9

ON

FREEDOM OF EDUCATION;

WITH REMARKS ON

THE GOVERNMENT MEASURE

FOR

INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION IN IRELAND.

BY

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ON

FREEDOM OF EDUCATION.

THE problem of education is closely connected with social science, and as such, I have endeavoured in what follows to divest it of certain fallacies under which it has been disguised. A careful examination of the subject has led me to recognize the soundness of the principle of FREEDOM OF EDUCATION.

The practical development of this principle may be stated as follows. The interference of the State with education should be strictly equitable, whether in furnishing resources for its maintenance, or in giving the weight of a formal recognition to the results of its operations. No exclusive monopoly of education by the advocates of a single special system should be allowed to obstruct the diffusion of knowledge. Every religious or secular educational party should be entitled to receive its fair proportion of the assistance granted by the State for the promotion of education, and no student who has stored his mind with the treasures of science or literature, should encounter any obstacle in obtaining a just acknowledgment for his attainments.

The advantages which a country derives from the diffusion of knowledge among its population, are now universally admitted. An inquiry thus naturally arises as to the nature of the actual or possible impediments to education. Such impediments may be classed under two principal heads. 1. Difficulties in the way of obtaining suitable education for those by whom it is required. 2. Obstacles to the realization of the advantages conferred by education after it has been obtained. The action of impediments of the first class is obvious, while that of the second may exercise an indirect but important influence.

Education of the most elementary, as well as of the highest kind, requires the aid of certain instruments. The most prominent of these are teachers and books. The great majority of students require the stimulating influence of personal instruction and superintendence throughout all the principal steps of their educational career. The influence of the teacher upon the pupil necessarily depends not only on the attainments but on the character of the teacher. If the pupil is not solitary, but associated with others in a school or college, the characters of his companions may possibly exercise some influence on the development of his own. All these circumstances may exist in every stage of education, from the most elementary to the highest; and thus it happens that, while the friends of education are unanimous as to the importance of a wide diffusion of knowledge and

of training youth in such mental habits as are best adapted for the subsequent fulfilment of the duties of life, very important differences arise as to the arrangements under which these desirable results can be most effectively accomplished. We may classify the parties so differing under two great divisions. 1. Those who believe that mental training should be always so closely accompanied by religious influences as to render a separate system indispensable for the youth of each denomination. 2. Those who maintain the possibility of separating the moral and religious part of education from that which is simply intellectual, and consequently the possibility of establishing what is designated as a mixed system of secular education.

In establishments conducted on the separate system, all the teachers must necessarily profess the same religious principles, while in those devoted to a truly mixed system, the teachers must conform to different varieties of belief. The unity or diversity of religious views among the pupils does not define the essential nature of the education which they receive: this is determined by the presence or absence of such conditions among the teachers. Thus, if one hundred pupils, belonging to several religious denominations, were instructed by six teachers, all attached to the persuasion A, in so far as the convictions of the teachers could influence the instruction they give, that instruction should be considered as in harmony with the views of persons belonging to the deno-

mination A. Conversely, if one hundred pupils, all professing the religion A, were to receive instruction from six teachers belonging to the denominations A, B, C, D, E, F, the education received by each pupil, in so far as it could be influenced by the varied doctrines of his teachers, would be of a mixed character, and consequently the education of the entire group of pupils. I would not say that I received a mixed education, if, in company with other students of different religious denominations, I received instructions from a set of teachers professing one creed; but if, on the contrary, *all* my fellow-students belonged to my own faith, and if we were taught ancient languages and history by a member of the Church of England, modern history by a Presbyterian, modern languages by a Methodist, physical science by an Unitarian, and so forth, I should say that I had been educated strictly according to a mixed system.

The dependence of the moral and religious features of any system of education upon the doctrines of the educators, and not on those of the learners, was well recognized in the profound policy of the Emperor Julian, when he desired to weaken the hold of Christianity upon the minds of the growing generation. He endeavoured to totally separate Christianity from education, and even to render the latter hostile to the former, through the instrumentality of teachers openly opposed to the Christian faith. Gibbon, who cannot

be accused of partiality to Christianity, strongly condemns this violation of freedom; for "if the greatest part of the Christian youth should be deterred by their own scruples, or by those of their parents, from accepting this dangerous mode of instruction, they must at the same time relinquish the benefits of a liberal education"—*chapter* xxiii.

