

~~If houses and buildings are (as we have seen) undervalued, and if industrial premises are valued upon a basis of site value, plus percentage on structural cost, some attempt at uniformity ought to be made when there is a general re-valuation. The exemption of one person or class of property necessarily means the extra taxation of another.~~

~~If these conclusions are too heroic and logical in these days of compromise and half-measures, something might be done to prevent new rates and increased poundages falling on such properties as railways (which have no representation) by providing that they should not be liable for increased rates beyond those fixed in a standard year.~~

~~It seems to me that in highly taxing means of locomotion in their districts, local bodies are, in fact, taxing their constituents, in the shape of increased rates and fares. Public policy would seem to point to a low level of taxation of railways in Ireland, where so much public money has been granted or spent for railway enterprise. It is a curious inversion of this principle that localities should encourage and promote railway schemes for their districts, and even contribute to their cost by baronial guarantee or otherwise, and then proceed locally to tax these enterprises when made.\*~~

~~I conclude with expressing a hope that Parliament in dealing with these problems of local taxation will also fearlessly grapple with the question of exemptions. Property exempted from rating is now estimated to have an annual value of about three quarters of a million. This, in plain English, means compulsory local contribution to purposes which are in the main of general benefit, and *prima facie* to be supported either by general taxation, or by private charity.~~

#### 4—*The Sanitary Condition of Our National Schools.*

By ANTONY ROCHE, M.R.C.P.I.

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[Read Tuesday, February 20th, 1900.]

THAT the health of the individual and the community depends largely on their surroundings being sanitary is now universally

\* According to the Railway Returns for 1897, Light Railways appear to pay £463 in rates per annum, though there is an annual deficiency in working of £861.

admitted. That this rule is specially applicable to the young is acknowledged by all sanitarians, and that therefore their schools, wherein they spend so many hours, should meet all the requirements of modern sanitation will hardly be contested by anyone devoting any consideration to the subject.

The growing and undeveloped structures of children, their close contact in schools for a number of hours, their less power of resistance to cold and other depressing influences, all render them remarkably susceptible to the causes and spread of disease. An inquiry, therefore, into the sanitary conditions of our National School is not alone interesting, but of great practical importance. According to the last Official report there are no less than 8,651 of these schools, and on their rolls 808,467 students. I have for some years been making personal observations and inquiries into the sanitation of these schools, as, however, my sphere of observation has not extended over many parts of Ireland, I will rely rather on the evidence of the inspectors of these schools and on official returns. These inspectors have had ample and extended opportunities of observation, they cannot be expected to be prejudiced against the system of which they form a part and, therefore, when they speak so plainly of the unsanitary condition of many of these schools their opinion may be trusted as impartial. I will now read some extracts from the reports taken from the last available report of the Commissioners of National Education.

Mr. A. Purser, Head Inspector, North Dublin Group of District, reports, January 25th, '98:—

In my last report I referred to the necessity of requiring that school-houses should be suitable, kept in proper repair, and adequately warmed in cold and wet weather, and I again express as my opinion that "the Commissioners should not tolerate the existence of National Schools without offices, unless under very exceptional circumstances, and should refuse salary for winter months if adequate fires for heating the school-room are not provided. It is not an extravagant supposition that a large part of the sickness among the children of the country is brought on by badly ventilated school-houses combined with want of due warmth in wet and cold weather." It is downright cruelty to have a school-room for the poorly clad children so cold that an inspector, even with a heavy overcoat on, feels chilled in hands and feet.

But the providing of offices is not enough; they must be kept in a sanitary, clean, and decent state; and any serious neglect of this matter should be visited with heavy punishment where the fault does not lie with defective construction of these buildings.

"No credit is given, by the present system of paying teachers, for cleanliness, neatness, or ornamentation for house and premises; none for regard to the health and comfort of the pupils; none for the educative example of decency and order, so these are naturally neglected in a greater or less degree."

