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THE

CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—FREE EDUCATION.

THE agitation for Free Education, which failed so signally in 1870, can hardly be said to have achieved any conspicuous success in 1885. Mr. Gladstone pointed out the difficulties which beset the question—"difficulties which demand, at any rate, grave consideration"—and expressly excluded it from his programme. The electors of the London School Board, looking at it, perhaps, from a ratepayer's point of view, pronounced very decidedly against it. . It is true that a considerable number of Liberal candidates, following the lead of the Bradford Conference, gave it a more or less hearty support; but this only served to bring into greater prominence the entire absence of any enthusiasm, and even of any demand for it on the part of the people. The whole agitation was forced, artificial—from above, and not from below. There could be no mistake, indeed, about the earnestness of Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. John Morley, and Mr. Jesse Collings. Their persistence gave the subject a prominence which there was nothing else in the course of the elections to warrant. Put by Mr. Chamberlain in the forefront of his programme, offered as a boon—I will not say as a bribe—to the working classes, and especially to the agricultural labourers, it failed altogether to arouse their interest; it hardly attracted their attention. I have heard and read almost innumerable explanations of the vote of the agricultural labourers. I do not remember to have met with one, either from Liberals, or Radicals, or Conservatives, which ascribed the slightest importance or effect to the cry for Free Education. The Land question, and still more the question of Free Trade or Fair Trade, and in some parts of the country the question of Disestablishment, excited the strongest feeling on both sides, and were the turning-points of many contests; but I do not suppose that anyone could point to a single election where the cry for Free Education

affected the result. It was recognised almost from the beginning as being factitious—a cry of politicians, and not a want of the people. Here in Plymouth, as I write, we have just had a School Board election. There were four candidates who claimed to represent the working-classes. They were eager for economy; they complained of extravagance in the building and fitting-up of schools; they demanded the reduction of salaries; they were divided about religious instruction; but not one of them made a point of Free Education, nor at any of their meetings did there appear to be the least interest shown in the subject. It is the same in other parts of the country. But for Mr. Chamberlain and his friends, who are still striving laboriously to keep it alive, the agitation would soon die a natural death and be forgotten.

But the persistent efforts of such men as Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. John Morley cannot safely be ignored. Though they do not represent a popular movement, they may at least create it. It is necessary for us to be equally alert. Both as citizens and as Churchmen, we must bear in mind what this cry really means and what it involves, and lose no opportunity of making known the grave issues which lie under a proposal apparently so innocent. Fortunately its advocates have not attempted to conceal their ultimate object. Their programme in 1869—the programme of the Birmingham Education League—was compulsory, free, secular education.[1] Mr. John Morley, speaking at Cambridge on the 29th of September last, said: "Of course I am one who believe that the question will not end with free schools. You must have your primary instruction not only easily accessible, but you must do other things when the time comes. You must first of all make it good and make it better than it now is; and the second thing is, you must bring this whole scheme of popular instruction, which is mainly provided for out of the public purse, under popular and elective management." A few days later Mr. Chamberlain, speaking at Bradford on this same question of Free Education, went on to say: "The existence of sectarian schools supported by State grants is no doubt a very serious question in itself, and one which some day or other ought to receive consideration.

[1] The League adopted the word "unsectarian," but in answer to a member who complained of this, Mr. George Dixon, the chairman, explained, "We do not use the word 'secular,' but we exclude all theological parts of religion, and I am sure that what is left is what even Mr. Dowson himself [the objector] would call 'secular.'" Mr. George Dawson, Mr. Cremer, Professor Thorold Rogers, Mr. Holyoake, and others, plainly called their scheme of education "secular." Mr. Applegarth said, "It is no use trying to mix up a national education with any portion of religion, however small the dose."

