National Schools is against this, and the schoolmaster is not allowed to teach morality by a reference to the Scriptures.

A lesson on morality of human composition, and which many persons think objectionable, has been printed by the National Board, and must be hung up and taught in every National School, while no such permission is given for hanging up, or teaching even the ten commandments.

The rules of the National System compel the teachers and parents to use the human composition, (*the general lesson*, as it is called,) in all schools, whether they like it or not; while the same rules refuse to the teachers and parents the right of using the ten commandments of God's law in all schools.

Again, the National Board does not provide nor allow, in any case, a sufficient quantity of scriptural instruction for Protestants.

They provide neither books, nor teacher, and in many cases not even a place. There is no knowledge so valuable to your children as an extensive and accurate acquaintance with God's Word: you must not be satisfied with any plan that does not provide for this knowledge; and it is not to be acquired easily or quickly; it is a work of time and toil, not to be done except by daily and diligent instruction. Romanists have comparatively small difficulty in teaching their catechisms, but scriptural education is a laborious process.

Now, how is it to be done? Many parents cannot, others will not do it. The clergyman cannot be expected to supply this instruction sufficiently; he can only, in many cases, visit and examine occasionally, and the children are supposed to have been taught, beforehand, the Scripture, in which their pastor examines them; the Sunday School cannot supply this want, nor will it succeed properly unless the Bible is taught during the week. Who, then, is to do it? The answer is, the *schoolmaster*:

it is through him that good Bible scholars are to be made. He should be in the place of the parent, and should do what God commands in Deut. vi. ; “ God’s Word should be in his heart ; he should teach it diligently to the children, and talk of it when he sitteth in the house, and when he walketh by the way.”

But the schoolmaster, be he never so willing, cannot do this, if the Bible is to be open for one hour, and to be shut for many hours ; he cannot do it, if he is bound strictly to divorce religious instruction from ordinary school business—if he is not allowed to unite and blend, through the whole day, as a good teacher knows how to do, literary and scriptural instruction.

You will hear it said that, in many National Schools, the Scriptures are read for an hour before or after the other business, and that this ought to satisfy you. This is one of the most plausible reasons that are given to defend these Schools from our objections. When you meet with persons who say this, reply, that it does not satisfy you, since the Bible is to be shut, as an unlawful book, during most of the day.

That it does not satisfy you, that the Protestant child should work, while the Roman Catholic child may play ; and thus, the reading of the Bible will not be desired by either one or the other, but feared and disliked by both.

That it does not satisfy you, for the schoolmaster is not bound by the rules to teach it at all, and may do it negligently, or altogether refuse to do it, without departing from the rules of the Board.

That it does not satisfy you, for, when the schoolmaster is a Roman Catholic, (as he is in very many places,) you cannot trust him to teach the Scriptures.

That it does not satisfy you, because, if the schoolmaster does not do it, there is no one to look to for giving this instruction but the clergyman, and that he cannot be expected to attend the school for an hour every day, especially if there are several schools.

That it does not satisfy you, because, even when the clergyman can attend, there are many cases in which the rules allow the priest to exclude him from the school-house, and refuse him the use of it.

These are various and good reasons which you may give in reply to such an argument as was mentioned above. You may judge, even from what has been said, why the Protestant clergyman refuses to be connected with these schools, but, perhaps you do not know *the oath which he has taken.*

He has sworn to instruct, out of the Holy Scriptures, the people committed to his charge, and to teach nothing as necessary to salvation, but what, he is persuaded, may be proved by the Scripture.

He has sworn, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God’s Word. This is his engagement—it is a noble and holy engage-

ment. But if he joins the National Schools, he becomes subject to rules by which he is bound not to meddle with these erroneous and strange doctrines, but to give his consent and assistance to keep the Roman Catholic children out of the reach of that word which alone is able to banish away these doctrines.

If he joins the National Schools, he agrees to its rules, and these rules bind him to "*give access*" to the priest, and to "*afford him convenient opportunity and facility*" for teaching these erroneous doctrines.

If he joins the National Board, he agrees to act upon its principles (otherwise he is not honest in joining it) and one of these principles is, *to permit and encourage the clergy*, (all clergy alike) to teach their doctrines, whether true or false, Romish or Protestant.

It is therefore plainly *contrary to the solemn engagement of the clergyman*, as it is also contrary to the duty of any true Protestant to join these schools.

