

LETTER

ON THE

Actual State of Education in Prussia,

TO THE

MOST REV. DR. CULLEN,

ARCHBISHOP, ETC.



Occasion of Present Letter—attacks on Irish Bishops for having asked Catholic Education for Catholic Children.

BERLIN, November 10, 1859.

MY DEAR LORD,

Having been in Ireland during the excitement which followed the demand of the Catholic Bishops for a Catholic system of schools for their people, and having read the attacks of the English press, assailing them in the most bitter manner for the course they had adopted, my attention was naturally directed, on my arrival here, to the state of things in this country, and I desired to learn how a government, belauded for its Protestantism as this is, treats its Catholic subjects in regard to education. I beg leave to communicate to your Grace the result of my inquiries. It may be useful to bring it before the public, though it contains nothing with which persons who have directed their attention to the subject are not familiar. The example of a country like this must have great weight with moderate men, even amongst your opponents. If Englishmen be in the smallest degree the lovers of fair play, the champions of human rights as they boast, they should be ashamed

of blustering so much because a demand is made for what is enjoyed in a country on whose political liberties they look down almost with contempt.

The attacks made on the Irish Bishops appear to me to be reduced to three heads. It is said, first, that in demanding for Catholics Catholic schools, under the supervision of the Clergy, they are obstructing the progress of enlightenment, and covertly opposing the cause of popular education itself. Secondly, that they are seeking undue influence for themselves in wishing to obtain the supervision of Catholic schools. Thirdly, that the separate or denominational system is behind the age; that all should be educated together as the best means of suppressing sectarian feuds, encouraging brotherly love, and teaching those who must live together as good citizens in after life how to do so from their earliest youth.

Example of Prussia of great weight in Educational Matters.
Does it sanction the attacks on Irish Bishops ?

It is not my intention, of course, to treat of these objections on their merits. But, I think the principles and the experience of this country must have great weight in showing them to be unfounded. Prussia is considered by our opponents at least, to be at the very head of the educational movement in Europe. No country is less liable to the imputation of truckling to ecclesiastical dictation of any kind, and least of all to dictation from Catholic ecclesiastics. In no country have the same efforts been made by government to soften down sectarian differences, and to obliterate their effects. The whole resources of the nation have been used for this purpose. It was considered as a kind of *summum bonum* to the attainment of which the most sacred rights of conscience itself have been sacrificed. The Lutheran and Calvinistic Churches have been fused by the strong hand of power into one so-called evangelical body, and a ritual has been adopted for the latter which was thought calculated to make it acceptable to Catholics. It was for a long time even expected that the efforts of fusion applied to these

also, would soon unite the whole population into one homogeneous mass.

There is no Government, therefore, which should be considered by our opponents as sound as that of Prussia on the very points on which the Irish Bishops are found fault with; and while a Catholic might justly refuse to be bound by its example, for it is after all most hostile to our faith, it would argue a lamentable amount of illiberality and injustice in others to deny to us what is accorded by authorities so little disposed to listen to any demands of Catholics unless forced to do so by the strictest requirements of justice.

General Doctrine of the Prussian Constitution regarding Education.

Let me now pass to show how Prussia treats this question of the religious and ecclesiastical element in education,—how it stands on the question of the denominational system.

I have before me the Constitution of the Kingdom, according to the form now in force, as finally adopted on the 31st January, 1850. Under the Title, "*Of the Rights of Prussians*," we find the following:—

Art. 21.—“For the education of youth adequate provision must be made by public Schools.”

Art. 24.—“In the management of the public Schools, the confessional relations must be kept in view as much as possible.” “By confessional relations” is meant the religious denomination of the parties. “The religious instruction in the public schools is conducted by the respective religious bodies.” “In their external relations they depend on the municipal authorities.”

The principle of denominational education—the religious part being entrusted to each religious body according to its respective faith, while in other matters its administration is subject to each civil community—is thus one of those fundamental points adopted in the Constitution of the Country, from which no law can possibly deviate. Let us now see how this principle is carried out in practice by the laws made for regulating public instruction.

Various classes of Schools in Prussia.—Elementary Schools, Gymnasiums, University.

The schools in which education is imparted at the public expense are of various grades and classes. There are, first, the elementary schools to which all children must be sent from the age of six to fourteen years, unless other provision for their education be made by parents or guardians. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and other elementary branches, are taught in these schools.

