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Elementary Education in England:

The Education Act of 1870 and the Bill of 1902,
considered especially in relation to the question
of Religious Instruction.

TWO PLAIN SERMONS

PREACHED IN

The Church of the Annunciation,

S. MARYLEBONE,

BY

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ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND.

“So when they had dined Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?” He saith unto Him, ‘Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.’ He saith unto him, ‘Feed my lambs.’”—S. JOHN XXI. 15.

I.

Such is the first duty laid upon the Church of God, the first service required of her as the evidence and expression of her love—the feeding of the lambs of Christ’s flock. And there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the figurative expressions employed here by our Blessed Lord. The “lambs” are the simple and uninstructed—and primarily the children of Christ’s Church; and the “feeding” here referred to is the nourishment of their spirits’ life with the Bread of God, the Word of life, the grace and truth which are given to us in Christ Jesus.

This charge was given to the representative and chief of the Apostles, as an indication of the special responsibility that was to rest upon the official ministry of the Church with regard to the education of the young: not indeed by way of exonerating parents from their obligations in respect of the religious training of their children—obligations which the Gospel regards as inalienable and of the highest importance: but rather as implying that the teaching office of the Church, which is normally exercised through the organic ministry, must be first employed in that sphere which is at once the most necessary and the most hopeful—the training of the young “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

It is surely unnecessary here to review the reasons why the Church has always taken, and must always, take the deepest interest in all that bears upon the education of the young. If she did not, she would be false to her Master, her vocation, and her creed. Particularly she would fail grievously in regard to her great work of the salvation of souls. She has a special duty of *preserving* the souls of the young from the contamination and corruption of the sin that is in the world. This can only be done by surrounding them as far as possible with holy and uplifting influences; by feeding them with the Bread of life; by instructing them in the Words of God. There is in the Christian child something to be

“saved,” preserved, safeguarded: a divine element which is “ready to perish”—which tends, as it were, to evaporate, if left to itself. If the Church does not feed the lambs of Christ, their souls are like to perish of hunger, or to feed upon the poisonous weeds that grow with rank luxuriance in a fallen world.

It cannot then be justly thought a matter of surprise, that the Church in this land, which, until within the last thirty years, supplied almost the whole of the education given to the poorer classes, and supplied it, partly for the education’s sake, but still more for Christ’s—should watch the developments of our national policy in respect of education with the keenest interest and solicitude. The Church has been blamed for taking a part in the discussions of this question. But in truth no subject is more properly within her province. Even if she were without her strong claim to be heard on the ground of the long priority of her occupation of the educational field, she cannot without disloyalty to her Master neglect the care of His little ones.

With these few words, then, by way of preface, I invite your thoughts to the subject of the large and comprehensive measure dealing with education introduced by the present government, and now before the country. I think it is true that there is more strong feeling, and even of prejudice, with regard to the proposed legislative changes than intelligent and just appreciation of their true character and significance. Many seem as yet unable, and not a few resolutely unwilling, to recognise the broad and statesmanlike purposes of the Bill now under discussion. The criticisms passed upon the measure are too generally characterised by an amazing want of the sense of proportion. Men have fixed their attention too generally on minor points, and those often of disputable meaning, and disregarded the main, obvious, far-reaching benefits to the cause of education which the measure would indisputably secure.

In view of the vital importance of the subject in its bearing upon the welfare of our country, and on the other hand of the large amount of ignorance that still prevails as to the present position of the educational question and the nature of the proposed reforms, I would attempt as briefly and clearly as I can to describe the purpose and effect of the Education Act of 1870, and the case for further legislation as it stands at present.