A considerable number of recently built vested schools that I have visited are very unsatisfactory structures, faulty in plan, unsound in construction, and, as a result, rapidly falling into bad

repair. Within the last month I visited a pair of schools in the county Wexford, which had not been occupied a single week, built at the public expense by a grant of two-thirds of the nominal cost. It is probably no uncharitable supposition that this "two-thirds" given by the Commissioners covered the whole cost of the building. The roof was not staunch; fittings, such as the boot scrapers at the doors had already given way; the woodwork was rough and unplanned, and hence the varnishing will be of little avail in keeping it clean; it was also so fresh that the joints were everywhere opening; at the corners of the rooms where the ventilation tubes are placed, one could see daylight through the wall, and the teachers were obliged to fill up the chinks with paper. This is certainly very far from satisfactory, and coupled with the after neglect which is common in country places in regard to school buildings calls for the application of some check.

It is very inadvisable to allow the applicant to be the contractor for building the house for which he has received a grant. For the above defect the teachers are, of course, in no way responsible. But in many cases they do not pay as much regard to cleanliness, neatness, and order as is desirable—defects which, partly owing to this neglect and bad example, are only too painfully observable in the children as well as in the school-rooms. With regard to the school-houses, I would suggest that the ceilings should be flat; that where the services of one or more assistants are likely to be available, a class-room should be built for each, not the little cell that usually is provided, but a room nearly as large as the main room and able to contain the assistant's whole division.

Mr. Sullivan, LL.B., Head Inspector, Galway Group of Districts, reports, February 10th, '98:—

As I have said, the attendance in most schools is, comparatively, good in winter. But this is only when the winter is mild. A very large proportion of the children of this province is poorly fed and very poorly clad. It is painful to see—as an inspector cannot fail to see—little groups of barefooted boys and girls, miserably clad, trying to make their way on a winter's morning to the neighbouring school. In such cases one hopes that the school-room, when reached, may make these poor children warm and comfortable. Unfortunately this is not the case. My experience, and it is extensive, is that the school-room which awaits most children after their walk over bleak roads or paths, is a cold cheerless apartment. Some sods of turf have been placed on the hearth and lighted, but as yet they give no heat, nothing but a mass of smoke. One day last January—and this day and the school may be taken as typical of many others—I was examining in such a cheerless room as that which I have above described. As the children came in they sat—quiet, melancholy, and miserable-looking, in the desks. I was glad to keep on my overcoat, and I also had the advantage of moving about. The sods of turf—there were not many—though "lighted" about ten o'clock, smouldered away, but showed none of the usual appearance of a fire; no blaze, no heat—until half-past eleven. Even then the fire added little or nothing to the heat of the room, but owing to the presence of the children the room began to get moderately warm.

Mr. F. Eardley, Head Inspector, Londonderry Group of Districts, reports, February, '98:—

A great mistake was made in the erection of many of these houses: they were built too small. A floor space of eight square feet per pupil was quite inadequate, seeing that out of that area had to be deducted the spaces for doors unwisely opening inwards; for the teacher's rostrum, an antiquated incumbrance; for a demonstration board, which was unsightly and almost useless; and for a free space round the fireplaces, so that schools built according to scale for the accommodation, say, of 75 pupils, were helplessly overcrowded when that number attended. A glaring defect in most of the schools is the condition of the out-offices. In the country the schools would be better off without them as they are kept—offensive alike both to health and to decency.

Mr. Alexander, Head Inspector, Cork Group of Districts, reports, January 27th, '98:—

Teachers are required by rules of the Board—

- (1.) To promote, both by precept and example, cleanliness, neatness, and decency.
- (2.) To satisfy themselves by personal inspection every morning that the children have had their hands and faces washed, their hair combed, and clothes cleaned, and where necessary mended.
- (3.) To have the school apartments swept and dusted every evening, and whitewashed at least once a year.
- (4.) To take every care to promote the health and comfort of the pupils.
- (5.) To impress upon the minds of their pupils the great rule of regularity and order—a time and place for everything, and everything in its proper time and place.

