

1827

Education -  
Irish Society  
Speech of  
v. Mr. Lyons

# EDUCATION IN IRELAND.

## IRISH SOCIETY.

**T**HE People of England have, for a long continuance, been applied to for contributions, to enable a company, under the title of the "IRISH SOCIETY," to circulate the Scriptures in the Irish language under pretence of enlightening the peasantry of Ireland. Of this Society the People of England are but little acquainted; the following Speech, delivered by the Rev. Mr. Lyons, an Irish Catholic Clergyman, on a late (Sept. 1827) public occasion at Liverpool, is therefore respectfully submitted to their cool reflection and judgment. As a further illustration of the proceedings of this and similar Societies, and the caution required before money is bestowed in support of their plans, a letter is added from the Right Rev. Dr. Logan, the Catholic Bishop of Meath, in whose diocese the operations of the Irish Society have been chiefly carried on.

On the toast of "the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick," an institution in Liverpool for educating the poor on the most liberal principles, being proposed and acceded to, the Rev. Mr. Lyons addressed the company in the following terms:—

MR. CHAIRMAN,—I never rose, to give expression to my sentiments, with greater pleasure than on the present occasion. You have touched a chord which harmonizes with the dearest feelings of my soul. I participate with all my heart in that glowing, eloquent, and appropriate eulogy on the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick, with which you have gratified your auditory, and elicited those bursts of feeling and applause which evince at once the justness of your observations, and the gratitude of this respectable assemblage of Irishmen to the object of your praise.

The Benevolent Society of St. Patrick is truly a beneficent society,—a society that never requires or permits a sacrifice of principle on the part of those who are the objects of its munificence, and that merges the distinctions of sect and creed in universal philanthropy. In what light soever I consider it, I find matter for admiration and praise. Its members are persons of all religious denominations—Quakers, Baptists, Unitarians, High Churchmen, Presbyterians, Independents, &c. &c. and Catholics. In religion, some of those are as far as the Poles asunder—the very antipodes of each other, and yet, for the last twenty years, they are linked together, hand in hand, in the practice of charity—that virtue which is the soul and life-pulse of religion; and without which all the professions of men are empty sound, signifying nothing—(cheers). Long may their union continue, and their conduct reflect shame and disgrace upon all those pretended charitable societies, whose operations are the bane of morality, and the main cause of all the religious dissensions and animosities, and angry polemical contests that divide and distract our unfortunate country, and poison the very fountains of charity and social intercourse.

The Benevolent Society of St. Patrick was established for the purpose of affording the blessings of a well ordered education to the destitute children of the Irish poor in Liverpool. I was present at a Committee of the Institution, and paid close attention to all the questions which Mr. Cearns, the Secretary, put to the parents of the children who were

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applicants for admission. I was both surprised and edified by the proceeding. The questions regarded their pecuniary resources, not their religious opinions; poverty, not the profession of any particular creed, is the passport for favour; and the moral improvement of the poorer classes of every sect, and not the proselytism of any, is the object of the Society; in fact, the very idea of interference with the peculiar tenets of the children is entirely banished from the schools. The majority in attendance there are Catholics; and I assert, with pleasure, that the Institution affords them the same facilities which are enjoyed by children of other persuasions. The children there know nothing of those distinctions which are the pass-words of derision, hatred, and all uncharitableness in Ireland. Catholics and Protestants are brought up together, and thus form those early attachments which constitute the bases of rational friendship in after life, and cause them to float down the current of time in the mutual interchange of kind offices, and the cultivation of those social and sublimer virtues which raise man above the brute, and proclaim him the masterpiece of the sublunary creation.

This Society instils into the young and ductile mind the universally admitted precepts of morality and religion, but wisely leaves it to parents and pastors to mould them into that peculiarity of religious profession which themselves approve and practise. All the other schools which I visited in Liverpool, let their profession be what they may, are sectarian in principle and proselytizing in practice. The school in Pleasant-street is emphatically a charity school, in the widest acceptation of the term: it educates without distinction, and meets the poor upon their own conditions. Every thing belonging to it is appropriate: the rooms, the furniture, the adjoining yards for play ground, the system, and the excellence of the teachers, form a *tout ensemble* which is unrivalled in Liverpool, and cannot fail to meet with the unqualified approbation of every discriminating person. Saint Patrick himself, from the battlements of heaven, must look upon it with complacency, and pray for a benediction on its benevolent founders—(*shouts of applause*).