To be bound to afford to the Romish priest every facility for teaching Popery, is, in fact, so revolting to the consciences of Protestants, that the rules have been lately somewhat changed, so as to allow, in some cases, the manager of the schools to exclude any teacher that he does not approve of.

It is this that has induced so many Presbyterians to consent that their schools should be connected with the Board; and as it has been used as an argument in favour of the National Schools, and has prevailed with many, it is right that you should know that it is not at all sufficient to remove the objections which you ought to feel.

The National Schools are of two kinds, the temporary schools and the permanent schools; the latter are those which the Board help to build, the former are those built without their help, but which they support with money and books.

It is intended, by the Board, that the temporary schools shall only last a few years, until they have built enough of permanent schools, and that then there shall be no longer any temporary schools.

Further, the rules are not the same for these two sorts of schools, and it is plain, that the rules of one kind of schools are permanent rules, while the rules of the other kind are only temporary.

Now *the new rules*, by which some Presbyterians have been induced to join the National Board, *are only intended for the temporary schools*, for the rules of the permanent schools remain just as they were, giving full liberty to the priest to teach his doctrines in the school.

What is the consequence? In a few years the schools which have been, for this reason, put under the Board, will be left to themselves, and no longer supported by the public money, and no choice will remain but to send their children to the perma-

ment school, (built, perhaps, in the neighbourhood) whose rules are at present so offensive.

Another answer to this bad argument is, that the same rule which allows a few Presbyterian schools to exclude the erroneous teaching of the priest, allows a great many schools to debar the Protestant children from instruction in their true religion. What is given with one hand is taken away tenfold by the other.

And another answer is, that there are a great many objections to the National Schools, and this argument only applies to one of them; even if it were a good argument, these schools could be still opposed to Protestant principles, and the obligations of a Protestant clergyman.

To make this plainer still, let us describe a case which often occurs.

As the pastor is on his travels through the parish, he pays a visit to the school—a class is called up to read the Scriptures to him—he questions the children, and tries to explain, simply and earnestly, the meaning and value of what has been read, while the ordinary business of the school for a few minutes pauses, and gives way to the claims of God's Word. Would you object to this as interfering with the education of the children? Is it not rather what you would approve of and desire? what in fact you have a right to? Would you like to see your children deprived of such visits?

But such a visit by the clergyman, or any other pious visitor, is absolutely forbidden by the law of the National Schools.

Again, it is meet and right that a school should open with prayer, and close with prayer; that God should be asked each day to bless the young, and the means employed to teach them, so that after the example of the holy childhood of Jesus, they might grow in wisdom and favour with God and man.

Will you consent to send your children to a school, where the master dare not ask such a blessing?

The National School is a prayerless school; the laws of National Education permit no prayer.

Again, many of you know that in the evening, after school hours, the door of the schoolhouse is often again thrown open for good and sacred purposes. Perhaps there is a meeting for the Bible Society; or, it may be, that you come to hear missionary intelligence, and how the Gospel is prospering in heathen lands; or to learn how God has blessed the Irish Society, or the Sunday School Society; or you may meet to hear a lecture on God's Word, and to join in his praise and worship; and many are the souls that have had reason to rejoice in such privileges, and in many a remote and secluded district has the humble schoolhouse been the means of inestimable blessings. Are these things all to be given up? Are you content that the glad tidings of great joy should be thus excluded from so many a station, where they were wont to be heard?

The law of the National Schools absolutely prohibits any such use of them.

But this new system strikes a blow, not only at the spiritual rights of Protestants, but at the spiritual rights of Roman Catholics, too.

For recollect that the Protestant principle is that all men have a right to read the Scriptures: the Romish principle is to deny that right; and this we believe to be tyranny. Now, the rules of National Education adopt and carry out the Romish principle, while they oppose and obstruct the Protestant principle; for they give facilities and secure power to accomplish the unrighteous object, of debarring Roman Catholics from their Divine right to read God's Word.

Your Roman Catholic countrymen are not indifferent about this right; they are not unwilling, but most willing to read the Scriptures.

Before the National Schools were founded, there were nearly 12,000 day-schools in Ireland, and the Bible was read in more than half of them by 300,000 children. From 1812 to 1824 the Scriptural schools had increased tenfold; and this was mainly by the free choice of the people, for more than 4,000 of these Scriptural schools, containing about 200,000 children, were not connected with any society, nor aided by Government money.

The Roman Catholic people valued the reading of the Word of God. It is a right too great—a liberty too noble—for any man to undervalue it.

