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THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT CRISIS.

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THE thoughts in the following pages are submitted as aids to reflection on the grave question, which now engages the attention of the friends of Scriptural Education. They are not offered to the notice of those, who are content to follow a leader without the trouble of enquiry, nor to those, who think that the subject has been closed against further discussion. Whoever desires to seek truth in its own spirit and for its own sake, will not neglect to use the most available means of informing and rectifying his judgment. If assertions be doubtful, he will endeavour to remove the doubt, by referring to authentic testimony ; if a limitation be imposed on a principle, under a state of facts, not previously considered, he will neither disregard the dictates of common sense nor of conscience, in determining the lawfulness of the limitation. It



is anxiously desired that the following suggestions may be tried by any test which can lawfully be used, by those who are willing themselves to be judged by the law of liberty. This will exclude exaggeration, sarcasm, and personality, so that the way may be cleared for the progress of truth, and the path of duty made more plain.



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IN the address from the Lord Primate to the Clergy of his own diocese, his Grace brings under their notice the following facts as to the existing state of the Church Schools. "Several of them are quite inefficient, owing to the want of adequate funds. The salaries are not large enough to secure the services of properly qualified teachers, and the supply of books and other school requisites falls very far short of what is called for." He then gives the following advice :—

"It is for the patrons of these impoverished and inefficient schools to judge whether, by renewed efforts, they can raise them from their depressed condition, so that the youthful members of the Church may not be left without the secular instruction which is needed to qualify them for competing with those of other communions in the struggles of life which lie before them. If exertions of this kind can be made, with any hope of success, they ought to be made promptly ; but if all expectation of increasing the funds of these schools be at an end, and the evils attending a defective education of the children be imminent, then it appears to me that it would be advisable to seek for aid from the Commissioners of National Education, rather than allow



the children of our communion to grow up in a state of ignorance, or expose them to the danger which would arise from their resorting for secular education to National Schools under the management and influence of patrons who are hostile to our Church."

Whilst offering this advice for the guidance of the patrons who may be placed under the pressure of circumstances, to which this advice exclusively relates, the Primate assumes it to be quite consistent with a faithful adherence, on his part, to the fundamental rules of the Society, and the continuance of his munificent liberality in its support.

The Bishop of Ossory, in an elaborate address, has expressed his deep regret that this advice should have been given by the Primate; and he asserts that it amounts to a surrender of the principles on which the Church Education Society has been founded and supported.

The advice of the Bishop to his own Clergy is, that to take aid from the Commissioners of Education, under ANY circumstances, however pressing, would be a violation of their duty to God, if such aid can only be obtained by a submission to the distinctive rule of the National System.

Under circumstances in which there is a freedom of choice between an efficient Church School and a National School, the Primate does not hesitate to approve and uphold the former, as that which ought to be maintained. According to the Bishop, it would be the duty of an incumbent to leave his parish without a school altogether, rather



than submit to the restriction imposed by the rule of the National System. He asserts that submission to the existing rule, under ANY circumstances, is a violation of duty to God. The Primate says that it is the duty of the incumbent not to submit, if he can maintain his Church School so as to meet the educational exigencies of the children under his charge, but that it is his duty to submit, rather than leave the children without suitable education, and without the superintendence which is proper for their pastor to afford as the patron of a school for their use.

The Bishop thus takes on himself the onus of establishing, that to submit, under ANY pressure, however exceptional, would be sinful; that no education may be a great calamity, but that submission to the rule, even in this case, would be a greater, for it would be a grievous sin. He says it is a question for the judgment and conscience of his Clergy, whether they should follow his advice. "The materials," he adds, "for deciding this question all lie before you, and, in my mind, they lie in a very narrow compass." These materials are supplied in the following extract from his address:—

"In your school, now, the Bible is read every day, whether you visit it or not, by all the scholars, as a regular part of the business of the day; and you can yourself go into it at any time, and make any use of the Bible, or any reference to the Bible, which you may feel to be necessary or useful; and you may accommodate such use and references to what you know of the character and circumstances



of the children, or any of them, so as to meet and provide for any special evils or weaknesses in themselves, or any special danger arising out of their circumstances. You may be, in short, all that a Christian patron would desire to be to children committed to him, some of whom have no other instructor, and others, it may be, worse than none.