Next comes the Gymnasium, to which those who desire a higher education may be transferred at the age of nine or ten. The course here lasts eight years. The subjects of study are Classics, Elementary Mathematics, Modern Languages, History, Drawing, Gymnastics, &c.

Next comes the University, where the students are prepared for the learned professions, or are instructed in the higher branches of mathematics and philosophy.

Those who do not aspire to the learned professions, but intend devoting themselves to industrial pursuits, and desire to acquire a higher education than is given in the elementary schools, instead of the Gymnasium, after going through the elementary schools attend what are called "Real schools," in which Latin is taught, together with mathematics and natural philosophy applied to the arts, modern languages, &c. Polytechnic schools continue this kind of instruction on a higher scale.

Normal Schools denominational.

The above may be said to include the whole system of schools intended for the people at large. At their side, however, exists another important class, viz., the Normal schools, where teachers are trained for imparting instruction in elementary schools and in the gymnasiums. Youths of eighteen are admitted into these after proper examination. The course lasts two or three years, during which time they are boarded and lodged at the public expense, and a certain allowance is also made to them in money.

In showing the prominence given to the religious element in these various schools, it may be well to commence with the Normal schools, which necessarily exercise a most important influence on all the rest.

The Normal schools are, first of all, invariably denominational, or, as they are called here, confessional. There are Catholic Normal schools for Catholic teachers, and Protestant schools for Protestants. There are in the kingdom seventeen such Normal schools for Catholics alone, most of them having an average attendance of about one hundred pupils.

Normal Schools for training Catholic Masters. How different from such schools in Ireland.

The Presidents of each of these establishments is a priest. All the teachers are, of course, Catholics. The President is appointed by the King, but before the Minister recommends any one for this office, he is bound to consult with the Bishop of the Diocese, and to recommend a person fully approved by him. The President so appointed has the charge of the religious instruction of the pupils, as well as the inspection of their moral conduct, and acts as chaplain to the Institution. When one priest is not sufficient to discharge these duties, another is appointed in the same manner to assist him. These priests are not only recognized as dependent on the Bishop in the discharge of their clerical functions, but the course of religious instruction adopted in the schools, and the books used for the purpose, are prescribed by the Bishop. The class books used for teaching history, reading, etc., in which religious or moral subjects may be touched, are submitted to him, and he has a veto on their selection. The Bishop has a recognized right of going himself or sending a deputy to examine these schools whenever he thinks proper to do so, to ascertain whether anything contrary to faith or morals is being introduced, and it is the admitted duty of those in charge of them to correct any abuses he may detect. When the pupils at the close of their course are examined for the degree of qualified

teachers, they are examined by the faculty, assisted by a commissioner appointed by the government, and another by the Bishop, and without the concurrent approbation of both no patent can be obtained. These rights are not granted to the Bishop under a smuggled title of patron, or visitor, or commissioner, but are acknowledged by government as inherent in his office, and are exercised accordingly.

Elementary Schools in Prussia not mixed.

I now pass to the other schools for the general population, and commence with the elementary.

These are also, *as a general rule*, all denominational. I say *as a general rule*; for, in some small places where separate schools cannot be founded for each religious body, a compromise is effected, and things are managed as best they can, with due regard to the rights of all. The constitutional provision first referred to requires the confessional relations (*viz.*, the religious denomination of all) to be kept in view "*as much as possible*." This qualification has reference to such cases as I have alluded to, but denominational schools are the rule; mixed are the exception, and are adopted only for the reason already referred to.

It may be said, therefore, that with these exceptions, arising from necessity, there are everywhere Catholic schools for Catholics, and Protestant schools for Protestants, for the elementary education of the children throughout the whole kingdom.

How the Elementary Schools are Governed.

The system of government of these may be summed up as follows:—

Every school has a "local Inspector," and what we would call a school committee. The latter is a part of the municipal corporation, where such exists, and where there is no such body, as in small villages, country parishes, &c., some prominent members of the community are named for the purpose.

The School Committee and local Inspector are subject to an Inspector who has charge of what is called a "circle," which means a certain number of schools, say thirty or forty, within a given portion of a district, and these Inspectors are again subject to the Regency College of the district. This Regency College is a public board, having charge of various matters in their respective districts, such as roads, police, &c., and, amongst other things, of the elementary schools, which are superintended by a committee of their body, appointed for that purpose. The whole kingdom is divided into twenty-five such districts. All these are again, as far as this subject is concerned, under the supervision of the Minister of Public Instruction, who represents the King.

