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THE ROYAL SCHOOLS.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. CHICHESTER FORTESCUE, M.P.,

Chief Secretary for Ireland.

BY

THE REV. WILLIAM STEELE, M.A.,

HEAD MASTER OF PORTORA ROYAL SCHOOL.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS,
BY M. H. GILL.

1869.

Houses of the Oireachtas

LETTER,

&c. &c.

PORTORA ROYAL SCHOOL, ENNISKILLEN,
January, 1869.

SIR,

You will probably consider the importance of the subject treated of in the following letter—viz., the condition and prospects of our Irish Grammar Schools, such as to give it a claim on your attention ; but the writer, who, doubtless, is unknown to you, is conscious that he requires some introduction. Permit me, then, for this purpose, to refer you to the following letter from the late Lord Carlisle :—

“ DUBLIN CASTLE,

“ *April 3, 1863.*

“ MY DEAR MR. STEELE,

“ I have long cherished the conviction that when I have to leave Ireland, your appointment will be among the bequests to which I shall look back with the

greatest satisfaction. If nothing intervenes to prevent me, I shall have extreme pleasure in visiting Portora on the 23rd of June.

“ Very faithfully yours,

“ CARLISLE.”

Lord Carlisle appointed me to the Head Mastership of Raphoe Royal School in the year 1855 ; and, without any solicitation whatever on my part, transferred me to Portora Royal School in the year 1857. And the knowledge that that accomplished and excellent nobleman never regretted my appointment shall ever, whilst I live, afford me sincere gratification.

Even a casual observer cannot fail to perceive that all the nobility, including our bishops, many of whom are Patrons of Irish Grammar Schools and affect an interest in their welfare, and a very large proportion—possibly nine tenths—of the gentry, in Ireland, send their sons to English Schools.

Whether this fashion, which has become the rage, and which appears very likely to continue, is calculated to aggravate the evils of Ireland, by encouraging absenteeism and fostering anti-Irish sentiment in our upper classes, I leave to statesmen and politicians to determine.

If this practice arose from any deficiency in the Grammar Schools of Ireland, it might be checked by improving those Schools and rendering them more efficient ; but inefficiency in our Schools cannot be

assigned as the chief cause—if, indeed, it be a cause at all—of this evil ; for, on investigation, it would be found that some of the Irish Royal Schools have, during the last ten years, sent out from their classes a larger proportion of men distinguished, both in the Universities and at the Public Competitive Examinations, than any of the English Public Schools.

But although the practice of sending the sons of our nobility and gentry to English Schools cannot be attributed to inefficiency in our Irish Public Schools, at least in the Royal Schools, yet it is evident that such practice tends inevitably to the injury, and, finally, to the extinction of all our first-class Grammar Schools ; the second and third-class Schools may still continue to enjoy that small and precarious measure of prosperity which appears to satisfy them.

But whilst those classes who used to support our Irish Grammar Schools voluntarily abandon them and send their sons to England, there is a very numerous and important section of the community who are, I may confidently affirm, *utterly destitute of the means of suitably educating their sons*. I refer to the thousands of gentlemen residing in country districts, whose means, whether derived from land or professions, range between £200 and £400 a year. This class embraces a vast number of the Clergy. None of these, under the present Grammar School system in Ireland, can afford to give to their sons that liberal education which suits their rank, and alone can enable them to maintain the position in which they were born. Any person ac-

quainted with the country districts knows that the fact is as here stated.

The effect which such a state of things, if allowed to go on, must have on the country at large I leave our rulers to consider. For a number of years the most laudable efforts have been made by them to diffuse the advantages of primary education, and bring them within the reach of the humblest classes ; but the higher education—which is now the passport to the Indian Civil Service, the Army, Woolwich, and almost all offices and employments which are sought after by the better classes—has not commanded similar attention. And our physicians and clergy, and other gentlemen of small means residing in country districts, are unable to give their children that liberal education which they had themselves received, and without which social degradation is inevitable.

Here, then, two great evils are exhibited to the view : on the one hand, the futility of large endowments set apart for the purposes of education ; and, on the other hand, the destitution, in an educational point of view, of a very numerous and important section of the community. It is obvious that there ought to exist some method which would have the effect of simultaneously removing both these evils. Such a method does exist, and one which presents not much practical difficulty in its application.

It has always appeared to me that our Irish Grammar Schools, even in their most flourishing estate, laboured under one serious disadvantage as

PORTORA ROYAL SCHOOL.

The Pupils of this School have, within the LAST TWO YEARS, viz. :—1872 and 1873, obtained the following distinctions in Trinity College, Dublin :

121 Honors or Prizes, including 46 First Honors at the Term Examinations, 12 of which were First of the First, 7 Gold Medals, 3 Scholarships, 4 Senior Exhibitions.