God has given a revelation, in which is to be found the only path to heaven—the only deliverance from hell. Shall the Roman Catholic be content to give up his right of seeing for himself what is contained in this book, and of drinking without mixture or hindrance out of this fountain of life?

Do not believe that he despises this freedom—when you speak to him take for granted that he does not.

Tell him what is written in the 17th Psalm—"By the word of thy lips have I kept me from the path of the destroyer."

Tell him what is written in 2 Tim. (iii. 15)—that the Holy Scriptures were taught to a child, "and that they were able to make him wise unto salvation."

Tell him of the famine that is worse than the famine of bread, (Amos. viii. 11)—"the famine of hearing the words of the Lord, when men shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it."

Tell him what was the highest honour and privilege of the Jews of old (Rom. iii. 2)—"that unto them were committed the oracles of God"—even the Scriptures.

Tell him why the same Jews fell into error—"Because," said Jesus, "they knew not the Scriptures, nor the power of God."

Tell him how Abraham sent (Luke xvi. 29) the brethren of the rich man in hell "to hear Moses and the prophets, that they

might repent :” and ask him why the Church of Rome should shut up Moses and the prophets ?

Tell him, too, that men may try to make fetters for the word ; but they shall fail, for (2 Tim. ii. 9) “The word of God is not bound.”

And tell him that a true Protestant will never be base enough to raise a finger to help to fasten such chains on the Roman Catholic, or on his child. We contend, therefore, that it is unjust to aid the priest, or the guardian, or even the parent of the child in this tyranny.

On this question a stand has been made ; and it is said that the parent has a right to command his child, and *that we have no right to interfere in religious concerns between them* ; and if he chooses to forbid the child to read the Scriptures, Protestants should not interfere, but acquiesce.

We shall try and make clear to you this subject, by which many persons have been perplexed.

1. As to the parent’s right. Has any man a right to do what is wrong ? Surely not. A man may have a right by law, or a civil right, to travel on the Lord’s day, and yet have no moral or divine right to do so, and it is my duty, if I think so, to prevent him as far as the law allows me ; and it would be sinful in me to bind myself not to do so, and still more sinful to aid him in breaking God’s law.

2. Has the parent a right to command his child to break any divine commandment ? Surely not. The Fifth Commandment cannot give him a right to violate the Fourth Commandment. A man may have a legal right to put his son into the mail-coach on the Sabbath-day, but if the youth has years, and reason, and conscience enough, to know and respect the precept of God for keeping that day holy, he ought to obey God rather than man, even a parent. And this may be, and has been the case, and we must have respect unto the rights of the child as well as to the rights of the parent.

3. It is clearly sinful in me, directly or indirectly, to assist the parent in enforcing on his child an authority, which, although allowed by the civil law, is against the divine law ; it is sinful in me to agree to conditions depriving me of the power or means of fulfilling my duty.

This is what we hold to be unjust and oppressive to our conscience as Protestants—that the Government should say to us, (as they do in the rules of the National Board,) “Unless you bind yourselves to admit and enforce the parent’s authority in keeping the Scriptures from the Roman Catholic children, you shall have no help from us to teach your Protestant children at all.”

We have two important duties—one to the Protestant child, the other to the Roman Catholic child. And it is said to us,

“ You shall not have means to discharge duty No. 1, unless you pledge yourselves not to discharge duty No. 2.”

Suppose that a religious society in some slave state of North America (say Carolina or Georgia) were anxious to equip and send out a missionary to the shores of Africa to preach the Gospel, and the government of that country were to say, “ We will supply you with a ship to go where you please, but you must have a partner in the ship, and you must agree to leave him to the free exercise of his traffic, which is the buying and selling of negro slaves.” Would this missionary bind himself to a plan allowing his partner unmolested to consign his fellow-creatures to bondage? Surely not.

The slave ship is the National School, and the slave dealer is the Church of Rome. (Rev. xviii. 13.) Shall not the Protestant refuse the unholy partnership, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made him free?

And this slavery is of a darker character than even that implied in shutting up God’s own book. Not only are the free waters of life sealed up from the people, but waters defiled and bitter have been given unto them; for it has been said, nay sworn before Parliament, that books of a shameful and mischievous character have been found in some of the National Schools. Shall we join a system in whose schools not only have the Scriptures been forbidden, but books given to the children which we believe to be corrupt and demoralizing?

Since this discovery was made, it is more difficult to find out what books are used in the religious instruction of the Roman Catholic children; for no Protestant is allowed now to be present at this instruction, nor are the books used reported publicly to the National Board.