At the time when Mr. Forster introduced his bill rather more than 30 years ago, the position was something of this

kind. The elementary education of the country was given exclusively in what are now commonly spoken of as Voluntary Schools, that is to say, schools maintained for the most part by representatives of religious bodies, and paid for almost entirely by the voluntary gifts or endowments of pious and charitable individuals. These schools in 1870 numbered 8,281. The great majority were schools of the Church of England, though a few belonged to the Wesleyans, the Roman Catholics, and others. The number of children in the elementary schools at that time was 1,693,000. Good work was no doubt being done by many of these schools. But very large numbers of children, especially in the outskirts of London and in the larger towns throughout the country, were growing up in lamentable ignorance owing to the unquestionable deficiency of schools in many places. It was not possible for the Church to provide all the schools that were required, and the Government of the day felt it incumbent upon them to inaugurate a new system of schools, with no intention whatever of supplanting, or provoking competition with, the existing Voluntary Schools, but simply and solely with a view to filling up the gaps which the voluntary system left. It cannot be too clearly and emphatically stated that the legislation of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Forster in 1870 with reference to elementary education was intended to *supplement* but *not to supplant* the existing voluntary system. I do not understand how any doubt can exist as to the sentiments of the authors of the Act of 1870. On this point there may no doubt have been some politicians at that time, as there have been not a few public men since, anxious that the Voluntary Schools should be extinguished. But I have good reasons for knowing that they would have met with no sympathy from Mr. Gladstone. For reasons which I need not now specify, Mr. Gladstone was strongly persuaded that, *cæteris paribus*, a Voluntary School was always to be preferred to a State-provided or Board School. His desire was, as far as possible, to conserve and maintain every efficient Voluntary School in the country. But undoubtedly, in some respects and to a limited extent, the legislative enactments of 1870, which have resulted in the erection of 5,837 Board Schools in the last 31 years, have had the indirect, and no doubt in a large measure unintended effect of crippling and injuring the Voluntary Schools. How this disastrous condition of things has come about is very well known. The School Boards have no doubt in the great majority of cases done much excellent work, though in some rural districts,

truth obliges me to add, they have been a very by-word for financial or educational incompetency. But owing to their unlimited power of spending public money, they have in some cases laid themselves open to the charge of a certain amount of profusion or extravagance in their expenditure. In any case they have in general spent much larger sums upon their buildings and the equipment of their schools, they have employed many more teachers, and in many cases paid them far more highly, than the managers of Voluntary Schools in parallel circumstances would have found possible or deemed to be necessary. Again, in their zeal for higher education, they have yielded to the temptation in some instances to trespass beyond their proper bourn. They have spent large sums out of the rates in the education, not of children, but of adults. They have carried on Evening Schools at the public expense, to which scholars have been attracted, not so much by anything commonly regarded as a subject of education as by mere recreation, such as dancing. I do not contend that money spent in night classes for policemen and others, as, for example, a class to teach English to German waiters, or on innocent amusements for young men and women, is not well spent. But I cannot believe that the provision of these things, however admirable in themselves, was ever intended to be the business of the School Board, and to be paid for out of the educational rates entrusted to them. But the only bearing of these extravagances—if such they be—upon the welfare of the Voluntary Schools is indirect, namely, by reason of the fact that the heavier the School Board rates the harder is it for the managers of Voluntary Schools to persuade men to subscribe to their maintenance. It is not unusual for even a rich man to refuse altogether to support the Voluntary Schools of his parish upon the ground that he is already heavily rated for the maintenance of the Board Schools. On the other hand, it is obvious that the School Boards have always the power of *out-bidding* the managers of the Voluntary Schools, as by offering higher salaries, and providing the best and most costly appliances, and otherwise enhancing the attractions of their schools both for teachers and scholars. It is unnecessary, and it would be therefore invidious, to assume that those responsible for the policy and administration of the School Board have deliberately aimed at increasing the difficulties, and so ultimately achieving the extinction, of the Voluntary Schools. But their policy has acted, as it were, automatically and necessarily, with that effect. And the ever-

increasing School Board rates—so far in excess of anything contemplated by the authors of the Act of 1870—have resulted in the ever-increasing difficulty of maintaining the Voluntary Schools, and in the closing of a very considerable number. It would be but just, however, if time permitted, to enumerate the many great and valuable services to the cause of education rendered by the School Boards in London and throughout the country. Not only have the School Boards done an immense amount of good work in the face of many difficulties, but they have largely contributed to raise the general standard of education as well in Voluntary as in their own Schools. If their competition has been often painful, and in rare cases hardly fair, it has nevertheless on the whole acted as a wholesome stimulus to the managers of Voluntary Schools. And if the education given in the elementary schools of the country still seems in certain respects open to improvement, there can be no doubt that a far better education is provided now than was the case 30 years ago, and that this is mainly the fruit of the Education Act of 1870.