Whenever the time comes for its discussion, I for one shall not hesitate to express my opinion that contributions of Government money, whether great or small, ought in all cases to be accompanied by some form of representative control. To my mind, the spectacle of so-called national schools turned into a private preserve by clerical managers, and used for exclusive purposes of politics or religion, is one which the law ought not to tolerate." It is true that Mr. Chamberlain added that "this is a question which can be treated by itself," and that it "should not be mixed up or confused with the just claims of the working-class to a free education in all the common schools of the country." But as if to avoid any possibility of doubt, the Bradford Conference adopted a resolution "That in the opinion of this meeting the public elementary schools of this country should be placed under the management of duly elected representatives of the people, and that they should be ultimately freed, and that any deficiency should be made good out of the national exchequer." There can be no mistake about this. It means not only School Boards everywhere, but Board schools. It means the extinction of the voluntary schools, the abolition of denominational education. It means the complete reversal of the policy of the past.

Our policy hitherto—the policy of the Act of 1870—has been to encourage and assist schools established and managed by religious bodies and philanthropic persons, and to supplement them by rate-supported schools under the management of Boards. The Act found the voluntary system in possession, and did not attempt to dislodge it. It provided, however, for the establishment of School Boards, and the erection of fresh schools wherever they were needed. In the working of the Act it is true that School Boards with their exceptional powers and almost unlimited funds have enjoyed enormous advantages over the managers of voluntary schools. But the intention, no doubt, was to give the voluntary schools fair play; and the experience of fifteen years has amply justified the policy of the Act. If it has proved anything, it has proved this: that the country has no desire for the extinction of the voluntary schools, and that the voluntary schools, in spite of the disadvantages under which they labour, are able fairly to hold their own against their more favoured rivals. The voluntary schools inspected in England and Wales, which numbered 8,281 in 1870, with an average attendance of 1,152,389, had increased in 1884 to 14,580, with an average attendance of 2,157,292; while the Board schools in 1884 numbered only 4,181, with an average attendance of 1,115,832.[1] This is the

[1] "Report of Committee of Council," 1885, p. ix.

answer of the country to the offer of an unsectarian, rate-supported education. Two out of every three children in attendance are attending voluntary schools. Remembering that the voluntary schools comprise the majority of schools in country districts and in the poorer quarters of large towns, and that their buildings and equipment are for the most part older and less complete than those of Board schools, and their teaching staff, for lack of means, often inferior, it cannot be said that they are inefficient or compare badly with the Board schools, when it appears that the percentage of passes in reading, writing, and arithmetic in all voluntary schools in 1884 was 83·89 against 85·47 in the Board schools.[1] The voluntary schools are strong, therefore, in their results, and in the possesssion of the confidence of the country, and an immediate and direct attack upon them would not be likely to be successful. The attack, therefore, is to be made covertly, and even with an outward show of liberality. The proposal now made is to establish a system of Free (or rather tax-paid) Education by a grant from the national exchequer of a sum equivalent to the present amount of school fees in all elementary schools. The ostensible purpose of the proposal is, of course, to relieve the labourer from the payment of school-pence, which Mr. Chamberlain, with his usual extravagance of language, describes as "an intolerable burden"—"a cruel and abominable tax." Let us see what relief the poor would really derive from such a measure.

The amount of school-pence paid in all the elementary schools in England and Wales in 1884 was £1,734,115, an increase of £74,372 upon the previous year.[2] It suits Mr. Chamberlain to describe this as a mere trifle. It is more than a quarter of the income of the schools from all sources. It is nearly double the amount now raised by rates throughout the country. It would add considerably more than half as much again to the present Government grant.[3] It is a sum which, I venture to say, no Chancellor of the Exchequer would be willing to add to the annual taxation of the country without very urgent reason. And it does not include any provision for Scotland or Ireland, which, I presume, would demand to be treated in the same manner; nor can it be taken to be the limit of the cost of such a measure even for England and Wales, as the amount must be expected to increase annually with the increase of the number of children on the books and in average attendance. But it is quite impossible to suppose that the addition to the national expenditure would end with