In a note belonging to the same chapter Gibbon further says:—"The Christians were *directly* forbid to teach; they were *indirectly* forbid to learn; since they would not frequent the schools of Pagans." These were not considered as mixed schools, although Christians as well as Pagans might constitute the pupils: they were regarded as strictly Pagan schools, because they were altogether under Pagan management.

A system wherein students of different religious persuasions are educated together, is frequently designated as a united system; but, if the teachers are not united on fundamental points, how are we to name the kind of education which they give? So far as teachers are concerned, education may be mixed or uniform; so far as pupils, separate or united. The total number of possible combinations of each kind would be four, of which mixed-separate, and uniform-united, may be excluded as incompatible, and thus the mixed-united and uniform-separate, are those which actually exist in practice.

Although I do not propose to discuss the relative

merits of uniform or mixed systems of education, it has appeared to me desirable, for the objects of my present inquiry, that the real nature of these systems should be distinctly stated. This is the more indispensable, as most erroneous ideas appear to be widely prevalent regarding the specific character of mixed, as distinguished from uniform education. The nature of these systems is supposed to depend on the doctrines professed by the pupils, and not on those of the teachers,—on the persons who *receive* education, and not upon those by whom it is given. As the words *mixed* and *uniform* apply to education itself, and not to the individuals who come under its influence, it will be more correct to employ these terms instead of others when we wish to distinguish the systems of instruction advocated by the secular and religious parties respectively.

Whatever may be the advantages claimed for the mixed or uniform systems of education, it appears manifest that the greater part of purely intellectual and professional training may be equally well carried on under either. If all of a group of teachers professing the religious views A, B, C, etc., were perfectly equal in abilities to a corresponding group professing the single view A, while the moral and religious influences exercised by each group on a given number of pupils would be different, the purely mental and professional results of teaching would be the same He who regards knowledge as good in

itself, and who would sincerely rejoice to see its general diffusion, would be comparatively indifferent as to the existence of different systems under which that great end may be effected. Should those who conscientiously adhere to specific systems of education be deterred from the pursuit of knowledge by obstacles in the way of that pursuit, arising from the necessity of compromising their convictions, he would regret the existence of such obstacles, and be glad to assist in their removal. Happily for England, the independence of all systems appears to be fairly recognized, and few countries present so many illustrations of the results of the principle of freedom of education. The universities, the higher schools, and above all, those elementary establishments which are devoted to the education of the humbler classes, present us with instances of different varieties of uniform and mixed education. The more ardent advocates of both systems have repeatedly attempted to reduce all education into strict conformity with their own views; but the great moderate party, which regards knowledge as a blessing, under whatever system it may be acquired, constantly interposes its salutary influence to check such fatal aberrations. Yet, as many well-meaning persons will always firmly believe that no system of instruction should be permitted for their neighbours, which does not conform to their own religious or non-religious views, even in England, the principle of freedom of education can-

not be too strenuously upheld, nor too firmly consolidated.*

In Ireland, this principle appears as yet not to be understood, and it is far from being acknowledged in the same way as it is in England ; yet we shall soon see that Ireland presents some examples of its practical development.

In England, the population may be considered as belonging to two great religious groups : 1. Members of the Established Church ; and 2. Those who do not conform to that Church.

The second group includes some very important subdivisions. As far as concerns the elementary education coming under the management of the Committee of Council, I find from Mr. Horace Mann's report, that in 1851 no less than twenty-five nonconformist persuasions possessed separate schools, more or less aided by the bounty of the State. Out of 12,708 schools, only 518 were mixed ; and out of 1,188,786 pupils, only 83,659 were educated on the mixed-united principle. The Sunday schools, as should be expected, were all on the uniform principle. It thus appears that the practical result of the existence of freedom of elementary education in England has been, upon the whole, favourable to the separate uniform education of children of different denominations. The growing importance of reformatory and

* Part of this essay was first read at Liverpool before the Association or Social Science.

ragged schools, and the fair promise which they hold forth of rescuing from vice those who seem destined by hereditary succession to be its victims, suggests the importance of applying the same general principle to the management of such schools, which has been found so effective in those under the care of the Committee of Council.

In Ireland the system of national education, which is supported by the bounty of the State, has been widely developed. The schools under the Board are numerous and usually well filled. The system on which they are conducted is supposed to be essentially mixed or united; but in practice this is rarely the fact. In three provinces of Ireland these schools are usually filled by Catholic children who are taught by Catholic teachers. In the fourth province, the schools are sometimes Presbyterian and sometimes Catholic, both being perfectly distinct. The arrangements of the National Board not having given satisfaction to the greater part of the clergy of the Irish Church, very few poor children belonging to that Church have availed themselves of the schools, and they are compelled to depend for their education on the assistance afforded by the charity of their co-religionists.