I had to complain in my last Report that so far as my observation extended, these rules appeared to be very imperfectly observed. The experience gained during the past year does not enable me to qualify this statement—quite the contrary. Instances of culpable neglect of these important regulations have, too frequently, come under my notice. I visited the three schools in a large village, not long ago, at a quarter past ten in the morning. The weather was cold and wet. I found the teacher of the boys' school walking about doing nothing, while two boys were sweeping the floor and a third was endeavouring to light the fire. In the adjoining infants' school I found a few children huddled together in a cold cheerless room. The mistress explained that she had been obliged to go in search of materials for a fire, hence the delay in commencing business.

On a pouring wet morning in September last I visited the male and female schools in a certain locality at half-past nine, and found neither of the teachers in attendance. The boys had to remain without shelter till 10 o'clock, and the girls till 10.15 o'clock, at which hours, respectively, the principals of the two schools arrived.

In the case of another school the Inspector of the district had to draw attention in 1895 to the filthy condition of the offices, and his successor found it necessary to do the same in 1896. I visited the school towards the end of 1897 and found matters worse than ever in that respect.

Mr. J. Moran, Head Inspector, Belfast Group of Schools, January 24th, '98:—

I have little to add to the few remarks on school-houses in my report for last year. Several are altogether unsuitable, and some have no out-offices attached. I regret to find that some of the Inspectors recommend, in special cases, a grant to a school conducted in an unsuitable house. Of course, we are told, this is only a temporary arrangement. A new school is to be built forthwith, or as soon as funds are available, but so soon as the grant is obtained no further steps are taken.

Mr. W. J. Browne, M.A., District Inspector, Londonderry, January 29th, '98:—

In many instances the out-offices are damp and badly ventilated, with earthen floors.

Mr. H. Cox, District Inspector, Coleraine, reports, January 31st, '98:—

Ventilation, too, is another point that does not receive sufficient attention. It must be within the knowledge of all the members of the Inspection Staff that, very often, instead of all the windows of a school-room freely admitting of being opened for ventilation, they are nailed, so as to prevent this. I have often gone into a school where, after remaining only a few minutes, I have had a bad headache from having been obliged to breathe the foul, unventilated air. Is it a matter for surprise that in such schools the pupils become languid, inattentive, unresponsive; and that the teacher finds himself, at the end of the day, completely exhausted—to become eventually anæmic or worse?

Mr. J. Chambers, B.A., District Inspector, Strabane, January, '98:—

The remaining schoolhouses are, as a rule, substantially built, but the lighting and the sanitary arrangements of several of them are defective.

Mr. J. P. Dalton, M.A., District Inspector, Belfast, reports, January 31st, '98:—

And twenty-one schools have been enlarged. The evil of overcrowding is yet far from being abolished. The district, moreover, is still disfigured by the existence of some half-a-dozen schools of such defective construction and ill-chosen situations that they would bring reproach upon any district, while they form an exceptionally discreditable contrast to the great majority of the fine school buildings which are to be seen in every part of the city.

Mr. J. M'Neill, B.A., District Inspector, January 12th, '98, reports:—

With regard to school buildings the general state of things is only fairly satisfactory. Schools vested in the Commissioners are of course well looked after, and those vested in the Trustees are also kept in fair repair. But several of the non-vested class are un-

suitable for schoolhouses. Of late years one or two of the worst have been replaced by proper buildings, and negotiations are going on with respect to several others. About a dozen still remain that are only a degree better than ordinary cabins. Repairs to non-vested schools have sometimes to be made by the teacher; sometimes a concert is held, and funds are raised. These extensions and repairs should if practicable meet with more encouragement from the Department.

Mr. J. Ross, M.A., District Inspector, Newry, January, '98, reports:—

In eight instances, seven being mixed schools, no sanitary provision exists. In a few instances the windows of the schools are furnished with diamond panes, and the lighting is in consequence unsatisfactory.