Finally, we object to the rules of the National Schools, that they are *not fixed, but changeable—not clear, but doubtful*; and to the National Board itself, that its members are of various religious opinions, and that a system of education, to which Roman Catholics have given their assent, cannot be viewed by Protestants without suspicion.

Such is your danger from the National Schools: it is not too late to avert it. Meet and petition, and lay your rights and wrongs before the high court of Parliament. If every townland, and parish, and county, were to raise a voice against this oppression, it would be only what is called for by the peril of the time. Let a cry go forth from Protestant Ulster, and the minister of England will retrace his disastrous steps, and peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may yet be established among us for all generations. Amen.

APPENDIX OF PROOFS.

For those who may wish to examine this all-important subject more closely, proofs and testimonies are subjoined, by which the several charges against the National Schools are established, and some other matters set forth, which could not conveniently be introduced in the address.

The sources of information on the subject are chiefly a volume containing the first nine Reports from 1834 to 1842, published last year, in which also is comprised Lord Stanley's letter, by which the system was at first founded and organised: also the evidence given before parliament in 1837, on the same subject, has been also made use of. The pages referred to are those of the above volume of Reports.

We proceed to give such quotations from these sources as may be necessary for establishing the heads of complaint that have been made against the system.

1. *Restrictions on religious instruction.*

"The schools are to be kept open for a certain number of hours on four or five days of the week, at the discretion of the Commissioners, for moral and literary education *only*."—(Lord Stanley's Letter:)

"The ordinary school business, during which all the children, of whatever denomination they be, are required to attend, and which is expected to embrace a competent number of hours in each day, is to consist *exclusively* of instruction in those branches which belong to a *literary and moral* education. The reading of the Scriptures, either in the authorized or Douay version, is regarded as a religious exercise, and as such, is to be *confined* to those times which are set apart for religious instruction."—(Second Report, 1835, p. 32.)

"In all schools receiving the ordinary rate of salary, aided by the Commissioners, a *certain* number of days, at least four in each week, and *certain* hours, at least four in each day, are understood to be set apart for moral and literary education, during which children of all denominations are to be educated together. During these hours, no book inculcating or countenancing peculiar views of *religion*, is to be used. As the holy Scripture is itself, unhappily, a subject of controversy in this

country, &c. it is not to be introduced during the hours set apart for common education."—(Third Report, 1836, p. 102.)

"The Commissioners desire me to observe, that it is of the essence of these rules that *religious instruction should be given only at the time specifically appointed* for that purpose ; and that children whose parents do not direct them to be present at it, should previously retire."—(Letter from T. F. Kelly, Secretary, 1833.)

"The days and hours (of reading the Scriptures and religious instruction) must be *specified, in order* to remove from the mind of the Roman Catholic parent the possibility of a suspicion that his children may be influenced to join in studies of which he does not approve."—(Explanations by Lord Stanley to a deputation from the Synod of Ulster, Eighth Report, 1841 p. 166.)

From these extracts it appears that—

Religious (including scriptural) education is forbidden in a National School during many hours fixed and specified ; and that this prohibition is made with a view to the protection of Popery from the power of the Bible.

The effect of this is illustrated in practice by the following extract of a letter from one of the inspectors of National Schools :—

"I called into Kircubbin school, (at half-past eleven o'clock,) as is my custom, and observed nearly two-thirds of the children in the female school with Bibles or Testaments lying before them on the desks during the period publicly notified for literary instruction. I passed into the boys' school without making any observation, and returned in about a minute after ; but not a Bible or Testament was to be seen : other books had been put into the hands of the children, which they held conspicuously. The hiding of the Bible, on the appearance of the inspector, I consider more culpable than the open violation of the rules."—(R. Sullivan's evidence before House of Commons, p. 573.)

What a system was this, which forced these poor little Protestant girls to have recourse to this deceitful trick to hide their Bibles ! What wonder if they should grow up with a notion as if there were something like shame and unlawfulness connected with reading God's word !

It appears further, that, from the same extracts, that—

2. *No moral training, such as Protestants require for their children, is provided in the National Schools, for the master is not allowed to inculcate morality by a reference to scriptural truth.*

[N.B. With the time set apart for scriptural instruction the schoolmaster has no concern, and out of that time he dare not refer to Scripture.]