The really united or mixed schools, or those in which pupils of different religions are taught together, or where they receive instruction from teachers of different persuasions, are comparatively excep-

tional. Besides these, there are many professedly established on the uniform principle, such as those of the Christian Brothers for Catholics, and of the Church Education Society for members of the Irish Church. The recent Report of the Endowed Schools bears high testimony to the efficiency of the schools referred to, as instruments for the diffusion of sound knowledge among the population of Ireland. In this respect they have been shown to be superior to most of the endowed schools established on the mixed principle. Notwithstanding any merits they may possess, under present arrangements they cannot participate in the bounty of the State. No matter how complete may be the elementary education they impart, or how perfect the educational methods employed in diffusing knowledge among their pupils, they are shut out from all state assistance, because they remove religion from a subordinate position, and concede to it the same place which it occupies in the English schools that are aided by the public money.

It thus appears that we have in Ireland three classes of elementary schools for the education of the poor. First, those which are openly on the separate religious principle, and which therefore receive no public grants; secondly, those on the mixed principle, and which are actually so in practice; thirdly, those which are understood to be mixed, but are in reality uniform.

The national system in Ireland owes the greater part of what success it has attained, not to a rigorous maintenance of the principle of mixed education, but to the prudent concessions made by the Commissioners to the more comprehensive and generous principle of freedom of education. It does not follow that this principle has been distinctly recognized by the Board of Education ; but they have at least allowed it to be acted upon by their officers. The *laissez faire* policy of the National Board, while far from satisfying very influential members of the Catholic majority, has necessarily resulted in producing much dissatisfaction among Protestants. The existence of such feelings not only supplies additional elements to the religious dissensions which exist, but must also seriously impede the spread of sound education. The emphatic recognition of freedom of education for the people of Ireland as well as for the people of England, while giving a fresh impulse to the further diffusion of knowledge, would also tend to allay much of the irritation that arises from vainly attempting to adhere solely to a system approved by a single party, and to force all other parties into its virtual adoption.

What is usually designated as intermediate education, namely, that which usually precedes the University, may be the work of establishments resulting from private enterprise, or it may be carried on in public schools endowed by the State. In the former

the principle of freedom of education must necessarily prevail. The head of such a school can adopt any uniform or mixed system that he deems most advisable. This he would probably do with due regard to the local circumstances of his school, and not exclusively upon some preconceived ideas. He would not, for instance, expect much success if he established a mixed school in a place where the population all around entertained strong views in favour of uniform religious education. Another teacher provided with an equally efficient staff of assistants, all professing the religion prevalent in the district, would be more likely not only to remunerate himself, but to advance the cause of education. Intermediate schools, supported by the bounty of the State, should undoubtedly be managed in conformity with the same business-like principle. The success of such schools must in a great measure depend upon their prudent recognition of the principle of Freedom of Education.

The nature of the evidence accumulated by the Commissioners of Endowed Schools in Ireland, as well as the views developed by the Commissioners themselves, prove that a rigid adherence to any special religious or non-religious system for intermediate schools would be highly injudicious. The people of Ireland have reason to gratefully remember the energetic opposition of a portion of the Commissioners to a proposal for inflicting upon that country

the general predominance of a single exclusive system. Such a despotic suggestion may excite astonishment in other countries, but its advocates in Ireland gravely assume to themselves the exclusive possession of *liberal* educational views.

With that education which provides for the service of the country the highest degree of trained intellectual power, which fills the ranks of our professions, and which influences the development of all other education by moulding the minds of those who are its instruments or its legislators, the State claims some right to interfere. It is manifest that the nature of such interference will determine the existence or non-existence not only of the first but also of the second class of possible impediments to education, namely, obstacles to the realization of the advantages of education, after it has been obtained. On this question the tendency of public opinion is very decidedly exhibited by the general approval which has been accorded to the system of competitive examinations for appointments in the public service. It is impossible to conceive a more emphatic recognition of the principle of freedom of education than that which consists in making the tests of knowledge independent of extraneous circumstances. Nothing can be better adapted to exalt the true dignity of letters and science than to acknowledge that their possession furnishes a sufficient title of merit, without any consideration as to where or how that possession

was obtained. Never was there a more complete vindication of freedom of education than in the brief remark of Mr. John Stuart Mill, in reply to a query of the Civil Service Commission, when asking his opinion upon the value of the proposed scheme of examinations. On the proposal that each candidate should possess a certificate from the head of the college where he had studied, the very authority whose opinion was consulted, declared that by such a regulation he would be incapacitated from presenting himself as a candidate, as he had never studied in any college whatever.* Yet, as the great majority of students will generally require the stimulating effect of a public place of education, where knowledge is not only imparted but certified by a degree, the question arises, does the principle of freedom of education apply to such institutions?