Mr. W. J. McClintock, M.A., District Inspector, Cavan, January, '98:—

A considerable number of instances of unsuitable accommodation, however, still remain, and there are five cases in which the houses are extremely defective and the pupils suffer from insufficient light and from imperfect ventilation. The offices are kept fairly clean, and the rooms are, as a rule, limewashed once a year, but the teachers are often remiss in their duty as to dusting—the walls and tablets afford indisputable evidence on this point. The want of an abundant supply of fuel is much felt in many localities, where no provision is made for a fire except the few turf which the pupils bring with them from day to day. This circumstance combined with the excessive moisture of the climate makes the walls damp and renders many of the houses incapable of affording a high degree of comfort in inclement weather. In numerous instances the premises are very small or non-existent, and the playground is the adjacent road or lane. This want of sufficient space outside has sometimes necessitated the erection of offices against the wall of the house—an arrangement which must be highly objectionable from a sanitary point of view.

Mr. D. F. Fitzgerald, B.A., District Inspector, Ballinamore, January, '98:—

These will still leave seventeen houses which cannot be decided otherwise than bad. They are, for the most part, wretched hovels, thatched, unceiled, with rugged clay floors, imperfectly lighted, and still more imperfectly ventilated, and provided with neither offices nor playground; they are poorly furnished, afford inadequate accommodation, and offer no facilities for teaching.

Mr. J. P. D. Lynam, M.A., District Inspector, Templemore, January, '98:—

With some notable exceptions, the school buildings and furniture in this district are very fairly adapted to their purpose. But there is almost universally an absence of taste, and even of cleanliness, which is much to be regretted. Even in some of the modern vested schools the walls are bare and grimy, the roofs cobwebby, the windows dirty, and the playground more like a pen for domestic animals than a place of recreation for young people. Bareness and squalor, unrelieved by any touch of care or adornment, are the prevailing

features. The homes of the Irish peasantry are not remarkable for order and cleanliness, and at school they see little to improve them in this respect. A very small expenditure, with a certain amount of trouble, would be sufficient to make the schools neat and tasteful in appearance. There seems to be no way of remedying the present state of things, except by making the teacher's income depend to some extent on the appearance of his school.

Mr. J. F. Hogan, District Inspector, Ennis, January, '98:—

In four of the small towns in this district new schools are needed. In the first case there is no chance of securing a site; the landlord will give nothing except at an exorbitant figure, and the prospect of heavy costs deters the manager from availing of the compulsory powers for acquiring that site. In two others the site can be got now; local aid is forthcoming, but building grants are not available, and when they are, the manager may not be able to secure the plot of ground. In the fourth case the buildings are not very bad, but old-fashioned and falling out of repair; here again no grants are available. In these three cases, I fear, old unsuitable houses will have to be put up with for years to come. For schools classified as "bad" in the annual returns of each district, some steps should be taken—that is, when building grants are to be got—to support managers in securing local aid, and to rouse the parents of the pupils from their apathy. Each inspector should be asked to furnish a list of these schools. These lists should be placed in the hands of an officer of the Board of Works competent to give a professional opinion on state of building repair and sanitary accommodation. He would then visit each school and furnish a short report. These schools should then be placed in a special schedule published each year. No new appointments should be made in them, no monitors recommended, and according as vacancies occur they should not be filled in.

Mr. J. A. Coyne, B.A., District Inspector, Tralee, Jan., '98:—

There are thirteen schools without out-offices.

Mr. Louis Daly, M.A., District Inspector, Mallow, March, '98:—

About two-thirds of the schools here are fairly comfortable and well warmed. Ventilation, however, during the school day does not receive due attention, and I have very frequently to complain of neglect of this important matter. The Practical Rule on this subject could generally be much more effectively observed.

Now let us turn to another section of the official report wherein the schools are classified:—

1. As regards the cleanliness of the out-offices, I find out of 8,542 schools, the out-offices are described as middling, or bad as regards cleanliness in no less than 2,068, and in 823 there are no out-offices at all—a state of things both immoral and unsanitary.
2. As regards buildings repairs, I find 2,411 schools are reported as middling or bad.