[1] "Report of Committee of Council," 1855, p. 222. [2] *Ibid.*, p. viii.
[3] See Table XIV., "Report," p. 230.

this large and continually increasing grant. With so great an increase of the Government grant to voluntary schools, there must inevitably come a large increase of Government control, more imperative demands upon managers and teachers, and the exaction of a greater quantity and higher quality of secular instruction, which will still further encroach upon the time and diminish the attention given to religious teaching, and thus vitally affect the very object for which the schools are maintained, and tend to destroy their value in the eyes of their supporters. This would, I fear, be the certain result of such a measure, if it were to take its natural course unaided. But the declarations of Mr. Chamberlain and his friends, which I have already quoted, show that they would endeavour to accelerate such a result by insisting upon "some form of representative control" as a condition or consequence of the increase of the grant. The author of the Radical Programme refers (p. 172) to "the determination of the Liberals" (or rather of his section of the Liberal Party) "to bring up again, when occasion should serve, the whole question of education by means of schools under private management;" and Mr. Chamberlain, in his letter to the Dean of Wells, declared that he regarded "the present position of voluntary schools as anomalous," and would make provision for "some popular representative control of the schools during school hours, leaving the use of the buildings at all times, except those when the secular instruction is being given, to the subscribers and general managers." But we may retain as much use of our school buildings as this on a transfer to a School Board under the 23rd section of the Act of 1870, and is it likely that managers and subscribers would continue to bear the expense and trouble and responsibility of maintaining schools, when they might have just as much use and control of them without? The inevitable result must be that sooner or later the cost of maintaining the present voluntary schools must fall upon School Boards, or their place be supplied by schools under Board management. How vast an increase of expenditure this would involve may be imagined when we remember that while the cost per scholar in average attendance in all the voluntary schools in England and Wales in 1884 was £1 14s. 10½d.,[1] the cost per scholar in Board schools, excluding charges on account of capital, was £3 2s. 8¼d., or, including capital charges, was £4 11s. 5½d.[2] Let me illustrate this by saying that while at

[1] "Report," pp. 236, 237.

[2] The cost per scholar given in the "Report," pp. xxxvii. and 237, as £2 1s. 8½d., includes the cost of "maintenance" only. The figures above given are arrived at by comparing the expenditure of the Boards shown on p. 91, col. 7, with the number of children in average attendance, p. 237.

this rate a voluntary school, with an average attendance of 300 children, would cost £523 per annum, a Board school with the same attendance would cost £940 per annum, or, reckoning—as must, indeed, fairly be reckoned—its proportionate share of capital charges, such as purchase of land, furnishing, and repayment of loans, no less than £1,371 per annum. The absorption of the voluntary schools into the costly School Board system would involve, therefore, a total expenditure, assuming only the present attendance, of at least ten and a half millions; or, including capital charges—which, as I have said, cannot properly be excluded—of upwards of fifteen millions per annum. How rapidly this expenditure would increase may be inferred from a statement in the "Report" for 1885, that "the amount annually required to meet the liabilities incurred by School Boards in providing school accommodation . . . . increased from £627,112 in 1882 to £734,262 in 1884, and now requires a rate of 2·1d. in the pound on the ratable value of school districts, as against a rate of 1·9d. in 1882."[1] The loans to School Boards sanctioned up to the 1st of April, 1885, amounted to £17,355,954 19s. 3d.[2] The "Report" remarks, with a grim humour not common in official documents, that "the School Boards have availed themselves freely of the power of borrowing on the security of the rates given by the Acts of 1870 and 1873."