This admirable Institution has already conferred inestimable benefits on Liverpool. I have met with merchants, shopkeepers, tradesmen, clerks, servants—in a word, persons in all the subordinate walks of life who have received their education there, and who acknowledge their obligations with gratitude. Yet, much as this Society has effected for the good of social order and morality, within the sphere of its influence I heard but little of its existence, and much less of its effects, before my arrival in Liverpool. With a modesty becoming its worth, it made no ostentatious display of its services; and satisfied with doing solid and permanent good, it avoided the bravado and boasting of the Irish and Hibernian Societies;—societies whose names and operations are synonymous in Ireland, with illiberality, proselytism, and persecution—(*immense cheers*). Yes, Mr. Chairman, I speak it boldly!—I speak before men who know it to be true, beyond doubt or controversy. From Erris to Howth, and from Dingle to Donaghadee, these societies have left lasting proofs of their bigotry and intolerance. Everywhere they engendered animosities, created heartburnings, spirited up the bad passions, and set Protestant and Catholic so much at variance as to make Ireland the most unhappy country on the surface of the globe.

I was introduced, by a friend, some few days ago, to a gentleman in the Exchange news-room for the purpose of soliciting his subscription for the education of the poor of Erris. He said he would give nothing, except through those societies already mentioned. I immediately exposed their incompetency by a detail of facts which fell under my own personal observation, and was met by a doubt of my veracity, expressed in terms too plain to be mistaken. As a Clergyman I took no notice of the affront intended for me; but I now assert here, in public, what I detailed to him in private; and I wish I could proclaim it from the top of the Town hall, and that not only all Liverpool but all England could hear



the impositions practised upon their credulity by these money-making societies. I wish there was a reporter present, I would then be satisfied that my voice could be heard, and that some plain and stubborn facts could make their way before the British public—(*long continued cheers*).

The orators of the Irish Society are never weary of enumerating the wonders they are achieving beyond the channel. They drive a thriving trade, indeed, at the expense of the credulous English people, and lavish thousands annually in salaries upon themselves, and to defray the printing of the Bible in the Ibero-Celtic language for the edification and conversion of *mere Irish* readers. Now I assert, and I defy the whole Irish Society, orators, teachers, readers, and all, to disprove my assertion, that there is not one man, woman, or child, of any class or grade, in Ireland, who is purely an Irish scholar, or who, being unable to read English, can read his native language in the English Irish or any other character. There is no part of Ireland in which our sweet, expressive, and beautiful language is better known and spoken than in the county of Mayo, of which I am a native—yet there is not one *mere Irish scholar* in that county. But my knowledge on that head is not confined to Mayo. With the exception of my friend Edward O'Reilly, the compiler of the Irish dictionary, and a few others, I am as well acquainted with the present state of the Irish language and the extent to which it is cultivated, as any man in Ireland; and I affirm that the assertions of the Irish Society are utterly devoid of truth and credibility. Several years ago, I heard that certain members of a family in the west of the county of Clare could read and write their native tongue though quite unacquainted with English. This was asserted so often and so positively, that my curiosity was excited. I made a journey of 80 miles to that part of the country, and, after the most minute and patient inquiry, discovered that these mere Irishmen were ideal beings; that all the proficients in Ibero-Celtic (and they were few) were proficients in English also, and that their grammatical knowledge of the former was attained through the medium of the latter; for every one of them, without a single exception, could read and write English before they ventured to learn the letters of the Irish alphabet. It is passing strange that any set of men could have the effrontery to assert such nonsense. The thing was utterly impossible in Ireland. The Irish language and the Irish people were proscribed together. It was penal to teach and penal to learn the energetic dialect of our country. All of you recollect when it was a crime to speak it in the hedge schools, where we received the first rudiments of knowledge; and when the square bit of timber, called *the score*, suspended from the neck of each new scholar, gave intimation to the master, by a notch on its angles, when the stammering urchin relapsed into his mother tongue at home—(*cheers*). I remember when a mere Irish servant would not be employed in my father's house, for fear his children should learn this (to him) vulgar tongue, and I was brought up for at least nine years in perfect ignorance of the finest medium of communication with which I happen to be acquainted. This was the practice throughout Ireland, and it continues, with little abatement, to the present day; and yet this bare-faced Irish Society come forward, and assert, in the face of the nation, that there are many hundreds of mere Irish scholars in Ireland who are eager for, and can make use of Irish Bibles—(*cheers*). But really, do those who can read Irish make use of the Bibles of the Society? Certainly not, except merely for the purpose of learning to read from them, for the translation of the new testament, by O'Donnell, is rather an obsolete dialect, and little, if at all, relished by Irish scholars of the present day. And with regard to the translation of the Pentateuch, lately foisted on the public, it is a burlesque upon the language, and replete with the most glaring errors in grammar and in rendering. There never was such a job as this same Irish Bible business. It is a complete hoax upon the English public. It never did, it never will, effect any good for the language, much less for the morality, of Ireland. Ship loads of these



unreadable volumes have been circulated throughout the country, for no other purpose than to serve for wrapper for the snuff-seller and the tobacconist. Very few know how to read them, and those few that do understand an English version better, and will use it in preference.

