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A FEW WORDS ON THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL CRISIS,

IN

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT REV. THE

LORD BISHOP OF ROCHESTER.

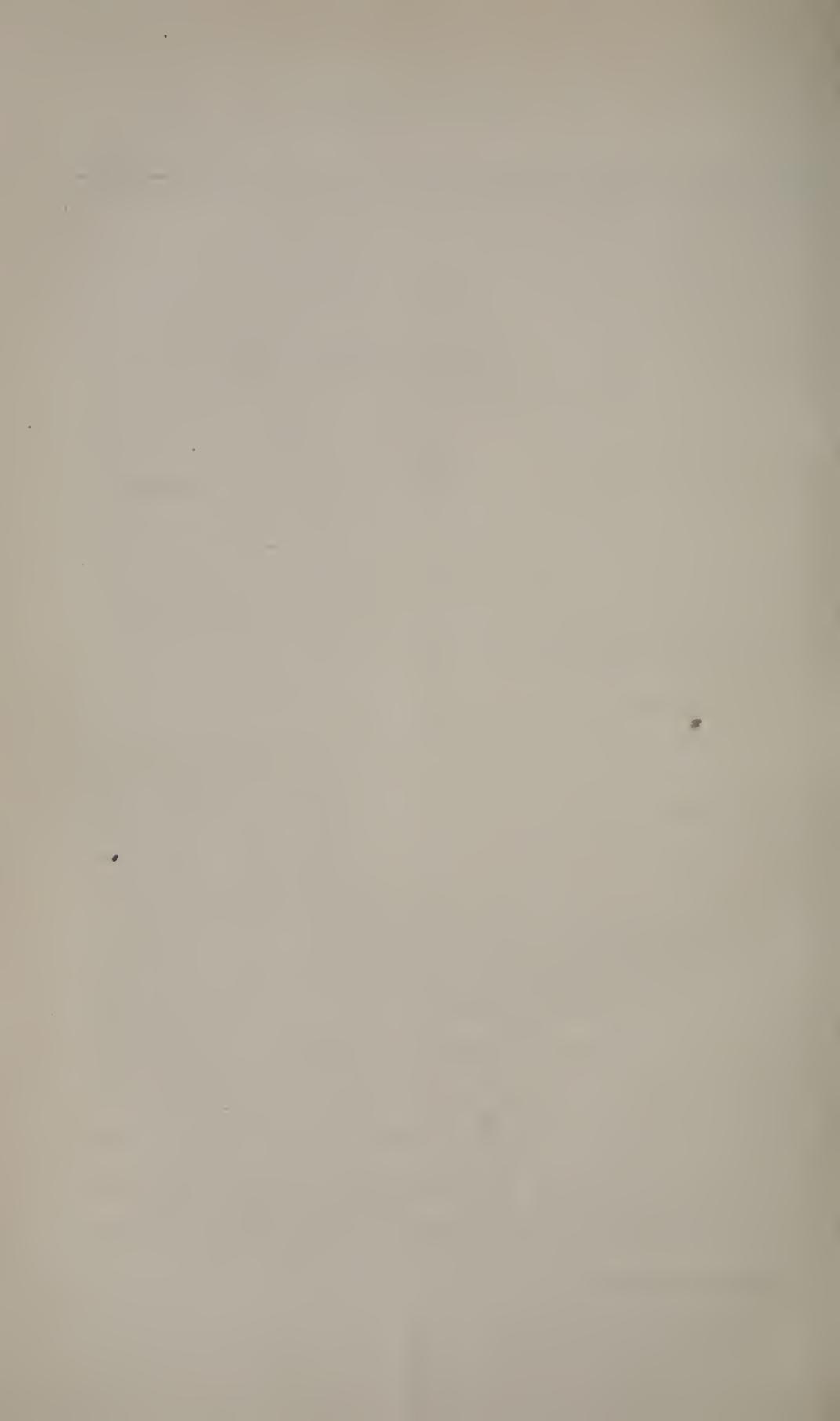
BY

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A FEW WORDS
ON THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL CRISIS.

MY DEAR LORD BISHOP,—

If it can be shown that every legitimate object of the Government, in the distribution of the Parliamentary Grant for Education, may be obtained without enforcing upon voluntary and Denominational Schools the distasteful condition of a *compulsory Conscience Clause*, I think a great step will be made towards a solution of the difficulties which agitate, at the present moment, the mind of all the prominent educationists in the country, and keep at seemingly hopeless variance the Committee of Council on Education and the National Society.

It is because I believe that a reconciliation of views which are considered to be antagonistic to one another is practicable, that I have asked permission to address these few lines to your Lordship, and thus submit them to the consideration of those with whom the solution of the question must rest.