What relief would the poor derive from this enormous increase of expenditure? Levied though it would be, of course, by direct taxation, the burden must fall upon all classes of the community, and the pressure of it must be felt most severely, as is always the case, by the poorest, because it is the poorest who can least afford any increase of their expenses. The over-taxed shop-keeper must increase the price of his goods, the over-taxed landlord must raise his rent, and the labouring man must suffer. And for what? Not for the schooling of his own children mainly, but for the instruction of the children of

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The Rev. J. Glendinning Nash, in his letters to the *Morning Post* in September last, estimated the cost of each scholar in Board schools at £5 2s. 5d., and I have hitherto adopted his estimate. But he includes in the total expenditure of the Boards, outstanding liabilities other than loans, which, on consideration, I think ought not to be included, as they may be expected to come into the account next year.

[1] Page xxxiii. How reckless the expenditure has been is shown by the statement (p. xi.) that the average cost of erecting voluntary schools, *with residences for the teachers*, has been about £5 7s. per scholar, including, as a rule, the value of the sites, very often given gratuitously; while the estimated cost per scholar of the School Board schools, including the cost of sites, is about £12 5s. The average salary of 380 masters in voluntary schools in the metropolitan district in the past year was £152 9s. 5d., and that of 313 masters in Board schools was £257 15s. 5d. (p. xxv.).

[2] Page xi.

people who are perfectly well able to pay for it themselves, who do not ask and do not want a remission of fees, but who would in fact derive the greatest benefit from this vast expenditure. Nearly half the entire number of children in elementary schools are paying from 3d. to 9d. a week. These cannot be supposed to be subject to any hardship. The "Report" mentions schools in Cambridge—schools receiving a Government grant, and classed as elementary schools,[1] and therefore included among those in which fees are proposed to be remitted, where "an observer might note, say, a wealthy merchant's children descending at the . . . . school door from a carriage and pair, [or] a clergyman's children coming in daily by rail from the country" (p. 309). The Oxford Garden School of the London School Board is said to be "draining the higher class private schools, not only in its immediate vicinity, but elsewhere."[2] It is children going to such schools as these, and at present paying, as I have said, from 3d. to 9d. a week, children who remain longer at school than the children of the working-classes, who require the instruction of superior teachers, and use more expensive books and materials—it is these children whose education costs the most, and it is the cost of educating these children that this measure would throw upon the labouring classes. The relief would be altogether illusive. The working-man now pays a small sum in school-pence, "the price of a quart of beer a week," as Mr. John Bright said the other day, for the brief period of his children's school-days. This measure would relieve him of this small payment to saddle him in exchange with a burden to be borne throughout his whole lifetime. The French peasant says, according to M. Monod, "I used to pay for my own children, now I pay for other people's." The English labourer might say, if this measure were passed, "I used to pay for my own children for a few years, now I pay for people who can perfectly well afford to pay for themselves, and I have to pay for them all my life long."

And what other advantage is claimed for the system of Free Education, besides this more than doubtful relief of the working-classes? We are told it will promote regularity of attendance. The author of the Radical Programme quotes a comparison made by Dr. Watts of the attendance at the Manchester Free School with the attendance at some of the Board schools in Manchester, in favour of the Free School by

[1] They are so entered on p. 522.

[2] *Kensington News*, October 31, 1885, quoted in *Church Quarterly Review*, January, 1886, p. 352. It appears from the financial statement of the Board that the children are actually supplied with books gratis at the cost of the ratepayers.—*Times*, February 5, 1886.