The Irish Readers conclude the drama: they are an appropriate appendage of this national humbug; men without education, character, or domicile; fanatical vagrants, who sputter English, and know just enough of Irish to misinterpret all the old and difficult words of the language, and turn the code of God's mysteries into an absurd and unintelligible jargon. These fellows, with the sanction and by the directions of the Society, pretend to be Catholics, and join in all the devotion of the people, in order to gain their confidence, and the more effectually to instil the poison of their latitudinarianism into the minds of their simple and unsuspecting hearers. Was it by such means and men as these that Christianity was propagated? Did the Apostles sacrifice at the shrines of the Pagan deities in order to gain over their idolatrous worshippers to Christ? Will the English people continue longer to be the dupes of these traffickers on their bounty and credulity, and pander to the most shameful exhibition of hypocrisy that ever disgraced a Christian community?—(*Long continued cheers.*) The people of England imagine (and how can they help it?) that the Hibernian School Society is popular in Ireland, and affords the blessing of a liberal and unrestricted education to the poor Catholics. I will put a plain case to you, Gentlemen. Suppose a number of Irish Catholics, replete with bigotry and intolerance; should take it into their heads to form themselves into a society, and establish schools throughout England, for the apparent purpose of educating the Protestant poor, but really for the purpose of bringing them back from the supposed errors of Protestantism to the bosom of the Catholic Church. At every one of their meetings in Ireland they malign the Protestants of England, caricature their religion, and so enlist the popular feelings of the Irish in favour of their society, that subscriptions pour in from every side to aid their exertions for converting the English nation. All their leaders, and every officer of the society, are sworn enemies of the civil and religious liberties of Englishmen. They establish a Popish agent in Liverpool or Manchester, who bribes a number of lukewarm or disaffected Protestants to forward their views, and become teachers throughout the country. The Douay Bible, with the Apochrypha, and all its notes and comments, is made the schoolbook, and the progress of the pupils is estimated by their proficiency in Popish doctrines, and their contempt or neglect of the tenets of Protestantism. The masters, after a while, are awakened, by pecuniary excitements, to a just abhorrence of Protestant errors; they gradually withdraw from church; rail against the tyranny of the parson; sometimes go to mass by way of inquiry; fling private judgment to the winds, and take shelter under the banner of authority. With few exceptions, however, they keep up appearances, and though they have privately read their recantation, and do not scruple to represent the parson as the enemy of religion and education, still they retain, with few exceptions, a Protestant exterior, in order to give confidence to the parents of the children, and secure an opportunity of impressing what they please upon the tender minds of their pupils. After a convenient time spent in this secret training, several of the masters make a public recantation, and the society exhibits the cloven foot. The pastors and parents take the alarm, and become fully awakened to a sense of the dangerous tendency of the society both to the interests of morality and to the Church of England. They withdraw the children from the schools, and strive to give them an education more consonant with their own feelings and opinions. In this emergency, the agent, the inspectors, and the masters, unwilling to lose their lucrative employments, play into each other's hands, and unite in representing the schools as in the most flourishing condition, and frequently contrive to muster a tolerable number for an inspection day, by borrowing the children of a neighbouring pay school, or the idlers



