

~~and the experiment is before you. It is based on tribal lines, on the old Irish system of mutual assistance called "Cojency" on my part, and on the desire of one Irishman to help his fellow countryman in a simple unostentatious way, but successfully. It can be amplified to any extent, and I shall be only too delighted if I can see my humble endeavour become the nucleus of an agricultural tillage revival, and the means of turning useless ranches into homes of industry for Irishmen and women.~~

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5.—*Practical Education in our Schools.*

BY REV. T. A. FINLAY, S.J.

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IT will be admitted as a fundamental principle that the aim of all education is to fit children to do their duty worthily and successfully in later life. This conception of education covers a wide field. It includes the cultivation of the moral and religious sense, as well as the intellectual and physical faculties. We are not concerned here with this wider significance of the term. We confine our attention to that narrower view which regards education as a preparation for the material tasks of life, as the training which fits a man or woman to earn a livelihood, and by so doing to contribute to the general welfare of the community. In this sense only can education be regarded as falling within the competence of the State, or included in its legitimate functions.

The principle is generally accepted without question that it is the duty of Government to provide for the education of the people. Rates are levied for this purpose, and large grants of public money are made for Primary and Secondary Schools and for Universities. What is the justification of this outlay? Is it so obvious as is generally assumed? Why should the State educate a child any more than it should feed or clothe him? The obligation of furnishing the child with the healthy conditions of bodily growth is left to the parent to discharge, the State intervenes only when it is necessary to force the neglectful parent to fulfil his duty. Why should the same principle not be applied in regard to the growth and development of the mind? For myself I cannot furnish a ready answer to the question. The right and the duty of educating the child

belong primarily to the parent, and it is only an extreme socialistic conception of State functions which would assign them to the Government. It is consonant with our notions of the duties of the State that it should provide parents who are too poor to educate their children with the means of discharging this natural obligation, just as it should provide the means of feeding and clothing them if the parent's poverty hinders him from doing this himself. But how justify the action of the State in providing education at the cost of the tax-payer for the child of a man who is himself able to bear the expense, and whose duty as a parent obliges him to bear it? It may, perhaps, be said that the power of the nation, its place in the political, commercial, and industrial systems of the time, depend on the education of the people, and that it becomes consequently, the business of a State to educate its citizens just as it is its business to train its soldiers, or its sailors. But this is a return to the old Greek view that the citizen exists for the State, not the State for the citizen, and inferentially subordinates individual and family life to political ends. Besides, it would bestow upon the civil authorities a power which our modern notions of individual liberty rightly refuse to it. A robust physique is quite as important for the military and industrial success of a nation as a well-developed mind. If to attain its peculiar ends the State may take in hand the mental training of its citizens, so too may it determine the methods of their bodily development. It has as much right to prescribe what they are to eat and what they are to wear, as to prescribe what they are to read and how they are to write. To impose on the people a State system for either purpose is mere socialistic tyranny.

All this is not inconsistent with the view that the State may, and ought to, establish a system of public education. An educational system adapted to the needs of a modern nation is a costly institution. It is beyond the resources of private individuals, and it requires combined and co-ordinated effort to give it efficiency. It is conceivable that an association of individuals might create such a system in the same way as it can build a railway. But education offers little inducement as a field of investment, and, as in the case of the railway, so in the case of an educational system, its extension over a wide area could hardly be effected without the aid of the State. It remains, then, that the State should itself undertake the creation of a system of public education, if such a system is to exist at all. Its functions in this respect are analogous to those which it exercises when it builds harbours or establishes a postal service.

The limits of its rights are indicated by the analogies which are here cited. In the first place, the State is not

justified in requiring that every or any citizen shall make use of the system which it establishes, any more than it is justified in requiring that every subject who sails the sea shall make use of its harbours, or that every one who has a letter to send must transmit it through the State Post Office. In the second place, it seems reasonable that those who can afford to pay for the use of the educational system which the State creates shall do so, just as the master of a ship pays harbour dues, and the sender of a letter pays postage. Gratuitous State education is public beneficence, and to this poverty constitutes the only claim.