from 22 to 37 per cent. On the other hand, the Rev. R. R. Hutton, Chairman of the School Attendance Committee for the Barnet Union, compares two schools in Barnet, at which the fees range from 1d. to 6d. with a free school there. The total accommodation of the former is 760, and of the latter about 100. The number of complaints of non-attendance at the former in the three weeks taken was 34, and at the latter in the same three weeks was 20, a difference of at least 16 per cent. in favour of the schools where fees are paid. But I do not believe that the question can be determined by any comparison of individual instances. The attendance at individual schools may depend very much upon the master, or the managers, or the reputation, or even the situation, of the school. The question can only be fairly settled by a large induction. I ascribe more importance to the statement of Mr. Miall in 1870, that the whole of the evidence produced before the Duke of Newcastle's Commission, of which he was a member, went to show that free schools "were the worst possible schools, and that parents who had to pay something for the education of their children valued the instruction thus given much more."[1] And the reports on education in the United States, where the experiment has been tried on the largest scale, point to the same conclusion. It is true that the author of the Radical Programme asserts that "in the United States they get a much better attendance without compulsion than we do with all our irritating compulsory machinery;"[2] but as a matter of fact, there is compulsion in several of the American States, and the percentage of average attendance, according to the "Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1884," shows a percentage of average daily attendance varying from 33·41 in Maryland, where there is no compulsion, to 86·32 in New Hampshire, where there is compulsion. The length of the school year in America varies, however, from only 62 days in North Carolina to 199 in Maryland. Supposing, for the sake of comparison with our own average attendance, a uniform school year of 200 days, the average attendance would vary from 26·93 in Western Virginia to 65·11 (the highest) in Massachusetts.[3] The average attendance in this country being about 75,[4] it cannot be said that the experience of America tends to

[1] The Chairman of the London School Board has stated that "he had obtained statistics to show that the attendance of children whose fees were remitted was worse than the attendance of children whose fees were paid."—*Standard*, 1st February, 1886.

[2] It is delicious to see this attempt to throw odium on compulsion by those who were the strenuous advocates of compulsion in 1869.

[3] Letter of the Rev. T. C. Morse, *Times*, September 12, 1885. See also Dr. Rigg's letter in the *Times* of November 10, 1885.

[4] Report, 1885, p. xvi.

show that free schools promote regularity of attendance. Non-attendance and irregularity of attendance are in fact the standing complaints of educationists in the United States, and Mr. Jacobson, a citizen of Chicago, has lately published a pamphlet in which he gravely proposes that a pecuniary compensation should be made to parents for the loss of their children's labour, in order to induce them to send them to school. In fact, the causes of irregularity are there, as here, not the school-pence, but the want of the children's earnings, or of their help at home; sickness, want of clothing, and especially want of boots; distance from school in country places and bad weather; and, above all, inability of the parents to control their children. Sitting as a magistrate I have over and over again heard parents declare that they were utterly unable to manage children of eight and ten years old; that they sent them to school, but the children did not choose to go, and nobody could make them. These are excuses which Free Education will not affect here, as it has not affected them in America. I do not say that there is no hardship at all. I have no doubt that there are many cases where poor parents have to struggle hard to pay for their children's schooling. They have to struggle much harder, however, to pay for their children's food and clothing, and it would be as reasonable to provide free boots for everybody or free bread, because some people find it hard to pay the shoemaker or the baker, as to provide Free Education for everybody, because some people find it hard to pay the school-pence. It is a hardship, I think, that parents not of the pauper class should have to apply to the guardians for the payment of school fees for their children. To say the least, it must make the road to pauperism easier. But the proportion of children whose fees are paid by the guardians is very small—a little over 3 per cent. of the number on the registers. I am sure that a remedy might be found for these cases. Some of the inspectors suggest that representatives of the school managers should be elected to the Attendance Committee. I have proposed that a committee be appointed by the School Board or Magistrates in every district, of which the Correspondents of voluntary schools should be ex-officio members. Let application for aid be made to this committee. Let them grant certificates which may be accepted by the managers of any school, and the amount due on them be claimed and paid by the Education Department with the annual grant. There will be no disgrace in this, no taint of pauperism. It will secure independence and a due sense of parental responsibility to the great body of parents, and the increase of expense will be almost inappreciable. The payments will probably go almost

entirely to Board schools; but where they do not, being a Government grant, they will not be open to the objections alleged against the 25th clause of the Act of 1870.