It becomes important, therefore, to examine if this principle is duly recognized in the university system of these countries. This appears to hold in England, at least so far as it has been invoked by those who have founded universities. When the wants of members of the Established Church required a third university, in addition to the venerable institutions belonging to an earlier period, few disputed that the Church had an undoubted right to extend its means

* This should, of course, not dispense with such certificates from students actually studying in a college, for the Head would be the most natural person from whom testimony as to general character should be expected.

of university education. But when the project of a Metropolitan University, conducted according to the mixed principle, had been matured, and when a movement arose to induce the State to give that establishment its formal recognition, attempts were made to frustrate the proposal, principally on the ground that the projected university was unconnected with any kind of religion. The supporters of the London University, comprising a vast and intelligent body of persons of very different persuasions, each of which separately could not so effectively establish a university for itself, determined to persevere in urging forward the recognition of a mixed establishment. In conformity with the principle here upheld, they possessed an unquestionable right to have their demands satisfied. In doing so the State once more fully acknowledged freedom of education. Thus England possesses, besides those institutions so closely connected with her Church, a great University representing that numerous and important class of her citizens who believe that their sons can receive education united under teachers of widely different denominations, without any serious injury to those convictions which so deeply influence the career of every man, even in this world. How far they are right or wrong I do not here inquire: they are fully competent to judge for themselves. I regard their success as a triumph of the principle I here advocate, and as such look upon it as an important event in the history of education.

In Ireland the corresponding party has been much more favoured by the State, although it was far from displaying so much influence, or of accumulating any large independent funds for the attainment of its objects. While the friends of mixed education in England had to sustain their University for several years from their own resources, the State has afforded the entire of the funds required for a similar establishment in Ireland. Besides affording it a full and spontaneous recognition, a large amount of public money is devoted by the Legislature for its maintenance. All the material and intellectual resources required for an university on a great scale have been amply provided by money out of the public treasury. Had the mixed university party in Ireland been as numerous or as influential as its prototype in England, the results of all this expenditure would doubtless have been commensurate to the forces developed for their production. While the importance of this party in Ireland was overrated from the supposed success of mixed education in the National Schools, the existence of more powerful parties favourable to a separate or uniform system was nearly overlooked. One of these parties already possessed an university, which, though strictly unmixed according to the trne definition, had long since opened its halls to students of every denomination. The other party possessed the confidence of the majority of the people, but had not as yet been able to carry its views into practice,

but nevertheless always desired their realization. These circumstances constituted an essential difference between the conditions under which the Queen's Colleges and University had been established in Ireland, and those which accompanied the foundation of the University of London. Still, in conformity with my general principle, the minority in Ireland who conscientiously believe that education is best achieved in a mixed university, are undoubtedly entitled to possess an establishment conducted according to that system. It is true that, in spite of the possession of an excellent collegiate staff, liberal offers of rewards to diligent students, and the prestige of Government connection, the Queen's University cannot bear comparison in its practical results with what was achieved during a corresponding period of existence by the great mixed University of England. While the success of the latter has resulted from its natural connection with the principle of freedom of education, the absence of corresponding results in the former will appear to be in some measure connected with a negation of the same principle. It was apparently argued that, although so large a proportion of the people of Ireland were manifestly unfavourable to the mixed system of university education, yet that they would be ultimately *forced* to adopt that system, by having no choice between it and the system conducted in conformity with Protestant principles in the University of Dublin.

The projectors of the Queen's University were probably almost unconsciously the foes of freedom of education, and I cannot avoid expressing my conviction that at least one,* whose name has been closely connected with the cause of general education in Ireland, could never countenance a policy so strongly opposed to the instincts of a liberal and generous mind. This oversight has probably arisen from two causes peculiar to Ireland,—first, the remarkable success attained by the mixed system as it was supposed to be developed in the National Schools. It was forgotten that the success of these schools was, for the most part, precisely in proportion to their practical adoption of a separate uniform system. The second cause appeared still more plausible, namely, the difficulty in the way of creating a university adapted to the requirements of the Catholics, to the same extent as the University of Dublin was already adapted to the wants of the members of the Established Church.