We have then to consider, how do matters stand now as compared with the condition of things in 1870.

I mentioned that in 1870 there were 8,281 Voluntary Schools, educating nearly 1,700,000 children.

Since 1870, the Voluntary Schools have greatly increased in number. From **8,281** they have become **14,319**, and the children attending these Voluntary Schools have *increased* in number from **1,693,000** to **3,056,000**. During the last thirty-one years 5,857 Board Schools have been established in which 2,600,000 children are being educated. It will be observed that the Voluntary Schools are far more numerous at the present time than the Board Schools—14,318 as against 5,857; and that they are now educating about half a million more children than the Board Schools. As regards educational results the grant earned per head per child in the Board Schools is very slightly higher than that earned in the Voluntary Schools, but the cost of education per head in the Board Schools is considerably greater (by from 13s. to 14s.) than in the Voluntary Schools. We may take it that the very slight apparent superiority of the educational product of the Board Schools, and the large excess of the cost of Board School education, are due in the main to the same cause; namely, the fact that the Board Schools are chiefly found in towns and populous neighbourhoods, whereas the Voluntary Schools are scattered broadcast over the country,

and many are very small schools working in remote, backward populations. The Voluntary Schools then are still doing considerably the largest share of the Elementary Education of the country, and generally speaking they are strong in the affection and interest of those for whose benefit they exist. In devising a great, comprehensive scheme of education which should bring all the schools of the country under one and the same educational authority, the Prime Minister was confronted by the same question as Mr. Gladstone in 1870.

Are the Voluntary Schools to continue to exist, or are they to be left to perish—as it is certain they must if left to their own resources, by slow degrees, in face of the Board School system with its practically unlimited financial resources? Mr. Balfour has answered the question exactly as Mr. Gladstone did in 1870. The Voluntary Schools—14,319 in number, of which nearly 12,000 are Church Schools, 458 are Wesleyan, about 1000 belong to the Roman Catholics, and another 1000 are classified as British and miscellaneous—these Voluntary Schools, I say, are a serviceable, working system which no practical statesman can ignore. They have done good service in their various localities for a long period of years. Their buildings are computed to be worth from thirty to forty millions of money. They were provided, and they have been maintained, by the voluntary gifts of those, who desired above all else to provide an education that should be complete in its scope—and train the children of the poor, not intellectually only, but morally and religiously as well. Would it not be possible to make all these schools available for the purposes of the best secular instruction, under the direction and control of a publicly elected educational body, while preserving to them the specific religious character which their founders in the past, and their owners of the present, regarded as of supreme importance?

Such was the problem as it presented itself to the present Prime Minister, and his solution of it is presented to us in the present Education Bill. That measure, in its broad outlines, will, I have no shadow of doubt, hereafter, when the storms of controversial passion shall have exhausted themselves, and the clouds of prejudice and misrepresentation have drifted past, be recognised as a wise, masterly, statesmanlike, and courageous endeavour to unify and consolidate the primary, secondary, and technical education of the country, and at the same time to do such justice as is possible to those who have long been contending, in the face of many difficulties, and with

the most generous self-sacrifice, in the cause of such education as in their belief alone can permanently bless its recipients—education in which the inculcation of the service and the worship of God occupies the foremost and the central place. Such in its general scope and main character is the great educational scheme of the present Government. And it is impossible for me in the limited time now at my disposal to proceed any further in exposition of its details. I shall hope, God willing, to return to the subject once again, when I shall endeavour to deal as simply and frankly as I can with the much-vexed question of the religious teaching in the two kinds of elementary schools that have existed side by side in England for the last 30 years.