Within the last 15 years about 220 Pupils from Portora have entered Trinity College, Dublin, and have obtained upwards of 600 Honors or Prizes, including 239 First Honors at the Term Examinations, 64 High Places at Entrance, 27 Gold Medals, 36 Royal Scholarships, 20 University Scholarships, 20 Entrance Prizes in Composition.

The Pupils of this School have also been remarkably Successful at the Public Examinations for admission into the INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE, ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY, WOOLWICH, Army, &c., &c.

THE SANITARY CONDITION of the School, which for many years has enjoyed a singular exemption from sickness of all kinds, evinces the healthfulness of the situation and the wholesomeness of the Dietary.

In testimony of this important fact, Mr. STEELE refers to the following Gentlemen who reside in the neighbourhood, and have sons Boarders at the School :

N. M. ARCHDALE, Esq., Crocknacrieve, Ballinamallard ;
Rev. R. VERSCHOYLE, Derryvullen Rectory, Ballinamallard ;
Rev. H. ARCHDALE, Trory Glebe, Enniskillen.

same time, susceptible of a complete and easy remedy,

Grammatical Schools,

estate, laboured under one serious disadvantage as

compared with the Public Schools of England (or the Continent). They were too small even when full. Seventy or eighty pupils is the highest number to which even the best and most popular aspired, and many of them never attained to the half of that number. Such miserable collections did not deserve the title of "Public Schools," and were liable at any time to be overthrown by every breath of calumny or unpopularity. Moreover, the existing system is most extravagant. There are six or seven Head Masters doing the work of one ; ten or twelve classical assistants doing the work of two or three ; six or seven French masters doing the work of two ; and so for Mathematics, English, Drawing, &c. But it is not only in the number of masters that the present system of division is most extravagant, but also in the number of servants, and several other items. And this is the sole reason why the Masters of the Royal Schools *cannot*, even with their large endowments, give a first-rate education for such a moderate sum of money as the gentlemen I have referred to can afford to pay, and are obliged either to give a second-rate education, or to take chance of attracting to their School the sons of that small portion of the wealthier classes who regard the English education of Irish boys as a national evil which should not be encouraged. This whole subject has naturally occupied much of my thoughts for some time ; and, as the evils referred to seem to me to be both great and national, and, at the same time, susceptible of a complete and easy remedy,

I beg leave to submit to your consideration the following thoughts and scheme :—

No Grammar School, but a very cheap one, has any reasonable prospect of success in Ireland.

A well-governed School of 300 or 400 boys is in many respects superior to an equally well-governed School of 60 or 70 boys—

1. It is much more economical.
2. Class teaching can be better carried out.
3. The monitorial system may be developed.
4. Ill-principled boys have less influence.

If a first-rate education (Classics, Mathematics, Natural Science, English, French, German, Drawing), such as would enable an intelligent and industrious boy to present himself, with a reasonable prospect of success, at the Competitive Examination for admission into Woolwich, or the Indian Civil Service, or to enter the Universities, with a fair prospect of attaining the highest collegiate prizes, could be offered for a sum inclusive of all extras, not exceeding £40 a-year for boarders, nor £8 a year for day pupils, two or three hundred pupils might be calculated on.

This reduction of terms could be effected if the six Royal Schools were amalgamated, and one great School were founded, which might be called the Royal School of Ulster (as all the Royal Schools, with one trifling exception, are situated in Ulster).

All the rents of the School Estates, and the payments made by pupils, should pass into the hands of a responsible Board of Education, and all the masters

3 should be paid fixed salaries ; and the Head Master, with the ~~four~~ principal assistants in Classics, Mathematics, English, ~~and Natural Science~~, should also receive small Capitation Fees—~~say £1 to the Head Master, and 10s. to each of the others.~~

The providing for the food of the Establishment should be committed to an officer (Cook or House-keeper), who should be accountable for the manner in which he discharged his daily duties to the School Board, which should have the power of imposing a moderate fine on him.

Under the present system the Head Master is charged not only with the management and superintendence of the Educational Department, but also with the task of providing for the entire establishment—a burden too great for any man, and related too closely to his pecuniary interests.

The School Board should consist of the Head Master (*Chairman*), First Classical Assistant, First Mathematical Assistant, First English Assistant, and the Natural Science* Master. This Board should meet once a month to transact all necessary business, and transmit a Report to the Board of Education.

The Exhibitions at present attached to the Royal Schools are tenable only by pupils who have entered

* If an amalgamation of the six Royal Schools into one College, such as I have suggested, were carried out, ample funds would exist for founding a Mastership in Natural Science, which subject is now excluded from School Teaching by want of means.

Trinity College, Dublin, and have subsequently passed a severe examination in Classics, and have shown also some proficiency in English Literature, French, and Mathematics. These Exhibitions in the University should be abolished—

- a.* As not sufficiently liberal in idea ; for why should they be limited to Trinity College, Dublin ? and why to classical scholars ?