So jealous does the National Board seem to be of using the Scriptures in the moral training of the children, that a moral lesson of *human composition* is actually preferred by them to the

Divine lesson in morality contained in the Ten Commandments. (Many persons find fault even with the first sentence of it, which tells "Christians to live peaceably *even with those of a different religious persuasion.*") And concerning this general lesson and the Ten Commandments, there is the following extraordinary rule. (It is addressed to the inspectors of schools):—

"[Each inspector] will take with him a copy of the general lesson, and in the event of its not having been previously put up, leave it with the teacher, to have it put up *immediately*. He will also take a copy of the sheet containing the Ten Commandments, and leave it with the teacher, that it may also be put up, *provided the conductors of the school approve of it, but not otherwise.*"—(Third Report, 1836, p. 103.)

Observe the end every where kept in view, *protection to Popery*; for, although the copy of the Ten Commandments printed by the National Board omits the words "image" and "bow down," which Protestants read in the Second Commandment; yet, still, it seems to be feared by the Board that some Romanist conductors might not like it after all, and their scruples must be provided for.

From the same extracts, already given above, it appears also—

3.—*That no sufficient scriptural education is provided in the National Schools.*

For scriptural education, to be sufficient, must pervade, and be blended with the whole plan of instruction, and not excluded from any part thereof.

And one may observe in the rules of this system a tendency from year to year to narrow and diminish even the scanty amount of scriptural instruction that was at first allowed. Lord Stanley, in his letter to the Duke of Leinster, said—

"It is not designed to exclude from the list of books for the combined instruction such portions of sacred history or of religious or moral teaching as may be approved of by the Board."

Acting on this, the Commissioners prepared books of extracts from Scripture, of which they said, in their first and second reports, "Such extracts may be used, and are *earnestly recommended* to be used during the hours allotted to the ordinary business." But soon they seem to have repented of the recommendation of even this small supply of scriptural truth, for in the fifth report (1838) they *omitted this recommendation* entirely; and what is still more singular, they *suppressed* the passage in Lord Stanley's letter just quoted; and the letter is actually printed without it in the volume of reports. Compare pages 4 and 164.

In the sixth report they say—

"*We do not allow them* (the Scripture extracts) *to be read* during the time of secular or literary instruction in any school attended by any children whose parents or guardians object to them.

In the same report we find that one of the superintendents having made some observation on the neglect of the Scripture extracts in the Shanballymore school, was reprimanded by the Commissioners, in which they say—

“You are not to leave *any suggestion* on this subject (the reading of Scripture extracts) in future either in the report-book or in the school, or *by word of mouth, to the teacher or other person.*”

That which in 1835 was *earnestly recommended* by the Commissioners themselves, in their printed rules, in 1838, is not even to be suggested to the teacher or other person, least, as the same circular intimates, it might “give offence, as an interference with the religious instruction of the children.”

Observe still the end which is kept in view.

In the report of 1835, it was a rule “that one day at least in each week, (independently of the Sunday,) is to be set apart for the religious instruction of the children.”

This, too, was soon encroached upon, for in the report of 1837, it runs thus: “One day at least in each week, *or part of a day,*” &c., and so it remains.

4.—*No Religious or Scriptural Education whatsoever is provided or required in the National Schools.*

All that the Board does is to admit religious instructors, provided by the parents to teach in some of the schools at fixed hours; the Board provides neither instruction nor books.

“The patrons of the several schools have the right of appointing such religious instruction as they may think proper to be given therein.” [Here follow certain conditions.] (9th Report, 1842, p. 195.)

The following evidence was given before parliament by the Rev. James Carlisle, one of the commissioners:—

“Do you consider that the Board *contributes nothing* to the separate religious instruction beyond the school-house? *Nothing whatever.*”

“Are there *any school books and other means* furnished towards it by the Board? *None whatever.*”

“In the time set apart for reading the Scriptures, or for religious instruction, do you consider the National Board *directs or controls the instruction at all?* *Certainly not.*”

“What provision do you make for seeing that the day set apart for religious instruction shall be devoted to that purpose? *We make no provision whatever.*”

“Is the Board considered to employ the schoolmaster to give that separate religious instruction, or is he employed by other parties? *We employ no one to give the separate religious instruction.*”

“The schoolmaster *may* give the instruction, but the Board *do not require* it. *Certainly.*”

“It would be open to him *to refuse* the application from the parents to give such instruction on that day? *Certainly.*”

5.—*No Scriptural Education at all is even allowed in some National Schools.*

“In schools not vested, but which receive aid only by way of salary and books, it is for *the patrons* to determine whether religious instruction shall be given in the school-room or not.” (9th Report, 1842, p. 196.)