I would end by the statement of my earnest conviction that those who desire to further the best interests of their country—of the State equally with the Church—will do well to strive and pray, that the proposals for the modification of our educational system now before the country, may in their main purposes and provisions speedily pass into law, and that, not for any merely political reasons, but because the great measure that has been so carefully devised, will bring unity, harmony and co-ordination into our public educational methods, in the place of the present hopeless and chaotic disorder; it will go far to remove the burden of grievous injustice and disability which has so long pressed upon the great majority of the elementary schools of England; above all, as we hope and believe, it will give new vitality and permanence to those schools, in which the fulness of the Christian Faith can be freely taught, and the lambs of Christ's flock can be fed with the life-giving Bread of God, in loyal accordance with the injunction of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

II.

In the foregoing Sermon I have endeavoured to put before you a simple statement of the present position of the question of Elementary Education in this country, and of the problem which the Government has set itself to solve. I shall now attempt to describe in outline the proposals of Mr. Balfour first with a view to bringing all Elementary Schools—and indeed all secular education—whether primary, secondary or technical—under the control of one and the same Education Authority: and in the second place, for dealing with the thorny and much-discussed question of the religious instruction. I need hardly remind you that the

present legislative proposals do not affect London, with which it is proposed to deal in a separate measure later on. The plan of the Government then is that the whole of the Secular Education given in all Elementary Schools shall be under the exclusive direction and control of a Local Education Authority. That Local Authority is to be the County Council, or the County Borough Council, as the case may be. Such authority will act not directly but through an Education Committee, in accordance with a scheme made by the Council and approved by the Board of Education. The composition of the Education Committee may—if I understand the matter aright—vary according to circumstances, but a majority of the members must be selected by the Local Authority, the remainder being appointed by them, on the nomination of other bodies, if desirable, from persons of experience in education, and well acquainted with the needs of the locality. The Local Authority will be responsible for the up-keep and maintenance of all necessary Buildings in connection with either the Board Schools, or the new schools which the Local Authority itself may hereafter find it necessary to provide. It will also be responsible for the whole of the expenses in connection with the work of all Elementary Schools in the country, including the cost of the secular instruction in the Voluntary Schools, but with one notable exception. The Voluntary Schools are asked to place their buildings at the disposal of the Local Education Authority—buildings estimated to be worth from thirty to forty millions sterling—to be used, rent free, for the purposes of secular instruction. It is proposed that the entire cost of the education furnished in the Board Schools and other state-supplied Schools, shall be defrayed out of public funds, three-fourths from the imperial Taxes, and one-fourth from local Rates: while from the same financial sources all expenses are to be defrayed relating to the secular teaching in the Voluntary Schools, including the salaries of the teaching staff. On the one hand, then, the Managers of the Voluntary Schools are asked to provide the School buildings rent free; and in addition, to keep them in proper repair—and further, to make such alterations and improvements as the Authorities consider to be necessary. This means, of course, that voluntary contributions to a considerable extent will be required, and it would seem impossible with truth and justice to deny that the State obtains a very good bargain.

There are about 20,000 schools in the country of which 14,294—or not far short of three-fourths of the whole—are Vol-

untary Schools. These 14,000 odd schools—of the capital value of say thirty-five million pounds are placed at the service of the State, represented by the Education Authorities throughout the country, for the purpose of secular education, during the main part of the day, for five days every week. No rent whatever is to be paid for them, and they are to be kept in repair, altered and improved, at the cost of the Managers, who, moreover, will be expected to comply with all requirements of the Local Authority regarding secular education. On the other hand, the Local Education Authority absolutely controls all the secular education, and can inspect the school, audit its accounts, and direct the work generally, as it thinks fit. Indeed it is difficult to see what the Managers will have to do during the hours of secular instruction, beyond seeing that the decrees of the Local Authority and its Committee are carried into effect. Moreover, the Local Authority has the right to appoint additional Managers to each Voluntary School to the extent of two-sixths of the whole number. The appointment of the Teachers rests with the Managers of each Voluntary School, but the Local Education Authority has the right of veto upon each such appointment, as also of dismissing any teacher considered to be unfit, on Secular Educational grounds.