The fact that circumstances, to which it is here unnecessary to allude, had long discouraged Catholics from the pursuit of the higher branches of learning in these countries, was doubtless supposed to surround with overwhelming difficulties the accumulation of the necessary intellectual resources for so great an undertaking. The numerous claims on the Catholics for other objects were possibly believed to

* Sir Thomas Wyse.

interpose insurmountable obstacles to the collection of the means indispensable for the foundation of such an establishment. If these surmises were ever made, they have been since in a great measure falsified; and whatever may be said as an excuse for overlooking the principle of freedom of education when the Queen's Colleges were at first set on foot, no pretext can now be alleged in favour of a continual violation of that principle.

The weight of public inquiries undertaken in Ireland preponderates in favour of extending to that country the principle of freedom of education which has been so long developed in England. The Report on the Endowed Schools, to which I have already referred, is highly instructive in this point. The different conclusions arrived at by the Commissioners themselves, clearly show that even those who are best informed on the state of education cannot concur in adopting any specific system. The manner in which such a system had to be in a great measure practically abandoned by the National Board, and the unsatisfactory results of a rigorous adherence to it in the Queen's Colleges, seem to show that it is impossible to force conflicting parties in Ireland, any more than here, to adopt any special system, no matter how skilfully framed. If, therefore, with Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, we regard the Government as a court for the protection of religious liberty in regard to education to which all denominations may

appeal, those who believe that education requires the direct participation of religion, have assuredly some right to be heard, as well as those who maintain the opposite opinion.

The Government will find that sectarian disagreements are not to be softened in Ireland, any more than in England, by forcing different denominations to coalesce in matters where they would prefer to be separate. Those who have proved the earnestness of their convictions by refusing to participate in the bounty of the State when any participation would be accompanied by conditions hurtful to their conscientious feelings, are assuredly entitled to receive some degree of attention. This would be simple justice, and not partiality; it would not be so much conferring a favour upon isolated parties, as it would form a distinct acknowledgment of freedom of education. Such views, happily for these countries, seem to be daily gaining ground among thinking men, and they have been more than once recently uttered from the lips of statesmen.

At page 13 the application of the principle to the question of intermediate education has been discussed, and it is manifest that the Bill which has been brought before the House of Lords, on the 21st of June, 1878, by the Lord Chancellor on behalf of the Government, is in harmony with the views I have enunciated. Impartial justice is done in this Bill to every system of education, and each is to be

fairly endowed according to the fruits it shall produce. It is scarcely possible to doubt that this measure, if passed into law, will prove to be the most successful attempt at improving the state of education in Ireland that has been yet achieved. It distinctly recognises that Roman Catholic schools, Protestant schools, and mixed schools, may all compete on equal terms for the bounty furnished by the State. In Germany such a recognition of freedom of education has been long since crowned with success; and there seems no reasonable doubt that in every country where there are different educational denominations, a corresponding success should not be also achieved.

Since the principle of freedom of education was first enunciated by me at the meeting of the Association for the Promotion of Social Science, it has never obtained such an emphatic practical application to the problem of education in Ireland as it receives in the Bill now before Parliament.

The strength which that principle has acquired by the results of the English national system, as exhibited in the minutes of the Committee of Council, has caused it to become firmly rooted in the congenial soil of Britain. Happy will it be for Ireland when the same principle shall be openly acted upon in her educational arrangements, and when Government will regard the question of Irish as well as of English education from that cosmopolitan point of

view which is so becoming on the part of those to whom is entrusted the management of an empire that comprises in its vast extent so many diversities of religion and race.

Such a spirit seems to have animated the framers of the new Bill for Intermediate Education in Ireland, and it realizes the condition of conformity to the principle of freedom of education by the method of results such as I have alluded to at page 15, when referring to the operations of the Civil Service Commission. Its grand merit is, that for the first time the highest school culture is acknowledged as so important to the welfare of Ireland, as to merit the application of the bounty of the State, irrespective of the how or the where that culture may have been obtained; and it may be fairly concluded, that every true friend of the Irish people will cordially co-operate with the Government in accelerating the passage through Parliament of a measure of such rare excellence.

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