Some of the most meritorious pupils I ever had were excluded, by the existing regulations, from all prospect of gaining exhibitions ; for either they did not enter Trinity College, Dublin, or they were not first-rate classical scholars, although highly distinguished in other most important branches of learning, *e. g.* Mathematics.

- b.* They are also of very questionable utility, for although they were, doubtless, founded by “the Commissioners of Education in Ireland” with the view of enabling scholars of small means to enter Trinity College, and pursue their studies there, and take out their degree of Bachelor of Arts ; yet no boy’s University education depends on them ; for any pupil who could gain an Exhibition could certainly obtain an University Scholarship, and could get private pupils, if he wished, which would enable him to go through College. And many boys are, as I have observed, and as I have often heard College Tutors say, notoriously injured by gaining them.

Exhibitions in the School should be substituted, say—

Twenty	annual prizes of	£20	} = £1300 a-year;
Twenty	"	£15	
Forty	"	£10	
Forty	"	£5	

conferred according to a plan which had regard to conduct as well as attainments and recognized merit in all the classes of the School.

This would enable 120 boys to get all the advantages of the School for sums varying from £20 to £35 a-year.

Proposed salaries of the principal Masters paid out of the endowment :—

1. Head Master, £600 a-year.
2. First Classical, £200 a-year.
3. First Mathematical, £200 a-year.
4. First English, £200 a-year.
5. Natural Science, £250 a-year.
6. French, £200 a-year.
7. Drawing, £150 a-year.

The Head Master and three principal assistants should receive, in addition to their fixed salaries, capitation fees, viz., the Head Master three pounds per annum for each pupil on the School roll; the second Master, two pounds; and each of the others, one pound.

The School should consist of at least four houses, presided over by the Head Master, First Classical Master, First Mathematical Master, and First English Master.

All the Masters and Boarders should dine, breakfast, and sup in one common hall every day.

Day-pupils should be admitted to the Commons' Hall on payment of a fixed sum. This would enable boys to attend the School classes from a distance.

The following calculation will show the practical nature of the foregoing scheme, on the supposition that the School consisted of 200 Boarders and 50 Day-pupils :—

RECEIPTS.

200 Boarders, at £40 each,	£8000
50 Day-pupils, at £8 „	400
Endowments of Royal Schools,	6000
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Total sum available,	£14,400

EXPENDITURE.

Commons for 200 Boarders, at £35 each for the nine school months (i. e. at the rate of £42 per annum for each pupil),	£6000
Head Master and other Foundation Masters,	1800
Non-Foundation Masters, in proportion to the number of Pupils,	600
Capitation Fees from 250 Pupils,	1750
School Scholarships,	1300
Cook and Housekeeper,	150
Laundry,	250
Fuel and Gas,	300
Necessary Repairs,	200
Servants,	300
Commons for Head Master and Eleven Assistants,	300
	<hr/>
	£12,950

Leaving a balance to credit of between ^{one and} ~~Two and~~ ~~Three~~ Thousand Pounds.

There cannot be any doubt, I think, that the plan here proposed could be carried out, and that it would be a great boon to the country, and a vast improvement on the present system, which never has, I venture to say, produced fruit commensurate with the extent of the endowments, and has now well nigh utterly collapsed, in consequence of the migration of Irish boys to England, which has of late years vastly increased, by reason of the increased facility of communication between the two countries.

I cannot conclude this letter without adverting to an indirect but very important advantage which would result to the country from such a re-modelling of the Royal Schools as I have sketched. There seems to be a strong desire now in the minds of our Rulers to place, so far as they possibly can, all the inhabitants of this country, irrespective of religious differences, on a footing of perfect equality. But no Roman Catholic gentleman could, under existing arrangements, send his son as boarder to one of our Royal Schools ; for, although the Master might be—as I certainly should be—quite willing to receive such a boy, and to exempt him from all religious instruction which his parents objected to, and give him facilities for receiving such religious teaching as they might desire ; yet, such a boy, living under the same roof with a large number of boys and men differing from him in religion, could not be happy, nor properly educated, under circum-

stances so prejudicial to the formation of a manly and virtuous character.

Now, under the system suggested in this letter, it would be always possible to have one house, or two if necessary, occupied by a Roman Catholic Master, who could take charge of the boys of his own religion, and duly instruct them, or see that they were instructed as their parents desired.

I now conclude, trusting that I have not trespassed too much on your patience, and beg to subscribe myself, with much respect,

Your obedient servant,

W. STEELE,

Head Master of Portora Royal School.

P. S.—I am prepared to show, if called upon, that the scheme proposed in this letter could be carried into effect within twelve months to the satisfaction of all parties, and at an outlay not exceeding £4000; which would be repaid in a short time by the profits of the School.

W. S.

LETTER,

&c. &c.

Houses of the Oireachtas