I pass now to the consideration of the bearing of the proposed legislative changes upon the subject of the religious teaching to be given in the two classes of Schools, namely, the Board and other State-supplied Schools on the one hand, and the Schools of the Church of England and other religious bodies, on the other.

And first we must cast a backward glance to the Act of 1870. And it is only fair that those who object to the cost of education in the Voluntary Schools receiving further aid from public funds, whether local rates or Imperial taxes, because they object to the denominational teaching given in those schools, should be reminded that for some 30 years we have been paying very dearly for the maintenance of a large number of Schools, now educating more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ million children, and that the system of religious instruction in those schools has been one to which a large proportion of Churchmen have a very strong, conscientious and reasonable objection. I do not maintain that the religious teaching in Board Schools may not often be good, and occasionally, I hope often, excellent. But the point of objection is that if religious instruction under a School Board is sound and good, it is merely an accident. There is absolutely no ground

of assurance, no guarantee that it is so and will remain so. I have no doubt that many a conscientious and devout teacher under a School Board endeavours day by day to instruct the children committed to his care in the great truths of the Christian religion. But that there has been and is not a little risk of unsatisfactory instruction in the same sacred subject matter cannot be reasonably doubted. I have it on good authority that at the present time religious instruction in a certain Board School is being given by an avowed atheist—well known to be a member of an atheistical club. I do not presume to pass judgment on him, or upon the School Board which lays itself open to such scandals. But I say that no words are too strong to condemn the rotten and illogical absurdity of the system based upon what is known as the “Cowper-Temple Clause.” It has been, in fact, the source of endless strife and controversy, and I venture to believe there never can be a satisfactory and peaceful settlement of the religious question in relation to education, until that miserable makeshift has been swept away. The Cowper-Temple Clause, devised no doubt with the best intentions, provides that in Board Schools “no religious catechism or formulary distinctive of any denomination may be taught.” The terms appear simple enough, but no authoritative interpretation of them has been given. In effect the clause has been taken to mean that only the last and least and lowest residuum of the Christian faith—under the strange negative title of undenominational religion—may be taught in Board Schools. Mr. Gladstone, though a devout Churchman and a theologian of a high order, was not wanting in large charity and breadth of sympathy towards those who differed from him in matters of religious doctrine. He it was who with just and accurate truth, spoke of the notion of “undenominationalism” as a “moral monster.” It stands for a vague, impalpable shadow—an undefinable formless evanescent wraith of religion—which no man living can object to, and which no man with a spark of faith or a grain of logic can respect or value.*

There were three courses open to the framers of the educational legislation of 1870. They might have set up a system of education purely and exclusively secular, leaving it open to

* If any person is interested enough in the subject, I would strongly advise him or her to study a short pamphlet, entitled “Undenominationalism as a principle of Primary Education,” published by John Murray, in which Professor Moberly, with his unrivalled power of searching analysis and logical acumen, exposes the ultimate significance of an idea which has become a very fetish in the minds of many people.

the various religious bodies to arrange as best they could for a supplement of religious teaching. This might have been done without any even apparent slight to the religious convictions, which happily still dominate the minds of the vast majority of our fellow countrymen.

Or, secondly, they might have endeavoured to arrange for the children to receive instruction in the religious beliefs of their parents. This would doubtless have demanded much patient and painstaking arrangement of details, but it would have presented no insuperable difficulty.

Or, thirdly, it was open to them to embark upon the fatuous policy of sanctioning the teaching of such religion only as could give no offence to any one—a shadowy, eviscerated, formless religion, in which no man does or could believe. Many are now disposed to believe that of the three courses, the worst was chosen. Nevertheless, it is but justice to admit that in many cases better results have been attained than the system promised: the truth seeming, however, to be that the better and sounder has been the religious teaching in Board Schools, the further has it drifted from strict allegiance to the principle of “undenominationalism.”