about the village. The society itself countenances the deception, in order to get money from the public at large in Ireland. It sends over a number of firebrand Irish Papists, who hold meetings in every town in England; insult the people; outrage their religious feelings; assault their persons; and madden round the land, until the Irish public is persuaded that the English are worse than Pagans. Let me suppose this case:—Would any Irish Catholic of feeling or benevolence countenance such a society, to contribute one penny towards their unjust and unwarrantable warfare against the English people? I, for one, would stand up in judgment against them, and with both my hands protest against such a diabolical system.—(*Long continued cheers.*) Let the English nation consider this picture; let them suppose Protestants instead of Catholics for the members of the society, and Ireland the scene of its operations, and they have a just picture of the Hibernian School Society and its effects, the just portrait of its teachers, agents, and abettors. While resident in Ballina, I was frequently asked to permit the children of pay schools to attend the Hibernian and other society free school inspections; and since I went to Erris I read a circular letter from Mr. Blest to scholarless free-school teachers, with an offer of double salary if they should persevere and continue this nominal school and ideal roll of scholars upon the list of the society. But why should I dwell longer on this subject? Is there a man in the present assembly who does not know these facts from his own experience?—(*Cheers.*) The thing is as notorious as the sun at noonday in Ireland. It is time for the Government to interfere, and put an end to that cruel crusade against the Catholics of Ireland which has raged throughout the land for the last ten years, and embittered the peace and prevented the prosperity of the country. The Hibernian and Irish Societies are an incubus on the moral energies of the people. They never did, never will succeed, except in tearing up the very foundations of social intercourse between Protestants and Catholics. Their speculations will succeed no longer. Ireland is heartily sick of their hypocrisy, and England must soon see the propriety of entrusting her charitable funds to more efficient hands. If the English wish really to aid in educating the Irish poor, let them make the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick the depository of their funds, and they shall soon see Ireland another country. The Catholic Clergy will unite with them in the sacred work; education will reach the humblest cottage; and the wealth of England will cease to be a curse to the Emerald Isle.

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*Letter from Dr. Logan, Catholic Bishop of Meath, to the Secretary of the Irish Catholic Association.*

DEAR SIR,—I have to apologize for not having forwarded to you before now the documents relative to the Irish Society; this delay was principally occasioned by the time necessarily employed in obtaining some additional information.

Allow me to give you a short sketch of the proceedings of this Society, as far as I could collect, regarding this county.

When certain resolutions were published on the 17th of March, 1826, dated Guaghmarogue, December 1825, in which it was asserted "that 5000 adults were receiving education through the medium of the Irish language, from 113 schoolmasters in five counties, Meath included," I felt it my duty to inquire into the truth of this statement, so far as Meath was concerned. For this purpose, I wrote to the pastors of 20 of those parishes where I knew the Irish to be the language most used by the people, requesting them to afford me whatever information they could obtain on this subject. The result of their



inquiries was, that I learned there were thirteen or fourteen persons connected with the Irish Society ; that some of them had public English schools ; that others were labourers or farmers with very small holdings, who taught, or were supposed to teach occasionally, the Irish language to a few persons in their neighbourhood ; that a few only of the fourteen masters signed the Guaghnarogue resolutions, and that they were prevailed on to do so without knowing the tendency of them, while others were given to believe that they were signing a petition to two of the neighbouring Catholic Bishops, to obtain their permission to join the Society or continue connected with it. I know only one person who admitted that he read those resolutions, understood them, and said that he would continue to act in conformity with the spirit of them, in opposition to all ecclesiastical authority. With the exception of three, all the masters declared that they could not, without a violation of their religious principles, sign the resolutions, and pledged themselves before witnesses that they would not have any connexion with the Irish Society.—On receiving the above information, I felt myself justified in concluding that there was not at that time, in this county, a single school, and only three itinerant masters without any fixed scholars connected with the Society.

When I read the Guaghnarogue resolutions, when I considered the character of the patrons and superintendants of the Society, the nature of the books printed and circulated by it, the evidence given by Captain Pringle to the Commissioners of Education, I had not, nor can I have, the slightest hesitation in pronouncing proselytism to be the object of the Irish Society. It may be said “ that Captain Pringle never gave testimony to the Commissioners relative to the Irish Society,” and that therefore his evidence to them respecting the London Hibernian Society cannot be taken as a proof that the Irish Society is a proselytizing one. Surely, Sir, I need not inform you that the object of the different Bible Societies is the same, and that they are all intimately connected. The object of the London Hibernian Society is “ to establish Schools and circulate the Holy Scriptures in Ireland.” “ The Baptist Society was formed for the purpose of employing preachers in Ireland, of establishing Schools, and of distributing Bibles and Tracts.” At the Annual Meeting of the Society, a resolution was adopted “ that the Committee be directed to encourage the increase of native Irish Schools, founded upon the fundamental principles of the Society, viz.—that the Scriptures alone be taught therein.” The object of the Irish Society is, “ to promote scriptural education in Ireland,” and “ to enable the Irish peasant to peruse the Scriptures in his own tongue.” “ Copies of the New Testament have been supplied gratuitously to the Irish Society, by the Bri-