“But if you connect your school with the National Board, all this liberty is at an end. You will not only engage to restrain your teacher from reading the Bible, or having it read, during the hours of the ordinary business of the school, when all the scholars are assembled, but you will bind yourself, during all that time, to abstain from all and every use of the Bible in the school, either in the way of reading, or citation, or reference. You can neither instruct, nor advise, nor admonish, nor rebuke, nor warn those immortal beings who have come to your school to be taught, and who are all assembled before you. You must know that they all need to have the Word of God so applied to them, and you may know that some of them stand in special and urgent need of such a use of the Word. But you cannot minister it to them. You must keep the Book closed, and your lips closed, until the hour comes when the Rule allows you to open them; and then you may see all those, whose need of such instruction you know to be the most urgent, go away without receiving it. And this may go on, day after day, until they pass out of your school into life, with all its temptations, and trials, and sorrows, without ever having been made acquainted



with the Blessed Book, which was given for every child in the school, to be his guide through life, to shield him against its temptations, to support him under its trials, and to comfort him in its sorrows—without ever having heard a word from you of their guilt, and their pollution, and their spiritual wants, and of the Saviour, and of his all-sufficiency—without ever having heard a word from you, in fact, which they might not have heard if Christ had never come down from heaven, or if God had not given a book to tell us he had come down—what he did and what he said—what he suffered, and why he suffered, while he was upon earth.”

The inapplicability of this comparison—as irrelevant, and therefore inconclusive—will be apparent when it is remembered that what the Bishop undertook to establish was, not that a genuine Church School was to be preferred to the imaginary National School which he has described, nor even to a National School as it might be described in accordance with the real state of the case ; but his advice and assertion, and what he bound himself to prove is this—*that to be without a school at all, is preferable to having a genuine National School under an incumbent as the patron.*

It is not, perhaps, of importance to the argument, but it is due to accuracy of statement to notice that there is a considerable limitation on the freedom of the patron of the Church Education School, which has been here overlooked by the Bishop. “In the Church Education Society it is the principle and the practice to abstain from all attempts



to influence or disturb the belief of any Dissenting children, Roman Catholic or Protestant, who may attend our schools." This is taken from the Bishop's Charge of 1845, p. 271, note.

If the test of comparison be used, let the comparison now be made between the real objects of choice placed before the incumbent, who is compelled to make the selection. The pastor of a parish, with children to be educated, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, without a suitable, or any, school, and without means at his disposal for providing a suitable school, unless he avails himself of the aid of the Commissioners of Education, if he follow the advice of the Primate, would set up a National School. He might then prescribe the course of the school. It may be opened with prayer—there may be a daily Bible class, for all the children whose parents consent that they should attend; that is to say, for all who could lawfully receive Scriptural instruction, under the patron, even in a Church School—there may be a time set apart for catechetical instruction of the children of the Church, and the teaching of her formularies; there must be a period for combined secular instruction, at which all may be present, whether they attend on the religious instruction or not—none need be deprived of a careful daily instruction in the Word of God, except those whose parents object; and as to those, the patron cannot by law acquire, in the school or elsewhere, any liberty whatever, as to their instruction, against or without the consent, which the parent has the exclusive right to give or to withhold. These, therefore, may be



put out of view in considering this part of the controversy, for as the patron of the Church School cannot have more liberty as to these, than he has in the National School, so far as religious instruction is concerned, the restriction in the latter school is reduced to a limitation with reference to time and the order of business, and it is not a limitation of liberty as to persons.

There is no reason to think that the Primate has undervalued the unfettered freedom of the Church School, and the facility which it affords for the working of a parish; this freedom he desires to preserve, wherever it can be beneficially used; but in commending it as worthy of being faithfully preserved by every reasonable effort on the part of the incumbent and the continued support of the Society, he does not found this preference or this duty on any depreciation of the National School below the level at which it might be worked by a Church patron, who honestly desired to make the most of it for educating the children.

But now comes the alternative of not having a school at all.—What might the Bishop say to the incumbent, who would prefer to withdraw from the National School, and cease to be the patron of the best (if not the only) school, which it was in his power to provide, and which offered him means and opportunity of doing much good, though not with the same freedom at all hours of the day, as he could have wished to have retained? Might not the Bishop's words run thus:—"All this liberty—which was at least very considerable—is now at an end. You have thought



fit to throw away a great opportunity; you have abdicated your influential position as director of the course of daily instruction, with power to nominate and control the teacher; the Bible Class is now abandoned; catechetical instruction and the teaching of the formularies are given up; the children of the Church are left without instruction, secular or religious; the Roman Catholic who might have yielded to your faithful remonstrance and allowed his child to attend the Bible Class, has now no option; you have helped to rivet the bondage of error on both parent and child; you have placed yourself between your own flock and the instruction of their children, and from the increased importance of knowledge for their advancement in life, you have degraded them by leaving them to sink in the slough of ignorance. The Word of God assures you that if the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; you have abandoned your pastoral charge by handing over all the children either to ignorance, the parent of crime and superstition, or by leaving the position to be occupied by a hostile patron; the ample funds, which you might have appropriated to the purpose of giving the benefits of useful knowledge and the blessings of a pure faith to all who were willing to receive them, are now perverted to perpetuate what you were bound to consider as strange doctrines, contrary to God's Word; the ignorance and the errors which you were called on to banish, you have helped to perpetuate."