Now, many persons have expressed themselves strongly in opposition to the present Education Bill, on the ground that it gives support—increased support—from public funds to denominational schools. I will not waste time in discussing the foolish distinction of principle which has been made between public funds raised in different ways. It is really absurd to object to aid from rates, while approving of aid from parliamentary grants or Imperial taxes. As Mr. Henry Fawcett said, many years ago, one is “at a loss to understand how anyone could refuse the application of rates for denominational education, when he sanctioned it in parliamentary grants. As a matter of common sense, what difference did it make in principle whether a house tax went in support of Denominational Schools, or whether a house rate went to support them?” But, passing from this point, it is objected that increased support is to be given to Denominational Schools out of the rates. But, for more than 30 years, we have been paying very heavy rates to support schools in which the religious instruction was, at least, as objectionable to us as Church teaching is to some of the objectors against the present Bill. This has been and remains a very real grievance and hardship. We have had, in common with our fellow-citizens, to pay for a system of Board Schools, which in one vital respect we strongly disapproved, and, meanwhile,

we have had to raise large sums by voluntary contributions for the maintenance of our own Church Schools. Now, at length, as is but a bare measure of justice, the State will pay for the secular part of the education given in our Voluntary Schools. It is an absolute untruth to assert that it will contribute anything to the religious instruction. We shall still pay, as a price for safe-guarding the religious character of our Church Schools—if so be that this Bill be found in its final form to safeguard them in this respect—a large sum for the maintenance and improvements of our school buildings; while, at the same time, we shall be required to continue our full share of contribution to the maintenance of the State-provided Schools, in which the religious instruction will still be cramped, fettered, strangled, by the same wretched and unprincipled restriction as in the Board Schools of the past. The fact is, that the present Education Bill, while redressing at least one serious wrong and injustice under which Churchmen have long been suffering, cannot be regarded as a final and satisfactory settlement of the whole education question. If it does all it originally seemed to promise, it may save our Church Schools from the extinction which surely threatened them. But it is not yet evident that the price we shall be called upon to pay for such advantages as it will secure to us, may not in the end prove ruinously high. It is entirely just and right that the Local Authority should regulate and control every detail connected with the secular instruction which is paid for by public funds. It would be entirely unjust, and an invasion of the principle which underlies the present legislative proposals, if the regulation and control of the religious instruction in the Voluntary Schools were directly, or indirectly, taken out of the hands of the religious bodies, lending their buildings gratuitously for the purpose of the secular instruction. It is a fundamental principle of the Church, and has been so in all ages, that upon the parish priest rests the primary responsibility for the religious instruction of the children. It would be rash to dogmatise as to the precise significance of recent alterations in the Bill. But unless it is made perfectly clear that there is no intention of tampering with the age-long rights and principles of the Church, with respect to the provision she makes for the religious instruction of the young, the proposed changes in our educational system are fore-doomed to a disastrous failure.

It may be asked: If it is true that the proposed legislation aims at the consolidation of the whole of our national educa-

tion under one authority—a measure of reform which commends itself to every expert and competent judge throughout the country; and if, on the other hand, it aims merely at doing a tardy act of justice to the Voluntary Schools, what can account for the heat and passion generated by its discussion, and the vehemence of the opposition it has encountered?

In trying to give you an answer to this question, I would pass by the partizan and political considerations that have led men to seize upon a far-reaching and complicated measure as a promising field on which to attack their opponents, and endeavour to indicate the grounds of more or less intelligible, and in a measure reasonable, grounds for objection to the present proposals.

In the first place, many able and conscientious educationalists and others hoped and believed that the Voluntary Schools were doomed to slow but sure extinction. They were—and from their point of view not unnaturally—impatient of the dual system, and the rivalry of the two classes of schools. They were thorough-going believers in School Board education and the uniformity of its centralised working. They seemed to look upon the struggling isolated Voluntary Schools with something akin to impatient contempt. The Voluntary Schools seemed to get in their way—to prevent them from studding the ground with their admirable, well-furnished Schools. There seemed something irregular and anomalous in these schools which lay outside their control, and here and there, no doubt, impeded the carrying out of comprehensive schemes for dealing with the educational needs of large areas. It is easy to understand and even to sympathise with these sentiments. Some, moreover, no doubt preferred the religious instruction given in the Board Schools to that which was customary in the schools of the Church of England. On this point, as was natural, they found themselves in sympathy with a large section of the nonconformists. Well, to all those who desired an universal School Board system and the extinction of the Church and other Voluntary Schools, Mr. Balfour's Bill is, of course, a bitter disappointment. It is a part of its purpose to preserve and fortify Church Schools. It has thwarted the endeavours and blighted the hopes of all who looked forward to their destruction. Moreover it must be admitted that the Elementary Schools of the Church, especially in country places where there are no rival schools to compete with them, are no doubt and of necessity strongholds of Church influence.