The liberty here claimed for the subject is not incompatible with the principle of compulsion in education, provided the principle be rightly formulated. A child has a right to the education which will enable him to maintain himself suitably in after life quite as valid as his right to the food and clothing which will enable him to be later a vigorous and healthy man. The obligation of making provision for him in both respects devolves primarily on the parent. The State, as guardian of the rights of all citizens, can and ought, in case of neglect, force the parent to discharge his obligation to the child. Its duty to do this is as binding as its duty to force him to feed and clothe the child, and to punish him for wilful neglect. To enable him to discharge his obligation the State should be able to point to a system of education which is available, and this system, as we have seen, it must itself create. But in the system which it forces him to employ there must be nothing which offends his convictions, religious or moral. Otherwise a higher law will constrain him to resist its authority, and to refuse obedience at any risk of punishment.

Having thus shown that it falls within the competence of State authority to establish a system of public education, we proceed to inquire what the character of that system should be. The end for which State authority exists is to promote the welfare of the people over which it presides. In education as in other functions which it undertakes, this conception of its purpose determines the character of its work. From the point of view of the State education must, primarily and above all else, serve utilitarian ends. It educates the people in order to make them good and capable citizens, and, in this connexion, the good citizen is the man who by his labour of hand or mind secures effectively his own well-being, and promotes proportionately the well-being of the community. There are many spheres of work in an organised social body, to train men for their work in life, each in his own sphere, must be the object aimed at by the State in any system of education it may set up. This is what is meant by the saying that State education must be practical before everything

else. Let us see in greater detail what this requirement imports.

In the first place it signifies that children are to be led to select at an early age the career in life to which they will devote themselves. An aimless education, one which prepares for no definite occupation, and develops no definite capacity is, so far forth, defective. No doubt there are certain fundamental acquirements which competence in any occupation presupposes. To be able to read, write, and speak correctly the language of the country is a common necessity for all who have to take a part in social life. Some knowledge of the material world we live in, and of the social and political organisation of which we are members, is also necessary for all. But the knowledge essential on these points is acquired during the first years of school life; and when it has been gained the special training of the child for his special work in life should be taken in hand.

The child's career once chosen, no influence should be exercised to unsettle him in his choice. Stability of purpose, persevering pursuit of a fixed end, are necessary for success. In this respect, much is said in the current discussions of the University Question which, though well meant, is, I would assert, unsound in principle. It is urged with much insistence, that the University to fulfil its purpose as a national institution should be democratic. When we inquire into the meaning of this axiom we are told that it should be open to all alike, that it should be for the son of the poor man as well as for the son of the rich, and furthermore that it should be so established that its advantages shall be equally within reach of both. In other words, the educational system of the country should be so arranged and its endowments so distributed that it will offer facilities to every one, no matter in what rank, to "rise to the top of the ladder." I have no desire to deny genius its opportunities. But genius is the exception, and legislation is not for exceptions but for the common run of men. It may be a minor purpose of an educational system to provide genius with its opportunities, but this cannot be its main purpose, and if it is prominent in the scheme, it will defeat its end as a whole. The duty of the State is to educate each class for its own functions. What is styled the humble work of the social organisation is as important in its way as the more honoured; and the well being of society depends as largely on the efficient performance of the humbler tasks as on the due discharge of those which society regards with more respect. It is important, for example, that we should have highly skilled engineers to devise the most perfect forms of machinery, but it is little less important that we should have skilled artisans to con-

struct them and skilled workmen to manipulate them when constructed. To set prominently before the pupils of the country's schools facilities for becoming engineers, and thus to direct their ambition to this career, is to disparage and discredit the others in their eyes, to make them regard the lowlier functions of the mere artizan as unworthy of a lad of spirit, and so to breed in him a contempt for those necessary social duties, and to make him discontented with them if necessity forces him into them.

Let me apply these principles to our own country. We are, in the main, an agricultural people; the welfare of the nation depends chiefly on its success in agriculture. To turn the thoughts of the young generation in the rural schools towards other pursuits, to point their ambitions towards clerkships and posts in the Government service, is to inspire them with the idea that agriculture is not an occupation for a man of trained intelligence, and to withdraw from the chief industry of the country the resources on which its success depends. We frequently meet with advertisements of schools in which the successes of their pupils in the competitive examinations for bank clerkships, the railway services, the Post Office, the Excise or other departments of the civil service are set forth with much self-complacency. Have we ever seen an advertisement in which an Irish school claimed the merit of having produced a successful farmer, of having taught a boy how to cultivate a garden, or trained a girl in the arts of housewifery?