Such would be a fair, though feeble, paraphrase of what the able and esteemed Bishop might have



urged. With the practical wisdom and the candour of the incomparable Butler (his own great exemplar) he would probably not have omitted Butler's very words, that "children have as much right to some proper education, as to have their lives preserved;" and that "to bring up the poor in their former ignorance, now this knowledge is so much more common and wanted, would be, not to keep them in the same, but to put them into a lower condition of life than what they were in formerly."

If, instead of contemplating the irrelevant comparison between his vivid description of a school with a free Bible and that of a school without the Bible, he had concentrated his attention on the plain reality with which the Primate had to deal, and as to which he has advised with his habitual candour and meekness of wisdom; or, if he had made out with his own hand the programme of a National School, as it might be prepared by a willing Church patron, taking the rules of the Board to mean what the most rigid but candid commentator would say they did mean, and without overlooking the general law which restrains the liberty of every patron, so as to preserve the exclusive authority of every parent, in reference to the religious instruction of his child; if he then contemplated thoughtfully the fearful alternative of a state of ignorance, which throws into the shade his own description of the school without a ray of light from the Bible, could he have really brought himself to believe that a faithful pastor of a parish, the responsible servant of Him, who graciously commended her who did



what she could—a minister of that Gospel in which we are admonished to do good unto all, *as we have opportunity*—with the alternative before him of the darkness of ignorance, and the daylight of the National School, even without the full sunshine of a free Bible during all its hours, *should*, as a duty—as a duty to God and man—wilfully choose this alternative of midnight *darkness*, and leave the children of his parochial care to the hard fate which they must encounter under this neglect and desertion? In a genuine and efficient Church School, with unfettered freedom, ten talents might be entrusted to him; in the National School he might have one only; and yet the admonition of the Divine Word would suggest to the incumbent, that he should not imitate the example of the unprofitable servant.

It is not a little remarkable that the only person to whose mind this very alternative had previously presented itself, seems to have been the Bishop himself. In his celebrated charge in 1854,\* he says:—“Of those who do conform to the condition there may be, and *probably will be many, who are carrying out education on principles, which they neither like nor approve, but who submit to the condition as the only way of obtaining the means of carrying on education at all.*” What, after all, is it, but to do the best we can, in the circumstances in which God may place us, and which we cannot control? We may righteously desire to do better, to preserve our unfettered freedom, to put the

\* Page 58.



highest honour upon God's Holy Word; to bear the largest, fullest, freest testimony to the right and the duty of all to know and to obey His revealed will. But, "In the government of the visible world," says South, "the Supreme Wisdom, itself, submits to be the Author of the better, not of the best; but of the best possible in the subsisting relations." "We think," (says the editor of the *Christian Examiner*, of April, 1842, the well-known author of the plan proposed in the previous month of January,) "the Scriptures ought to be insisted on, but we know many in authority and power do not think so and will not insist on the Scriptures. Then comes our question—what would be *the next best thing* to be done? It is at this point we suggest our plan, and why in our judgment is this plan the next best thing? Because it will leave those who love the Scriptures at perfect liberty to introduce them into education, *to the greatest extent which circumstances will allow.*"

The hindrance to the Scriptural instruction of the Roman Catholic children, whose parents object to it, however much to be deplored, results mainly from the general law as to parental authority; it is not a consequence of the course which may be taken by any Church patron. Until he can persuade the parent to consent, he cannot lawfully interfere with the instruction of the child, whatever be the system of the school.

But it is said that by consenting to give the child so much as the parent may be willing to allow him to receive, that is to say, by agreeing to give the secular instruction only, the patron makes himself



responsible for not requiring him to receive the religious instruction to which the parent will not consent.