I must, first of all, *assume* these three points, viz.—

1. That, from whatever cause, the State finds itself compelled to extend more widely, and to organize more completely, than is the case at present, the means of primary Education in this country.
2. That it will not accept the proposal lately made at a large public meeting, viz. that it should confine its action in the case of Denominational Schools simply to inspection and payment for secular results, without touching at all the religious difficulty.
3. That it is not prepared to originate an entirely new system of Education, supported by public taxes or rates, thereby subverting the existing Denominational voluntary organization.

Assuming these three points, which are com-



monly conceded, the problem to be solved may perhaps be stated under the following heads ; which, for the purpose of considering them dispassionately, I put as I imagine they would be put by one who regarded the question from a Government point of view :—

1. How may the existing voluntary Denominational Schools be retained, and work harmoniously with the State in its endeavour to provide for the Education of the poor of *all denominations* ?
2. How, where a deficiency in the means of Education exists in any district or parish, may that deficiency be supplied ?

It is to the former point that I specially address myself.

The proposal of the State, if we accept as the voice of the State on this point the recommendation of Mr. Bruce and Sir John Pakington, is, to require all Denominational Schools, as a condition of their receiving any portion of the public money, to accept a compulsory Conscience Clause.

The most influential managers of these Schools declare this to be *unjust* ; I content myself with saying it is *unnecessary*.

I will not weary you with enumerating the objections to this proposal, but adduce only those which are considered to stamp it with injustice.

1. Such a clause, either inserted in the Trust Deed, or exacted as a *permanent Rule* of the School, does interfere with, does alter, the *constitution* of the School as a Denominational Institution. Thenceforward it becomes—at the will and option of *others besides* the managers and supporters of the School—partly a Denominational and partly a Secular School. A new and foreign element is imported into its constitution.

2. It creates and establishes certain rights in the School, and over the conduct of it, which are unreasonable, and may lead to most mischievous consequences. It gives to Dissenting parents of children a *right* to have those children educated in the School on their own conditions in regard to religion, which is a direct interference with the character of a Denominational School.

This, surely, is most dangerous; not merely as possibly, and in not improbable cases, leading to the deterioration of the religious teaching of the School, and actually (where the Dissenting children chanced to be a majority) to the preponderance of

secular instruction in it, so that the character of it would be changed; but also as leading to a claim which might, with a great show of reason, be set up—for it was in reality set up in the case of the Ilminster Grammar School,—that, since the Dissenting parents have certain rights in the School, some Dissenters, possibly the Minister *ex officio*, ought to be on the Managing Committee in order to see that those rights are respected.

But experience has shown that it is impossible for any School to be conducted by persons of different religious sentiments without eliminating from it altogether any distinct religious teaching; and this would simply amount to a revolution in the existing Schools, if it did not lead to the abandonment of them by those who have been most active in the promotion of them.

I cannot think these dangers to be purely imaginary,* and I put them in as strong a light as

* The resolutions passed at a recent meeting of Nonconformists at Southampton, in which this plan of an universally-enforced conscience clause was urged, show that they are aware of the advantages that will accrue to them; since the poorer children of their own persuasion will thus have a right to be educated at the Church schools, on their own terms, without their contributing to the schools.

I can, because I think they may be avoided, without denying to the State either that reasonable desire which it of course entertains to make its grants for education as widely available as possible to all the population, or that right which it undoubtedly has to affix such conditions as it pleases (as long as they are not unjust) to its disposal of the public money.

How then can this desire be satisfied, and this right recognised, without the enforcement of a Conscience Clause ?

The Court of Chancery seems to me to have provided an adequate and satisfactory reply to this question.

From time to time that Court has provided schemes for the appropriation of large sums bequeathed for the purposes of Education. These it has allotted in the form of subsidies to certain existing Schools ; and it secures their availability for all the population (without regard to religious differences) within the area to which they are applicable, not by exacting from the Managers of the Schools a formal engagement to admit all children, but simply by requiring annually a Certificate that, *as a fact*, no child has been excluded,

during the previous year, on account of its religion, or instructed in a manner at variance with the expressed wish of the parent.

This seems to me really to meet the difficulty; at least, I venture to think that it more nearly offers an adjustment of the claims of the State with the freedom of School managers, than any other proposal I have chanced to see.

It practically and adequately secures that object which the State reasonably seeks to obtain. It does this without interfering at all with the constitution of the School, or the liberty of the managers. And it would, I think, be readily accepted by managers of Church of England Schools, who, as we know, generally recognize the principle involved in the condition of the grant.

The advantage of such an arrangement to the promoters of Schools is, that should any of the dangers apprehended from the recognition of the *quasi* rights of Dissenting parents arise, they would have a remedy in their own hands, for they would for that year, or for a number of years till the danger was overpast, simply decline the subsidy from the State. And we may be sure they would not do

this except under the presence of some serious and pressing danger to the School.