In these respects our schools offer a striking contrast to the kindred institutions in such countries as Belgium, France, or Germany. There, it is understood that the life-task which lies before the children of the rural population is the cultivation of the land, and as soon as the rudimentary knowledge on which all education must be based has been imparted, the minds of the pupils are fixed upon what is to be their future occupation, and their further training is conducted distinctly and professedly as a preparation for it. I may cite, as an example of the methods adopted, what I have been able to observe in the schools of Belgium.

In the first place the teacher is required to impress constantly on his pupils the dignity as well as the importance of manual labour. He must incite them to regard the perfection and success of the work of their hands as the ideal after which they are to strive. No suggestion that "genteel" occupations are the most suitable field for the exercise of their powers, however developed, is tolerated. The ambition which they are led to cultivate is that of becoming skilled tillers of the soil, and every aptitude which they show in this direction is encouraged and rewarded. In the girls' schools the object

kept in view is to form accomplished housewives, women who will be able to turn to most account the resources of a small household, who will be able to provide the maximum amount of home comforts on a slender income, who are experts in kitchen gardening, in poultry-keeping, in butter-making, in domestic account-keeping, in cookery, laundry-work, and needlework. The whole system of teaching is directed to the realisation of this ideal; such literary instruction as is imparted is designed as a means to this end, and success in acquiring these arts is the only success which the children are encouraged to strive after. So far is this principle carried that in the larger schools where children from the town and country are educated in the same institution, the two classes are not allowed to associate together. The reason of the separation is the apprehension that the child of the farmer, brought into contact with the children of the town artizan and trader, and hearing them discuss their plans and prospects for life might come to lose his respect for the avocations of his parents, and have his ambitions diverted into other channels. If the child is to be a farmer, or the wife of a farmer, life on the farm must be the one object to which he or she is to look forward and for which they must prepare. Is it surprising that the man who has been trained under this system takes a pride in his well-tilled holding equal to that which the lawyer takes in his well-filled brief-bag, and that the woman is as proud of her neatly kept, comfortable cottage as the lady of fashion of her mansion and its luxuries?

The schools are equipped, and the programmes of instruction devised in keeping with these notions of the end and purpose of a system of public education. The schools in rural areas differ in character from those in manufacturing and commercial centres, in each the methods of training are specially planned to prepare the pupils for the occupations prevalent in the locality. The same system is pursued in the elementary schools of Germany. As exemplifying in detail the school methods adopted by the practically-minded educationists of the latter country, I may quote from the report of the Commissioner sent out four years ago by the English Board of Education to gain information as to the use of school gardens in connexion with the schools of Germany. The extracts which I make will suggest a contrast between German methods and our own, and will at the same time show what the schools can do for the industries of a country. The Commissioner, Mr. Rooper, is describing his visit to the district of Siegburg:—

“ I paid a visit to the district inspector of the schools at Siegburg. He told me that he had charge of about a

hundred schools. The occupations of the people were mostly agricultural and horticultural. A few years ago, the inspector said, the fruit trees were sadly neglected, and the peasants knew so little about fruit-growing that they bought from the South of Germany worthless trees which were rejected by the growers there, and sold for a few pence to speculators who made a good bargain by selling them at advanced prices to the Rhinelanders. More than this, the peasantry of the Valley of the Sieg knew no more how to plant or tend their trees than how to choose them.

“ At the present time, after some ten years’ work, the inspector has established a school garden in all of his hundred schools, except in one or two towns where the land is too expensive.

“ His first difficulty was that the teachers, although they had been taught science at the training college, had learned nothing that served any practical purpose. There are, however, horticultural schools at Cologne and Bonn. Arrangements were made to enable teachers to attend courses of theoretical and practical instruction in these institutions, and after they had introduced gardening into their schools they were assisted by visits of inspection and by advice from the same source.

“ With respect to the sale of produce, there is no local organisation for an export trade, but there is a ready sale for fruit and vegetables in the neighbourhood, and a master, besides supplying his own house, can make an increase to his salary amounting to £15 a year.”

The Commissioner then paid a visit to one of the rural schools to observe for himself the actual application of the inspector’s methods.