Which gives to the Roman Catholic patron the power of determining that no Scriptural instruction shall be given in such schools, even to Protestant children, at any hour, or on any day.

6.—*The rules of the National Schools bind the patron to admit teachers, and give facilities, for teaching doctrines which he believes to be false.*

It is here necessary to give a brief history of that important law of the National Schools, which obliges the managers of them to give access to *all religious teachers* at the option of the parents, and *without any distinction* of truth or falsehood.

At first the law was absolute and clear :—

“Religious instruction may, or may not, be given in the school-room; the choice of the place being left to the pastors of the children, but *liberty is to be secured* to them to assemble the children of their respective flocks in the school-room, if they see fit.” (Official explanation of Lord Stanley’s letter, p. 7.)

“Such pastors or other persons as are approved of by the parents or guardians of the children *shall have access* to them for that purpose [religious instruction,] *whether those pastors have signed the original application or not.*” (1st Report, 1834, p. 13.)

In the years 1839–1840, this rule was relaxed in favour of some Presbyterian schools, to which aid was granted “without binding them literally to the rules of the Board,” (6th Report, 1839, p. 141,) and without obliging them to admit any religious teachers except with the approbation of the patrons.

The commissioners admit that such schools bear in some degree a religious aspect, and then they divulge what was not made public before, that what appeared a new concession to the Presbyterians, had been long before conceded to the Roman Catholics.

“Schools of such a description, when connected with Presbyterian meeting-houses, appear to us to stand upon the same principles as schools connected with communities of the Roman Catholic persuasion, and to these *we have been, from the commencement of our labours, granting aid*, having first communicated with his late Majesty’s government on the subject, and being sanctioned by it in doing so.” (6th Report, 1839, p. 142.)

It was not, however, until 1843, that this concession appeared formally set forth in the rules of the Board, and it is most important to examine critically what it amounts to, as many Protestants have been led by it to think more favourably of the National Schools.

In that year a distinction was made between schools *vested* in trustees, to the building of which the Board have contributed,

and schools *not vested*, to which they give only salary and books ; and the rules affecting these schools stand thus :—

“ In schools towards the building of which the commissioners have contributed, and which are therefore *vested* in trustees, for the purposes of National Education, such pastors, or other persons as shall be approved of by the parents or guardians of the children respectively, *shall have access to them in the school-room*, for the purpose of giving them religious instruction, *there* at convenient times to be appointed for that purpose, whether those pastors or persons shall have signed the original application or otherwise.

“ In schools *not vested*, but which receive aid only by way of salary and books, it is *for the patrons to determine* whether religious instruction shall be given *in the school-room* or not ; but if they do not allow it in the school-room, the children, whose parents or guardians so desire, must be allowed to absent themselves from the school at reasonable times, for the purpose of receiving such instruction *elsewhere.*” (9th Report, 1843, p. 196.)

In vested schools, therefore, the patron must admit teachers of all kinds, whether he likes it or not. In the non-vested schools the patron may refuse to admit teachers whom he does not approve of.

But is this last principle permanently *secured* to non-vested schools? No, the commissioners take care to inform us that it *may be withdrawn* : for they say—

“ Should any thing occur hereafter, which might appear *contrary to the spirit of the rules*, the Board has it in its power to have the evil corrected, or if it be not, to withdraw the salary.” (6th Report, 1839, p. 141.)

But it further appears that the plan of the Board was, from the first, that what are called *vested schools* should ultimately prevail throughout Ireland, and take the place of the *non-vested schools*. Any privilege, therefore, to the latter is only temporary, while the rules of the former are permanent. This plan was set forth in the second Report ; they there reckon that more than 500,000 children would require the aid of the National Schools ; that 5000 schools would be required for them ; that these could be built in about nine years, “ *after which period the building of school-houses would cease to be an annual charge ;*” that salaries to teachers of the present establishment, that is (in non-vested schools,) for the 1st year would amount to £11,124 ; for the 2nd year to the same ; for the 3rd year to £7000 ; for the 4th year to £2000 ; for the 5th year to £1000 ; and in the 6th year there would be no salary for any but primary (now called vested) schools.

This was the plan of the National Board ; but it has not been as yet carried out, for want of funds. Of this they complain thus in their 9th Report, 1842:—

“ Unless the annual grant be raised, we cannot undertake to contribute to the building, or even the support of additional schools.