Functions of School Committee. Local and District Inspector of Catholic Schools always Catholic Ecclesiastics.

The School Committee to which I have alluded have charge merely of what are called the externals of the Schools, such as buildings, school furniture, fuel, &c. In what is properly called teaching the local Inspectors, the Inspectors, and the Regency College, or Board, are the parties to whom the teachers are responsible. Now, the "local Inspector of each Catholic school is invariably the Parish Priest, and he is also a member of the School Committee. The "Inspector," or as we would say—"General or Head Inspector," of the Catholic schools in a "circle," is either the Dean, the Inspection District being made for this purpose conterminous with the Ecclesiastical District of which he is Dean; or if he be not willing or able to act, another *priest* is appointed for this purpose. Analogous arrangements are made for Protestant schools. I have been assured by persons officially connected with the Ministry of Public Instruction, that the Government looks upon this arrangement as essential for the good government of the schools. Though every priest or minister is not, as a matter of course, in all respects eminently qualified for the office of Inspector, they consider that he has qualifications which no one else can possess.

This being now an invariable appendage of his ministerial office, every priest will endeavour to qualify himself as well as possible for discharging it efficiently; and if each one may not do so as effectually as would be desirable, the deficiency is supplied by other agencies, while the absence of the parish priest's co-operation could not be supplied by that of any one else.

The "Inspector" of what is called a "circle," which is a more extensive district, is, as I said before, the Ecclesiastic invested with the office of Dean or Episcopal Vicar of the district. The office of inspection being, however, one that requires careful and skilful attention, if the Dean cannot attend to it, another priest—and invariably a priest—is chosen for the purpose.

Catholics fully represented on the various Education Boards.

So far for the character of the schools and their inspection. The higher administration is vested, as I have stated, in the Regency College, or as we would call it, Board, this body acting through a committee that has special charge of this matter. A Catholic priest is invariably a member of this Board or College, and of the Committee, and is the official organ through whom all business regarding Catholic schools is brought before it. It is his special duty to see that Catholic interests are properly protected, a priest being chosen for this very purpose.

In like manner there is a special member of the Privy Council of the Minister of Public Instruction, who is the official organ through whom all matters pertaining to Catholic schools of every kind are brought before that functionary. He prepares all statements, reports, &c., and gives advice on all subjects relating to such schools. It is his recognised duty to be the protector of Catholic interests; and on any official document regarding them issued contrary to his advice his dissent is endorsed, that it may appear that he is not responsible for such a measure.

Gymnasiums altogether denominational.

The Gymnasiums are more strictly denominational than even the elementary schools. Being established only in the larger centres of population, the same reasons for an exceptional course in some cases do not exist in their regard. There is only one mixed Gymnasium in the whole kingdom. It is at Essen. It was formed by the union of two others—the one Catholic, the other Protestant; each having been thought too small to be carried on efficiently. A plan of administration based on compromise is adopted, by which the rights of both parties are supposed to be secured; but it does not give satisfaction, and will probably be abandoned.

With this exception, all the Gymnasiums are either Catholic or Protestant, with superiors, teachers, books, &c, of a respective religious character. There are about eighty or ninety Protestant Gymnasiums in the kingdom, and forty Catholic.

Besides the Gymnasiums where the full course of eight years is followed, there are so-called Pro-Gymnasiums, where the first four or six years' course only exists. Those who wish to follow a full course go to Gymnasiums after having attended all the classes found in the Pro-Gymnasiums. Of such Pro-Gymnasiums twenty are Catholic. They are conducted in the same manner exactly as the Gymnasiums.

Rights of the Bishops regarding the Gymnasiums.

In each Catholic Gymnasium there is a Catholic chaplain, who attends to the religious instruction of the pupils, teaches Hebrew, &c. He receives his appointment from the government, and his canonical mission from the bishop. The rector and teachers are generally laymen, but always Catholics. The books for religious instruction, as well as the religious exercises, adopted both in the Gymnasiums and the Elementary Schools are determined by the bishop. Books on other subjects—where faith or morals may be

affected—are not adopted unless after consultation with him. His right to visit all such schools, personally or by deputy, to examine into their religious character, is specially guaranteed; and the Provincial School Boards—distinct bodies from the Regency Colleges before alluded to—whose special duty it is to superintend the Gymnasiums and Normal Schools of their respective provinces, like the latter, have always a Catholic priest as member, who is the official organ through whom the business of the Catholic institutions is communicated, and by whom their rights are specially protected.