And the leverage thus gained for the parish priest may not unnaturally appear anomalous and, so to say, illegitimate, in the eyes of the dissenter who is practically compelled to send his child to the Church School. Assuming that the clergyman of the parish is a sensible, just and tactful man, with no intention of using his parish schools as a propagandist influence, nevertheless in countless impalpable ways the close association of the Schools and Church makes itself felt, the whole influence of the place tells for the Church, and the nonconformist feels that his child is regarded rather as an alien and outsider. The grievance, though varying greatly in degree, is probably always felt. Often, no doubt, it is far more imaginary than real. But such as it is, it arises of necessity out of this position. The Schools were usually built by Churchmen, and in most cases with the predominant purpose of supplying religious education—by which was intended Church teaching—for the children of the poor. They have been maintained almost entirely by the voluntary contributions of Church people, as in some sense Church institutions. Nevertheless, it is obvious upon reflection, that to the zealous and conscientious Dissenter, the fact that the school to which he is compelled to send his son was built and maintained by Churchmen, does not appear to justify morally what he regards as the excessive preponderance of the clergyman's authority and influence: and especially, in view of the fact that all Elementary Schools have for years past been in some sense State Schools, as being largely subsidized by grants of public money. Endless indeed, and a standing source of bitter grief to every loyal Christian, are the complicated difficulties and entanglements issuing from "our unhappy divisions." The courses open to us are consequently in most cases of a kind that we must regard as second best and far from ideal. So long as the minds of many—perhaps the majority—of our fellow-countrymen are carried away by the strong delusion of "undenominationalism"—the most fatal falsehood that at the present time is sapping the religious life of England—it would be the height of unwisdom to sacrifice the distinctively Church character of our schools and hand them over to the State. The time may not be far off—God grant it in His mercy—when the educational policy of the country may recognise the imperative necessity of liberating the religious instruction in all Elementary Schools from those degrading fetters which now make it impossible for any religiously minded man—whether Wesleyan, Baptist, Churchman or what

not—to have his child taught the religion of his parents in any State-provided school. In the meantime it would seem to be the duty and the wisdom of the Managers of Church Schools, especially in single school areas, to try and arrange, as far as is practicable, for all the children to be taught by competent persons the religion of their parents. Let the Wesleyan Minister—supposing there are a sufficient number of the children of Wesleyans in the school—be invited either personally or by deputy to come and teach his children in one of the school-rooms or elsewhere during the hour set apart for religious instruction. In at least one large Church school in London, the Jewish children are so taught, I believe, every morning by a Jewish Rabbi. In some cases, as in that of a country parish where the great majority of the parishioners belong to some Nonconformist body, it might be the policy of charity and prudence to admit to the teaching staff of the Church school one or more teachers belonging to the body in question. In any case, Churchmen must make it unmistakably evident that they desire just liberty to teach Church doctrine to Church children in all Elementary Schools, and are equally anxious for the same right to be given to every other religious body. By steadily working in this direction, they will be paving the way for the only satisfactory and final solution of the religious question in relation to Elementary Education.

I have spoken at too great length upon this subject, and I fear that much that I have said may strike some as incongruous with this place and discordant with its sacred associations. But if there are no duties laid upon the Church of greater importance than the “feeding of the lambs of Christ”—the religious training of the children—then I do not think we should grudge the time given to the study of a great legislative measure, directly bearing upon the daily religious instruction to be given in all Elementary Schools of England.

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