But in the 10th Report (1843) we read—

“ We have learned, with the greatest satisfaction, that her Majesty’s ministers intend proposing such an addition to the funds confided to us as may enable us to *increase the number of our schools.*”

The conclusion is plain: let the National Board only obtain sufficient funds, and they will soon build their 5000 vested schools, and, of course, withdraw their aid from the non-vested schools, that is, from the only schools that now have the privilege of excluding a false teacher.

7.—*The patrons of national schools must bind themselves not only to admit error, but to exclude truth from the children, at the option of the parent.*

In a letter from T. F. Kelly, secretary, (which letter A. R. Blake, Esq. one of the Roman Catholic commissioners, avowed before Parliament to be his composition) to a member of the Synod of Ulster, July, 1833—it is said—

“ The Commissioners desire me to observe, that it is of the essence of their rules that religious instruction should be given only at the time specifically appointed for the purpose; and that children, whose parents *do not direct them* to be present at it, *should previously retire.*”

One of the queries to be answered by applicants, as found in the 3rd Report, 1836, p. 107, is this—

“ *Will you take care that no children be present at any religious instruction, or exercise, except those whose parents consent to their being present?*”

In the 4th Report, 1837, p. 120—

“ The principle of the system, and which we consider *fixed and unalterable*, is, that the National Schools shall be open alike to Christians of all denominations; therefore, that no child shall be *required to be present at any religious instruction or exercise of which his parents or guardians may disapprove.*”

In the 5th Report, 1838, the mode of protecting the children from hearing doctrines objected to by their parents, is more strictly defined:—

“ Where any course of religious instruction is pursued in a school, during school hours, to which the parents of any of the children attending it object, the managers are to make an arrangement for having it given to those who are to receive it *at a stated time, or times, and in a separate place*; so that no children, whose parents object to their being so, shall be present at it.”

Not only is the hour of religious instruction to be fixed, but it must be given, not in the school-room, but in some other place. Bible-reading children, and Bible teachers, must be turned out of the school room, even at the Bible hour, if objecting Roman Catholics attend the school.

This rigorous enactment is renewed in the 9th Report (1843) in a more striking manner, for there it is actually embodied in

the form of lease, by which all trustees of National (vested) Schools are bound :

“ And it is the true intent and meaning of these presents, that when any course of religious instruction is to be pursued in any such school as aforesaid, during school hours, to which the parents or guardians of any of the children attending such school *shall object*, an arrangement shall be made for having such instruction given to those who are to receive it, *at a stated time and in a separate place.*”

A relaxation in this condition is made, however, in the 10th Report, (1844) by a verbal change so minute, that it is hard to say whether one should feel more repugnance to the severity of the rule, or uneasiness at the subtlety displayed in effecting an important alteration in a manner so unlikely to be noticed. In the 10th Report, the words of the Report of 1838, and of the lease of one of 1843, are changed into the following :—

“ At a stated time, *or* in a separate place,” that is, if the time be fixed, the children need not quit the school-room.

Why the Board saw fit to make this change, we know not ; but we cannot avoid a feeling of insecurity and distrust, when we see so important an effect on the rights of Protestants may be produced by changing *and* to *or*.

But one thing is secured throughout ; the patron is made responsible for the absence of the child whose parents object to his being present at the religious instruction.

8—*The National Schools are prayerless schools.*

“ The rule as to religious instruction applies to public prayer and to all other religious exercises.” (9th Report, p. 196.

That is, prayer is not to be made in the presence of the children of different persuasions, or during the time of common instruction. The Board do not require or provide that there should be any prayer in their schools.

9—*The rules are so contrived, as not only to compel the patron to give access to the false teacher, but to secure to this teacher secrecy in his teaching, and to protect him from discovery.*

“ The pastor, or other religious teacher, who proposes to employ any book (in communicating religious instruction) is expected to communicate his intention *to any individual member of the Board*, and to consult with him respecting its suitableness.” (2nd Report, 1835, p. 32.)

“ As the religious instruction of the children is under the control of the clergyman, or lay person communicating it, with the approbation of the parents ; the commissioners can give no liberty to any other visitor, whether clergyman or layman, *to interfere at all upon the subject.*” (5th Report, for the year included between March 31st, 1837, and March 31st, 1838.)