Religious Practices in Elementary Schools.—Religious Instruction.

In all the elementary schools, when it can be done without too much inconvenience, the pupils, accompanied by their teachers, attend mass every morning before going to study. Prayers are said at regular times during the day. The parish priest or his assistant is expected to give religious instruction at least two hours every week. Where this cannot be done, the teachers supply his place, and when the priests give instruction, the teacher is present for the purpose of repeating it and examining the children on what they heard. The teacher gives religious instructions himself at other times, so that there are at least six hours of religious instruction every week.

It may not be amiss to remark here that the religious instruction imparted in the schools in Germany generally, as well as in Prussia, is not confined merely to what we would call the catechism. It embraces a regular course, extensive in proportion to the other classes attended by the scholars. While a very short catechism is provided for the junior classes, more extensive works are prepared for the advanced. The manuals for the advanced classes of the Gymnasiums contain a very respectable amount of information on religious subjects.

“Real” Schools.

The “real” schools above alluded to are founded entirely at the expense of the towns in which they are established. Their character and government, and the course of studies adopted in them, is, on that account, left almost entirely to be managed as each municipality desires.

No Catholic University in Prussia.

I will not treat of the University. In this branch, justice cannot be said to be done to Catholics. There is no Catholic University in all Prussia. There is an academy, however, at Munster, which is exclusively Catholic. Philosophy and Theology are taught there as in the Universities. Catholics hope that before long this will become a perfect University, by getting the faculties of law and medicine added. At Bonn and Breslau there are Catholic faculties of Theology. The other Universities are exclusively and avowedly Protestant. They do not pretend to be general or mixed. Yet Catholics having no other place to acquire University education at home are left to work their way through these as best they can. As in Ireland some come out of them, perhaps stronger in the faith in consequence of the struggles in which they were engaged; many in their anxiety to qualify themselves for a profession or for government patronage, suffer shipwreck in the faith received from their fathers, while others retain faith enough to have something of the kind to sell when there is a demand for apostates, or to give apparent force to attacks directed against the Church, her ministers, or the measures advocated for her protection, which would be powerless if proceeding from quarters avowedly hostile. Here, as elsewhere, Catholics complain of the injustice done them in this regard, and they hope that the same spirit of fairness which marks the government administration in the inferior schools will be extended to the higher departments. Measures of various kinds are adopted in the mean time to

neutralize the baneful tendency of the existing state of things, upon which it would be out of place for me to enter at present.

Rights of Catholic Clergy openly and directly recognized by
Government.

From what I have stated it will be seen that in the inferior and intermediate, as well as in the normal schools, the denominational system is not only admitted, but a very fair amount of influence is given to the Church in protecting the religious interests of the pupils. The priest and the bishop are not smuggled in under other titles, such as patrons, commissioners, &c., but their position in their official capacity is honestly recognized, and their rights secured, while the government, through its own agents, retains full control over every thing that belongs to its own sphere. Priests become thus expert in the work of education; they qualify themselves for becoming inspectors and members of the various boards that superintend its operations. This is at the same time an advantage to the ecclesiastical body, from the practical experience on this subject, and administrative skill which thus becomes extensively diffused through its members, and to the cause of education, in the promotion of which their clerical character cannot but be productive of the most important benefit. It is idle to talk of men learning to love one another by sitting on the same benches. If they learn well the principles of their religion, they will learn this duty amongst the rest. The attempt to eliminate religion will only cause strife as well as other bad passions to grow up. Men who are not faithful to their God cannot be true to one another.

Besides the rights in educational matters explicitly guaranteed to the Church in this country, as I have already explained them, an indirect influence of the most important character is found in other rights that are explicitly guaranteed. Thus, though the bishop or the parish priest has not the

right to remove an obnoxious teacher, he not only has the right of visiting the school and lodging any complaint he may have to make before the competent tribunal—a right, the exercise of which is not considered an officious intermeddling in what does not belong to him, but is recognized as inherent in his office, and the authorities to which such things are subject are pledged to give every such complaint all due weight—but further still, the ecclesiastical authorities have the right of suspending the party in question from imparting religious instruction or performing any religious office. This would bring the operations of the school to a dead lock, as continuing it in such a condition, much less disregarding the ecclesiastical suspension, would not even be thought of. To bring about such a collision would involve a serious responsibility. The odium which the wanton cause of it would bring on himself is an effectual check on an unnecessary recourse to such a measure, or on the refusal to accede to just demands that would warrant its adoption.

