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Ireland and Educational Needs and Rights (Continued)

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Ireland and Educational Needs and Rights.

BY MRS. BRYANT, D. Sc.

(Continued).

This Irish Board would, on doubt, sooner or later take over the Board of National Education. Perhaps it might do so at once, but that need not concern us in the first instance. All the matters that have been under the Science and Art Department should come beneath its sway. This idea should be mooted at once. (The model of the Agricultural Board might be used in its constitution so far as applicable.)

Supplementary to the Central Board, local authorities in the counties should be established founded on the County and Borough Councils, or possibly Joint Committees in the first instance nominated by the Councils and the Central Board. The first business of these local bodies would be to make a careful study of the needs of their district, and propose plans for the approval of the Central Board. For these money would be wanted, and some there is to hand. The £86,000 per annum of the present Intermediate Board is an endowment for the whole of Ireland, and there are other endowments. The Customs and Excise duties might all fairly be claimed for Intermediate Education, the £78,000 now going to elementary schools being supplied, as it ought to be, by a central grant. And then there is the Science and Art grant, which, as it stands, could be used with much greater effect by an Irish educational body. Moreover, good reason could be shown for replacing it by a larger Treasury Grant. Many such grants would be needed to make up to Ireland for the excess of taxation from which she suffers. Here is one means of affording redress.

But what of the religious difficulty? How is it to be met? It should be faced and settled at the very initiation of the idea, settled by a treaty between Irish parties, to be followed by a firm stand against all other proposals in Parliament. It is not to be denied that there are some difficulties inherent in the subject, but the whole history of the discussions shows that the trouble is mainly due to the fundamental conflict between Irish ideas in favour of a free denominational system on the one hand and the Irish Nonconformist ideal on the other, of which the Welsh scheme—good for Wales—supplies a clear example.

As I understand it, there is very little practical difference of opinion in Ireland, the basis of a consensus being a frank agreement to differ. There are no more than three distinct religious communities to consider—for practical purposes we might say two—and each of these desires the liberty of educational institutions in conformity throughout with its convictions. Catholics and Protestants—both prefer that the instruction given by them should be in accordance with the principles of their respective Churches. The endowed schools of England are nearly all on the same principle under a clause in their schemes, and yet they are eligible to receive grants of public money over and above their endowments, provided, it is true, that there is a conscience clause under which parents can claim that a child be not required to attend prayers or definite lessons in religious instruction. But there are not in the English Secondary Schools any irritating regulations about the unnatural exclusion of everything that can suggest religious ideas during the hours of secular instruction. All that is left to the good sense and good feeling of the teacher, and it goes without saying that the less wise learn quickly the error of alienating by inconsiderate acts the feeling of a child or parent here and there. So, as we often say, there is no religious difficulty in English Secondary Schools, because the idea of the system is sound and the administration of it is left to the discretion of the Heads of Schools, whose qualifications for their office generally are just those which fit them to deal fairly with a minority of religious dissenters.

But in Ireland as at present advised this minority would seldom be present at all, and the problem is so much the easier. The schools would continue to be, as they are at present, on the voluntary system, only they would be more numerous and better equipped and brought nearer to the people's means and needs. Aid in public money would be given, whether from central or local funds, in consideration of their efficiency for secular learning, and no doubt there should be a conscience clause

administered as described above, enjoining definite hours of prayer and religious instruction. So at least it seems to me; if no one claims the conscience clause then the limitation vanishes.

A more serious difficulty is that of the private school. How can a school managed for private profit become partaker in public funds? This is one of the most knotty questions in English as well as in Irish educational reform, and in Ireland it is probably essential that a way out should be found, so much has depended and, in view especially of the religious question, must continue to depend on private effort and voluntary association. Now it has been suggested that the private school can be made quasi-public by the regular publication of its accounts, and I believe a solution may be found along these lines. A private school desiring recognition as part of the local school supply might be required to send up a full account of itself, the number of its pupils and of its teachers, the qualifications and salaries of the latter, and a properly audited financial statement such as the endowed schools of England are required to furnish to the Charity Commissioners (in future to the Board of Education). This would, I think, strike at the root of the insuperable objection to giving public money to purely private and privately managed schools. It would combine the extreme voluntary principle with the necessary public control in matters of finance just as it is proposed to combine these in matters of religion, and indeed generally. We cannot spare one particle of voluntary initiative in building up our Ireland of the future.

I should like to see the examinations of the Intermediate Education Board continued not as a means to the assignment of definite result fees, but for the award of scholarships as at present, and for the sake of the great stimulus given by a National system of examination in standards. The Senior Certificate of the Board stands for a valuable leaving-school certificate all over Ireland. In course of time this examinative function might be transferred to a University Board, but that lies in the discretion of the Irish people, and requires further thought.

THE PLYMOUTH ROCK.

The Plymouth Rock fowl has been now so long with us that one would think all its good qualities were sufficiently well known and duly appreciated. But I frequently find it is not so, and a few years since I felt bound to take up my pen in its defence, after a scathing poultry article in the "Weekly Irish Times." I keep several pure breeds of fowl, and consider the Plymouth Rock the most profitable of all. The Plymouth Rock suits a damp soil, and is a very hardy bird. As a rule, I prefer to set Plymouth eggs in the early season, because I find those eggs usually contain strongest germs; the chickens are so hardy and easily reared. Then as to laying, I find I get more eggs in winter from Plymouths than any of the later novelties, so much exploited in poultry journals. True, the hens are prone to clocking. In the early season this is most desirable, and in the summer sitting hens lay profusely, so that the Plymouths can have a well-earned rest, or, with a little trouble, can be put off clocking. The only two objections I can make to Plymouths are 1st., they have usually yellow legs and skin, and, though a plump, well-flavoured bird, consequently not so much appreciated at table as the newer breeds are; and 2nd., a tendency to grow too stout.—Mrs. Abbott, Ballinode, Monaghan.

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