This was more explicitly expressed in a circular from the secre-

tary, dated *June 26th*, 1837, in which the latter part of the foregoing rule runs thus :—

“The Board can give no liberty to any other visiter, whether clergyman or layman, *to be present at that exercise.*”

Now let it be observed, that before a committee of the House of Lords, appointed *28th February*, 1837, testimony was given that certain Protestant visitors entering a National School, found in the hands of the Roman Catholic children, books of a most objectionable and corrupting character, (in the judgment of Protestants.)

The secretary's letter providing against any such inconvenient exposure for the future, agrees in a significant manner as to date, with the evidence given about these objectionable books.

The priest is now only bound to divulge the books which he employs to *some one member of the Board*, and is quite secured from any other risk of discovery ; he may appoint his own bishop at the Board the sole keeper of his secret.

10—*The power vested in the Board over the books to be employed in religious instruction, is inconsistent with the rights of Protestants.*

“In the separate religious instruction, no books are to be employed but with the approbation of the members of the Board, of *the same religious persuasion* with those for whom they are intended.” Lord Stanley's letter.

Protestants cannot conscientiously or safely yield to the Protestant members of the Board any such control over the books to be used in religious instruction.

11—*The rules of the National Board deprive many Protestants of spiritual advantages hitherto enjoyed by means of school-houses.*

“The commissioners require the school-rooms to be used *exclusively for the purposes of education*, and any breach of this rule will be held to be a violation of the principle of the National Education System.” (9th Report, 1842, p. 197.)

And in vested schools, the form of lease provides :

“That *no meetings of any kind whatever* be summoned, held or convened, or permitted so to be, in any such school-house, or in any part or room thereof, or in the premises hereby conveyed. And that said school-house and premises, or any part thereof, shall not be converted into a place of *public worship, or used for any purpose save that of such school.*” (9th Report, p. 210.)

How many meetings of Sunday school teachers, of Bible Associations, meetings for Missionary purposes, or for hearing the word of God expounded, seem cut off at once by this law of the National Schools !

12.—*The rules of the National Board are, in many cases, fluctuating, ambiguous, and insufficiently published.*

Instances of their being changeable, have been already given in the case of the Scripture extracts—of the day set apart for religious instruction—of the power of excluding religious instruction in non-vested schools.

Another instance is in the rule about the children who are to be present at religious instruction.

A Roman Catholic parent may *direct* his child to attend Scriptural instruction and *approve* of it; or he may *allow* him to do so and *not object* to it. The latter course is more usual and likely than the former. Now, the secretary's letter of 1833 enjoins—

“That such children only as *are directed by their parents* to attend, be allowed to continue in the school, and that all others do then retire.”

And in 2nd Report, 1835, to the same effect—

“That those children, and those only, may be present at the religious instruction, whose parents and guardians *approve of* their being so.”

But in 9th Report, 1843, the rule is—

“That no child be compelled to receive or be present at any religious instruction to which his parents or guardians *object*.”

Much has been said of this change, and much argument in favour of this system built upon it. “The system,” cries Dr. Martin, “is changed from worse principles and worse regulations to better.”

But it seems this was a hasty conclusion, from a fact for which we are indebted to Dr. O'Sullivan, (at the Church Education meeting, 1844.)

In a National School in the north of Ireland, some Roman Catholic children chose to join the Scriptural class, and their parents made no objection; but the National Board pronounced this a violation of their rules, and called on the school-committee to refund the money advanced; thus proving that their rule means that unless the parent *directs and expressly permits* the child to attend, the patron is bound to *turn out* the child from religious instruction.

13.—*Some of the rules are insufficiently made known to the public.*

For instance, the Commissioners refuse to aid a school “unless there be a *sufficient* daily average of children.” (9th Report, 1842, p. 208.)

Now, by not making known what they mean by a *sufficient* average, they keep in their own hands a power of a formidable kind. The Rev. V. Drapes, of Kilkenny, (as quoted in a late sermon of the Rev. C. C. Townsend,) declares, that a certain

clergyman, having enquired what average would be sufficient, was informed that *twenty* would be enough; but on his stating that the attendance was twenty-two, the Board raised their average, and refused the application unless there were an average of *thirty*.

This rule (observes Mr. Townsend) is enough to cut off, at one blow, fully half the parochial Protestant Schools in the south of Ireland from all support were they dependant for it on the National Board.

14.—*Protestants cannot believe that persons holding religious opinions, of the most conflicting character, and of which some must necessarily be false, can be safely entrusted with the education of the country, and they cannot feel confidence in a Board so composed.*

“It is essential that the Board should consist, in part, of persons professing different religious opinions.”—(Lord Stanley’s Letter.)

THE END.