Exceptional Character of some Schools.

When I said that all the schools are either Catholic or Protestant, to be entirely accurate, I should have qualified the statement. There are here some men who are not content with mere indifference in religious matters. The indifferent, alas! are legion, but they seldom object to their children receiving religious instruction of some kind, though the indifference practically taught at home will generally neutralize its effects. The persons to whom I allude have an anti-religious conscience! They consider their rights invaded if their children received any religious instruction whatsoever. To meet the scruples of such persons it is provided, in the first place, that on application their children are exempted from attending the religious instruction in the schools. In some instances such people have organized themselves into societies called "free societies," which are a kind of anti-religious sects, their faith consisting in the exclusion of all

religion. In a few cases schools have been allowed to be established bearing the same relation to these societies that the other schools do to the various religious bodies. It is in the ranks of this class, almost exclusively, that are found the defenders of the system of divorcing the state schools from religion, and of establishing them on the basis of communicating secular instruction alone, leaving it to the churches to teach religion when and where they may. This class, though active like such people everywhere, and represented even in the chambers, is, I am assured, insignificant in the number of its adherents, and all prospect of success is considered as not even to be dreamed of. I have been assured by persons the best qualified to form an opinion, that it may be said with truth, that *no men* having a regard for religion of any kind adopt such views. With the exception arising from this and the other slight exceptions before alluded to, all the schools in Prussia are strictly denominational, and adopt such religious instruction and practices as are pointed out by the ecclesiastical authorities of the respective religious bodies with which they are connected.

Conduct of Prussia different from that of England in regard to Catholic Education.

The conduct of Prussia is thus in marked opposition to the policy adopted by the government in Ireland. There the government will not even recognize the legal existence of the Church. In Prussia it not only recognizes its existence, but assigns it an important place, and uses its powerful influence in the work of popular education. Yet the relative position of Catholics and Protestants in both countries is to a great extent alike. The population of Prussia is about 17,500,000. Of these about 7,000,000 are Catholics. The latter are found chiefly in certain provinces which are almost exclusively Catholic, while a few are scattered throughout the Protestant districts.

Whether it was a prudent unwillingness to provoke the hos-

tility of a third part of the population, which at certain times might be productive of serious results, or a sense of what is justly due to the Catholic sentiment of so many millions, or both these motives, that induced the government of Prussia to deal so fairly with its Catholic subjects, the example of this country may not be unworthy the imitation of England. It is vain for her to boast of the superior liberties enjoyed by her subjects, when those of the veriest despotisms of the continent enjoy more perfect rights on a point so dear to every Christian.

There are, and there always will be, of course, persons who call themselves enlightened, whose only test of enlightenment appears to be their readiness to chime in with the enemies of the faith in their attacks on its defenders. Such persons are very willing to let hostile governments do as they please. But it is equally manifest that the sentiment of the Catholic masses will always support the demands of their bishops. Even when they themselves do not see the danger—which they generally do—they know their bishops and clergy to be the best judges of what is necessary for their protection in religious matters. They know that these look at things from an elevated position—with high principles and an extensive field of experience before them, and not on what can be seen merely in one's own village. Their decisions will everywhere command the respect of those who value their faith, especially I would say in Ireland, where they have spoken with such unanimity to a people so thoroughly animated with Catholic life.

But the principal object which I had in view in bringing forward these details was to show that what the Catholic Bishops demand for Ireland is already enjoyed by Catholics in this land, which stands forward so prominently in the cause of popular education—a land where the civil power is so jealous of its rights, and where so much is done to remove everything that could in any way contribute to cherish sectarian strife. That such an example may tend to silence the accusers of the Irish Hierarchy, and to realize for the

Catholics of Ireland, who are admitted in theory to the rights of British subjects, the enjoyment of privileges possessed by their brethren in a country which boasts much less of the liberties enjoyed by its people, is the sincere wish of

Your Grace's obedient servant,

M. P.

To his Grace Most Rev. Dr. Cullen.