3. Furniture and apparatus are reported as middling or bad in 2,590 schools.
4. Premises and play-ground middling or bad, 2,344 schools. No play-ground in 1,577.
5. Space accommodation middling or bad in no less than 1,713 schools.

These are important and certainly not satisfactory returns.

I find also that out of 808,467 students on the rolls only 211 passed in the subject of hygiene. Moreover, in only one of the five Training Colleges is this subject taught, and of 843 internal students in these colleges training for teachers, actually only 3 passed in it.

I think that I have shown conclusively that sanitary laws are neglected and outraged in many of the National Schools in Ireland. The importance of this to the children, and to the community of which they constitute so important a part as the coming generation of our workers, is self-evident. I will not apportion the blame of the existing state of things. How far the Government, the Board of National Education, the managers, and perhaps in some respects the teachers are each responsible, or conjointly so, I will not, at least on the present occasion, enter into, but this I do unhesitatingly say that no shifting of responsibility can or should be allowed to hinder or delay reform. I hope the Press will direct the attention of the people and of our members of Parliament to the facts I have laid before you, and that practical and immediate efforts will thus be made to do justice to our poor people and their children.

I wish to make here two acknowledgments:—

1st. That the greatest credit should be given to the Head and District Inspectors for their repeated and emphatic condemnation of the sanitary abuses that come so constantly under their notice. It is too frequently the custom for officials connected with any system to overlook or hide the defects of that system. Their rising above this common fault shows that they are worthy not alone of the confidence of their Board, but of much more importance of the public.

2nd. I fully allow and appreciate the improvements that have been made in many of the schools in sanitary matters, but I consider this improvement in some schools is only an argument of what could and should be done in others. It might be interesting were I to give a summary of what has been done in school sanitation in America and in many continental countries, but already this paper has, I am afraid, exhausted your patience, so I must reserve it for some future occasion.

I will conclude by giving some suggestions towards reform that have occurred to me during my study of this question. I do not lay them before you as a complete scheme, but rather as hints towards the drawing of such:—



1st. It is evident that the schools directly under the Board are better kept and inspected than those under their partial control.

2nd. The plans and inspection of new schools seem in some cases, at least, to have been defective. This is inexcusable, and those responsible ought to be made answerable, and care taken in the future that both plans and inspection are above question, at least, the public have a right to expect that the new schools will not perpetuate recognised sanitary defects.

3rd. The keeping of the new structures in repair seems frequently, according to the reports, to be neglected.

4th. In the winter the school rooms should be warmed. If no fund at present exists for this purpose an application to Parliament should be made for a grant.

5th. A special sanitary report should be made and published of every National School by competent authorities—and where the sanitary defects are removable they should be, when not, a new building should be insisted on. The cubic space for each child, the ventilation, the heating, the sanitary accommodation which should be available in every school, the state of the buildings, and the dryness of the walls and roof, the ground for recreation should be specially noted.

It may be objected that there are no funds to meet this expenditure. Then apply to Parliament. No better use could be made of the public money.

6th. The instruction of our teachers in hygiene. It is quite evident from many of the reports that they do not appreciate at present the importance of this science. I have already shown the few who qualify in it; the subject should be made compulsory for all teachers, so that they may, in their turn, impart at least some knowledge to the pupils.

7th. The National Board ought to have a competent adviser to whom they might refer the many health questions, that so frequently arise. The London School Board have such a referee, and his use is shown by the valuable report published yearly, by the Board, giving the immense amount of sanitary work done. Many of the School Boards throughout England have also appointed a Medical Sanitary Adviser.

8th. The printing and circulation amongst the children of simple instruction in the elements of sanitation and the best methods of preserving their health and avoiding disease.

If such suggestions were adopted I have no doubt that the health of our children would be greatly improved, and that the schools would be object lessons in sanitation and cleanliness, which, in many cases, they certainly are not at the present time.