The case of Trinity College, though not at all parallel in degree, yet, as to this objection of complicity, seems to be decisive. After the Act of 1793 and the King's letter of 1794, the Board was bound to remove every impediment which stood in the way of a Roman Catholic taking his degree in Arts, and for this purpose to dispense in his favour with every rule of the system as to that part of the course of education in which it would be against his conscience to participate. This is the judicial exposition given by Judge Keatinge, as assessor to the Visitors, in Mr. Heron's case. All these rules, the instruction and the discipline under which the other students are Scripturally educated as Protestants, remain in full force; but the Roman Catholic is allowed to accept so much of the instruction as is not inconsistent with the conscientious convictions of his parent. His parent does not choose to allow him to receive Scriptural instruction, but it never was supposed that in consenting to admit him to take so much of the instruction as his parent is willing that he should receive, either the Board, or any Tutor acting under the control of the Board, would, in any degree, be responsible for not requiring what could not have been pressed upon the pupil without breach of faith and an unlawful disregard of parental authority. On the effect of this restriction in the Tutor's chambers, the Bishop of Ossory might have made a comment, like to that which he has



made in the case of the National School. In his own chambers, when he was a Tutor, he could not lawfully have made any use of the Scriptures to instruct, rebuke, or exhort any Roman Catholic student. No Tutor ever attempted to do this; and, although there is no express rule subscribed, there is, under the Statute, the Royal letter, and the system of the University, a restriction as morally binding upon every Tutor, as if it were set forth in the words of the rule of the National Board, and subscribed under hand and seal.

Under the *general* aspect of the question, it is true, the case of Trinity College may not be at all parallel with our Church Schools. It is founded for a great national object, on a basis of religious liberty; the Church School, on that of religious truth. The condition of the students, the course of the instruction, the facility of systematic arrangements, are rather to be contrasted than compared with the case of a parochial school. But where the parochial school has virtually perished, and means are not forthcoming to restore it, or where the only school that can be had is a school under the rule of the Board, then it would seem to be a reasonable view of the matter, to refer to the system of Trinity College, where the rules for religious instruction are maintained for the general body of the students, but are not enforced in the case of Roman Catholics, in deference to the rights of conscience and of parental authority. The parent, who has the exclusive right, has also the exclusive responsibility as to its exercise. His child gets so much as the parent is willing that



he should receive, but he is not required to receive more. The foundation principles, and the education offered to all, testify that he ought to have more; but he is not required to take what his parent refuses to allow him to receive, and by giving him the remainder, it has never been supposed that there is a guilty participation, or a complicity with the parent in the voluntary exercise of his exclusive privilege. For those who agree with the Primate in an unabated attachment to the Society and the support of a system of sound and efficient Scriptural Education, and who approve, moreover, of the advice which he has given in reference to the special circumstances to which this advice is exclusively applied, it is not necessary to refer to what has been said or done in considering the general question, when discussed without reference to any peculiar state of facts, and before any practical question, arising out of such facts, was presented for consideration. Indeed, it would not, under any view of it, be open to those who maintain the inalienable right and the responsibility of private judgment, and confide in the force of truth where discussion is free, to refuse to accept the clearer and improved exposition of conference and reflection. Those who desire that truth should prevail, for its own sake, will not measure a present conscientious conviction by the impressions or expressions of the past, nor by the apprehensions of the future. We are as responsible to God for rectifying our opinions, as we are for the daily amendment of our lives.



What may be the effect of the advice given, in reference to the Society and the cause which it upholds, is not within the province of duty to consider.

But let us not any longer judge our brethren. Let every man be free to form his own judgment as to the best means of doing the most good, according to the circumstances in which he may be placed.\* He cannot lawfully sacrifice a principle, but he may not be able to apply it, without some limitation.

The duties of life, after all, are not mere abstractions ; they are often complicated—they are always practical. Principles cannot be changed in their essence by facts ; but the realities of life not only may, but must limit and modify the application of principles. To what extent this is to be allowed is, doubtless, often very difficult, but not the less our duty, to determine, and this may be a part, and a responsible part, of that moral discipline for which our life on earth is manifestly intended.

To do *the* best is absolute perfection, the highest privilege, the free action of pure principle. To do *our* best—the best *we can*—is relative, and in its very nature and essence involves the limitation of principle, which must be practically applied by conscience and common sense, in the daily conduct of real life.

“ the best of what we do  
And are, just God, forgive !”

It is *expedient* that we should always do the best

\* See the Evidence of the Rev. M. O'Sullivan, Trench's Dig. 233.



we can ; it is right that we should always desire to do better ; but this feeling is profaned when it is made the pretext for our declining to do what we can, because we could not do all that we would. All duty is expedient, but the word " expedient " is not to be desecrated by a mere clap-trap use, which is too often its fate. Our Blessed Lord himself has associated it with his own departure from earth, and the mission of the Comforter from Heaven.—*John*, xvi. 7. May that Gracious Spirit now guide us at this eventful crisis. May he move over the chaos of this contentious controversy, convert it to harmony and order, and cheer us at last with the light and the warmth of liberty and love !

THE END.