The advantage to the State from this mode of proceeding would be that, while gaining its object, it would be freed from the collision which must necessarily arise from an enforcement of a Conscience Clause. I believe a very large number of Schools, whose managers would resent the imposition of any condition that altered their constitution, would, under this plan, be brought into harmonious co-operation with the State, and the disputes with the National Society would cease. That noble institution would pursue its course untouched ; the constitution of Schools in union with it would remain unaltered ; and, the rights of managers of Schools being reconciled with the rights of the State in its protection of Dissenters, a fresh impulse would be given to the extension of Education in districts where it is now defective.

Of course, under this arrangement, the *Building Grants* from the State would cease. This, I apprehend, however, is of small moment. Much more widely, I believe, than is generally thought, adequate Schools exist in the parishes supposed to be deficient in the means of Education ; and the

greater energy that would be infused into the operations of the National Society, together with the increased sense of the necessity of Schools being provided, which the present agitation of the question will produce, would lead to buildings being erected without the aid of the Government. The difficulty of maintaining Schools when built hinders their erection far more than that of erecting them in the first instance.

But every one must of course feel that a settlement of the Conscience Clause difficulty, though it undoubtedly removes a very great obstacle out of the way of Educational progress, does but little in the promotion of the second part of the problem which the State has to solve, viz. how to extend the means of Education, and make them commensurate with the needs of the population throughout the country.

Upon this larger topic I shall have but little to say.

Yet I believe, first of all, that the deficiency in the means of Education for the poor has been greatly exaggerated. In his very elaborate and valuable letter to the Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education, the Rev. C. A.

STEVENS has shown how much this part of the question has been misrepresented; and has proved that Church Schools, aided by the annual Grant from Government, are established in parishes or Ecclesiastical districts in which 66·3 per cent., or two-thirds of the whole population, reside. He proves also that the small parishes (*i.e.* those with a population under 500) which have been deemed the great blot in the Educational system of the country, and which contain no separate Church School assisted by the State, comprise only 7 per cent., or 1 in $14\frac{1}{4}$ of the whole population.

These statements relate only to *assisted* Church Schools. The number of Schools in rural parishes which are not assisted are very numerous. I myself know several excellent Schools of this description, some of which have been deterred from seeking Government aid, either in the building or maintenance of them, on account of the conditions required by the Council on Education.

When the National Society has completed its Returns we shall know more fully what the state of Church Education is, and it may reasonably be hoped that no decisive step will be taken till these facts are ascertained.

Still, no doubt, there will, after all, be a *residuum* of places where the means of Education are either wanting or deficient. How are these to be dealt with? Seeing, what we all have seen, how year after year fresh schools have sprung up in rural parishes, and in town parishes too, which had been neglected in this respect, on a new and young Incumbent entering upon his ministerial duties, or on a change in the ownership of the property of the parish, I can feel no doubt, but that—let only time, fair time, be given, the Conscience Clause out of the way, and the assistance of the State extended, unfettered by unreasonable conditions,—in a few years the means of Education would be provided for the whole population on the existing system.

No doubt there will be exceptional cases; and in such, the State, regarding its acknowledged duty in the matter, might step in, and require the owners of property and ratepayers in the parish or district to provide and maintain adequate schools. Still, so great, in my estimation, are the advantages derived from that kind of superintendence which the voluntary system secures, that I think every opportunity should be given, even in these cases,

to private individuals to supersede the necessity of a rate-raised school, by themselves undertaking the task on the Denominational principle. And, even after a school was built out of a rate, it should be competent to a certain proportion of the rate-payers (two-thirds, for instance, or three-fourths) to assign the management of it to any voluntary association, the assistance of the State being annually given, subject to the proviso above mentioned.

But one other case presents itself to me for consideration. It is that in which, a Denominational school existing, a minority of Dissenting children is excluded on the ground of religion. A great deal, far too much, has been made of this supposed case. No doubt it is possible. But it is *hardly* possible, when the loss of the annual State assistance will be incurred by the expressed desire of parents not being complied with. Supposing, however, the grant being forfeited, any considerable number of children were left unprovided with the means of Education on the ground stated, it would then be competent for the State to regard the parish or district as unprovided with a public school, and proceed as though no school were in existence; by which means, either the exclusion of

the children would be rectified, or undoubtedly the rate-supported school would starve out the voluntary one. Anyhow, it would be disastrous if, on account of a few exceptional cases such as these, the existing voluntary and Denominational system, which has accomplished so much, and is capable of accomplishing so much more, were broken up, and that co-operation of the Church with the State in the great cause of primary Education, which is so eminently desirable, were interrupted.

I remain,

My dear LORD BISHOP,

Faithfully yours,

A. GRANT.

AYLESFORD VICARAGE,

Feb. 25th, 1868.