tish and Foreign Bible Society, which Society has lately undertaken to print an edition of the Irish Bible." The Hibernian Bible Society "has likewise agreed to print an edition of that Bible in a smaller size" According to the regulations of the London Hibernian Society, "the art of reading Irish in the Roman and Celtic characters, is to be taught to all pupils who may desire it, and all masters in districts where the Irish is the common language of the adult population, are required to form an Irish class; and for the extra attention attending the instruction of Irish classes, an additional allowance of half-pay is granted the teachers." Let us now see what are the fruits and advantages of this Society, as stated in their own report. "Every Catholic schoolmaster who enters into the service of the Society, and introduces the Holy Scriptures into his house, immediately withdraws from his Priest, as to confession, which circumstance frequently leads to a further alienation from his influence, and at length to a gradual abandonment of the whole system of Popery. In this way several of the Society's Schoolmasters have, by degrees, become sincere converts to genuine Christianity." Captain Pringle stated, with respect to this Society, that he preferred having Roman Catholic teachers to any others, as he contemplated their conversion, and, through them, the conversion of their scholars. Does not the Irish Society prefer Roman Catholic masters to any others? Will it then be said that the testimony of Captain Pringle is not of importance in exposing the views of the Irish Society, and the instruments they employ in the accomplishment of these views? Will it be said that the Irish Society is not a proselytizing or Bible Society, merely because the Bible is given, not in the English, but in the Irish language? I fear, Sir, that I am unnecessarily taxing your patience, by these extracts taken from the report given by the Commissioners of Education, on a question concerning which there can be no doubt, at least on your mind; but I really find that there are many of our people ignorant of the objects and designs of the Irish Society; many, who are simple enough to suppose that the intention of the Society is to preserve and perpetuate the Irish language, although the Society expressly states that such is not the object, and who scarcely suspect, that it forms any connexion with the various other Bible Societies.

Having considered the information afforded me by the Clergy respecting the scholars, the manner in which they were inspected, the exaggerated returns made by the inspectors, the sums of money given them for this purpose—having borne in mind the statement given by Mr. Connor, one of the officers belonging to the Society, in the *Dublin Evening Post* of July 13, 1826, "that though there were 100 schools specified as under the protection of the Society, he would not find so much as one



school or even *one* person taught to read Irish." Having reflected on all these statements, was I not warranted in pronouncing the masters and managers of the Society as persons whom the world would deem guilty of fraud, deceit, and a gross imposition on the public? To acquit themselves of charges so foul and disgraceful, what have they done? They meet at Kingscourt—they plead not guilty—they even attempt to prove their innocence—"they look into the general report book and find their 5068 scholars. From our knowledge of the number of masters now in the district, and the average number of scholars taught by each master, we think and believe the reported number accurate and correct." Thomas Smyth and James Tarnan, both of the parish of Kells, were masters under the Irish Society, for whom the inspectors returned about 70 scholars. Let the inspectors give the name of any one scholar ever taught Irish, or produced to them, as such, for inspection, by either Smyth or Tarnan.

To satisfy their benefactors, that the system was working well, that the loss of morality, must be a preparatory step to a conversion to "*genuine Christianity*," and to secure a continuance of their patronage and support, it is proclaimed to the world that 125 masters renounced the Catholic faith, by adopting resolutions inconsistent with our principles, at Kingscourt, on the 5th instant. That many of the Irish masters signed the resolutions, I admit; that some of them would sign any resolutions, which their employers would require, may be equally true; that they would for money barter their country, their consciences, their religion, I will not dispute; but that the majority of them understood the meaning or tendency of the resolutions, I deny. These masters did not mean, I am convinced, to reject tradition and to renounce all ecclesiastical authority; they did not mean to make the Written Word their sole rule of faith, nor themselves the judges of the Word; they did not mean to claim a liberty which would lead to infidelity. In a word, they never meant, I am satisfied, to renounce the Catholic faith. They were deceived, and cruelly imposed upon. I hope that an imposition so insulting to their understandings as men, and so opposite to their principles as Catholics, may have the effect of guarding them against a recurrence of similar insult and mockery. What I have now advanced will appear from the enclosed declarations.

If I pass by in silence the conduct of Reilly, the Inspector, it is not that I am unable to support his first declaration, and satisfactorily account for his second; and should it seem to exhibit a more than ordinary degree of profligacy, it will be remembered, that he was the patriarch of the Irish Society, whose confidential servant he was from its infancy.

Kells, September 28, 1827.

✠ ROBERT LOGAN.