“ Arriving at half-past eight, I found the upper class, which consisted of about thirty boys and as many girls, finishing their arithmetic lesson. The head master, who was most ready to explain his methods, changed the lesson and gave the boys an oral examination in the growth of plants. His object was to show me how he dealt with the theory of the subject before conducting me over the gardens. The boys were about twelve or thirteen years old. Their answers were prompt and full, and their language was correct and free from dialect. They were unquestionably interested in the subject. The examination extended to the nature of the root, and the working of the root-hairs and their absorbing powers. Various experiments were discussed which the boys had evidently seen and understood. Something was then said of the various salts that were in solution and imbibed by the cells of the plant. The stem and bark were next dealt

with, and the course of the sap from the roots upward was traced to the leaves. The evaporation of water from the leaves was explained, and various experiments called to mind to show the effect of sunshine. Then followed an account of the effects of cutting a ring in the bark (1) of a stem, and (2) of a shoot, and the explanation of the results was readily given by the boys. This led to an explanation of the process of grafting, and some of the boys were here set to work to make a tongue graft, which they easily did. . . .

“ When the master began his work some twelve years ago, fruit culture was at a low ebb. Old trees were decaying and were either not replaced at all by new ones, or else by trees of inferior quality. Thanks largely to the example of the master, who has co-operated with the local chamber of agriculture, the villagers have now taken to fruit growing as an important subsidiary industry. They spend much of their leisure time in their gardens, and they save much money, which they invest in co-operative societies for building houses and other purposes. They do not invest it in buying land, which is now very costly.

“ The soil of the school garden is a rich loam which is easily worked. . . . There are many kinds of fruit trees, both standard and espalier, including some of the best from France, America, Belgium and England, besides, of course, Germany. There were also many named varieties of vegetables, among which were various sorts of peas, scarlet runners, cabbages, lettuces, and broad beans. There were many standard roses, a few garden flowers, especially some fine auriculas, and a few strawberry beds. Currants, gooseberries, and raspberries had each a place assigned to them, and there were two or three beds of asparagus. . . . In this garden the boys learn all the usual gardening operations, and what are the best kinds of fruit and vegetables to grow in their village. They also learn the art of grafting and budding. The walls of the school-house were covered with apples, pears, cherries and other fruit trees, and the boys were expressly taught how to turn wall space to account.”

I have quoted thus at length in order to make clear the methods by which education is made practical in a country where national progress has been effected on a large scale by national education. The extract deals only with gardening operations. If space allowed it, I could cite equally interesting accounts of the methods by which the larger operations of the farm are taught to children who are to live their later lives and do their later work on the farm, and also how those who are destined for the workshop and the factory are prepared for their avocations. There are many districts in Ireland where fruit was at one time grown on a large and profitable



scale and gardening was practised with great advantage to the cottage home, and where now both fruit-growing and gardening are lost arts. Would this have been possible if our rural schools were conducted on the lines described by this Commissioner to the schools of Rhineland? Would the valleys of the Blackwater and the Sur exhibit the melancholy display of neglected and worthless orchards and gardens which they offer us to-day if the schools of these districts had enjoyed the methods of teaching applied in the valley of the Sieg? Would the labourer's cottages in so many parts of Ireland appear so tasteless and unkempt—their gardens devoted, as I have seen them, to a crop of oats or hay—if the children of their owners were trained in schools like those of Siegburg?

Reform in the home, in the garden, and on the farm is essential in Ireland if rural life and rural industry are to furnish adequate and attractive conditions of existence to our people. And this reform, if it is to be effective, must, I am persuaded, begin in the schools. I have had experience of some attempts to introduce it among the men and women of mature age. But I have found that, among these, habits already fixed and prejudices firmly rooted have increased the labour and cost of change out of all proportion with the results. The children I have found in every case to be the readiest in appreciating and accepting the suggestions for improvement, and they have also proved the most active and successful apostles of reform. Taught to prize neatness, order, and cleanliness in the school, they will become impatient of untidiness and disorder in the home. Having learned how to cook and sew, they will insist in applying their acquirements where the domestic conditions call for them. Instructed in sound principles of agriculture, they will protest against faulty methods when they see them applied, and when control passes into their hands they will put to use what they have learned in the school. Let me mention here an incident which came under my own notice and which exemplifies what the agency of a child can effect in the work of domestic reform. When the community of nuns whose success in the textile industry has made the village of Foxford famous began their labours in that locality the conditions of life around them were deplorable. Fortunately they had the school children in their hands, and they were wise enough to understand that through them their efforts for general social improvement could be conducted with the best promise of success. Beginning with the children themselves, and insisting on that personal neatness and cleanliness which are perfectly consistent with extreme poverty, they led their pupils to appreciate these advantages, and to strive for them

at home as well as in the school. The removal of the manure heap from the doorstep of the cottages was the first and most urgent change which had to be brought about. Argument, entreaty, prizes, the terrors of the law, were all employed to secure this first step in the social revolution. One extreme conservative, however, was proof against all these influences. He held tenaciously to the traditional custom, and resisted bribes and threats alike. His little daughter, a pupil of the school, exhausted herself in appeals to her parents, but even her solicitations were unavailing. At last the child's opportunity came; the parents went to a fair some ten miles distant and the child was left for a whole day in charge of the house. When she found herself alone in authority she made a round of the cottages in the neighbourhood and begged the men there to help her in removing from her father's door that unsightliness of which they had cleared their own. They entered into her scheme enthusiastically, a crowd of workers gathered, and when evening came, and the stubborn recalcitrant returned from the fair, he found that his manure heap had been put out of sight and was replaced by a neatly gravelled approach which even he had to admit made his doorway more inviting than it had ever appeared before. He reconciled himself to the transformation, and other improvements within and around the homestead quickly followed.

In the view of this question which I have presented I have dwelt almost exclusively on the effects of the school on rural life. I have been induced to do so by the consideration that the welfare of Ireland depends primarily on the prosperity and comfort of the rural population. Our school system should provide for the amelioration of the life our people have actually engaged, rather than aim at introducing new industries and new consequent conditions of life. This latter task is beyond the power of the schoolmaster. It seems to me a fruitless and impolitic effort to teach children the methods of an industry which they will not have any opportunity of practising in their own country. Education of this kind is only an equipment for emigration, and we have no call to expend our resources in educating citizens for other nations. We have quite enough to do in providing for ourselves

This principle I would apply to the technical schools and schemes of technical instruction which now occupy the attention of Government Boards and local authorities. Where manufacturing industries exist, I would have the schools educate their pupils to become skilled workers in the field of industry which they have at hand. But where there

are no such industries I would have the children educated for work upon the land, taught to respect the agriculturist's occupation, inspired with the ambition to become successful tillers of the soil, instructed in the arts which will secure that success, and, above all things, trained to create for themselves, upon the land and out of it, the decencies and comforts of a genuine home.

I cannot see that any of the changes in educational methods which recent legislation has brought go far to realise this end. Seventy years ago the Board of National Education, with a praiseworthy conception of the purposes of a system of State education, set themselves to make a training in the essentials of agriculture an important portion of the work of Irish primary schools. But the Free Trade fanaticism was just then at its height, and it did not comport with the current views of the orthodox economists that State assistance should be given, even in education, to any branch of industry. The efforts of the Commissioners were thwarted by the Chief Secretaries of the day, and it has taken half a century of experience, and the successful competition of more enlightened countries, to convince the official theorists of their mistake. Now that saner economic views have asserted themselves, the time seems come for a return to the earlier policy. Furthermore, the advent of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction has brought facilities which did not exist when the Commissioners undertook unaided to give a practical complexion to their system. The Department co-operates with the Board in the teaching of science. Could it not extend this co-operation to the science most vital to the interests of Ireland—the science of agriculture?

The first requirement for practical education in the schools is that the teachers should be competent to impart it. It will not be claimed for the existing training colleges that they equip their students sufficiently for functions of this kind. They do not pretend to form teachers who would be equal to the duties of the teacher at Siegburg, and it is teachers of this stamp that are most urgently needed for the schools of our country.

What the training colleges fail to supply could, however, be made good by the Department. It would seem to be outside the appointed duties of that body to interfere in the actual teaching work of the schools, to send their instructors and inspectors into the schools side by side with the instructors and inspectors of the Board. Such duplication of officers would be as fruitless as it would be redundant. It is not by multiplying teachers, but by enlarging the acquirements of the existing teachers, by giving a higher and broader training to the man to whose hands the children are confided, and

who is responsible for the formation of their whole character, that the schools can be radically reformed. This higher formation of the existing teachers the Department could supply in Ireland, as the corresponding institutions furnish it in Germany. Courses of training in the methods of practical education for teachers—men and women—maintained by the Department and encouraged by the Board, would do much more for our Irish schools than the entrance into the school-room itself of the Department's instructors and inspectors. Unless the responsible teacher takes up the work of practical education enthusiastically there will be no enthusiasm for it in his pupils, unless he watches over the application of the knowledge imparted that knowledge will not be applied. And if he himself is not made to share in the knowledge, unless he becomes expert in it, he will have little interest in spreading it, and he will not concern himself strenuously about its application and its results.

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