Mr. Chamberlain talks about the unpopularity of our present system of education. I do not believe it is unpopular on the whole. But Free Education will not make it less so, for it will not remove either of the complaints which are now made against it. It will not lessen the rates, which are the chief cause of grumbling among the middle class; nor is it proposed, as far as I know, to abolish compulsion, which is the chief cause of grumbling among the poor. I heard, indeed, the other day, of a Wiltshire labourer who, when he was asked why he supported Free Education, said it was because he thought it was quite right that a man should be free to send his children to school or not as he liked, just as it used to be in the old days; but if the good man imagined that this is what Mr. Chamberlain means by Free Education, he is certainly doomed to disappointment. What Mr. Chamberlain does mean by Free Education, however, is a much more serious thing. It is an alteration of the whole basis of our system. It is a shifting of the responsibility from the parent to the State. The Government of 1870 was most careful to leave this responsibility upon the parent, while aiding him, whenever necessary, to fulfil it. The principle is actually enacted in the Act of 1876, in the fourth section of which it is provided that "it shall be the duty of the parent of every child to cause such child to receive efficient elementary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic." In opposing Mr. Dixon's amendment in favour of Free Education in 1870, Mr. Forster said: "If they were broadly to lay down the principle that the State ought to pay the cost of the education, they would, in effect, say to the great body of parents throughout the country—'We think it our business rather than yours to educate your children.'" And this is precisely what Mr. Chamberlain and his friends now propose to do. It is true that the parent may still pay in rates or taxes, but he will pay as a ratepayer or taxpayer, and not as a parent. It is true that at the present time he is assisted by the State, and perhaps by private benevolence; but the school-pence are a continual reminder, and the payment of them a constant exercise of his duty. Free Education must inevitably weaken the parent's sense of obligation to his child. And it will as inevitably, I fear, weaken the obligation of the child to the parent. But more than this. In assuming the entire responsibility for the education of the child, the State must necessarily assume a very much larger share of control. And with the extension of State control our schools must lose the independence,

variety and freedom which have hitherto been their characteristic excellences. At the Trades Union Congress, at Southport, last autumn, a resolution was passed protesting against the introduction of drill into elementary schools as a cunningly devised plan to prepare the way for conscription. In this particular case I think the Congress was wrong. I believe that drill was introduced only for the sake of the physical improvement of the children. But the alarm arose out of a right instinct. The Government control of our schools would involve serious danger both to civil and religious liberty. And it is no answer to this to say that the Government is dependent on the will of the people. The despotism of a democracy may be as dangerous as the despotism of an autocrat.

But the most fatal result of Free Education would be the loss of religious teaching. For a system of State education which, as I have shown, must be the result of Free Education, and which is indeed the declared object of its advocates, must be in the end a secular system. For a little time School Boards might maintain that unsectarian teaching which Mr. Holyoake called "Parliamentary piety." But what no one would be much interested in keeping up, and what a great many people would be eager to put down, would not be likely to last very long. Even now I suspect that the religious instruction in Board schools would not bear much looking into. The Devonport School Board professes, and I believe with perfect sincerity, its desire to provide religious instruction in its schools. On the eve of the recent election a ratepayer took the trouble to make some inquiry at the nearest Board school. He found that no religious instruction had been given there for a month. The explanation of the master is that his school was a little backward in some subjects, and he had omitted the religious instruction in order to work up the children in other matters. I have heard of other instances of the same kind, and I believe that if careful inquiry were made, it would be found to be no uncommon occurrence. I say deliberately that I think it would be better to have no religious instruction at all, than to have it treated like this. I can imagine nothing more likely to injure and degrade religion in the eyes of the children than to have it dealt with as a subject of secondary importance, to be set aside for the sake of vulgar fractions or geography. But with the great and constantly increasing requirements of the Code, this is certain to be the case, unless the managers themselves feel the primary importance of religious teaching, and are resolved that before all things the school shall be a religious school.[1] It was declared by the

[1] As a school manager for nearly twenty years, I may venture to urge

Committee of Council in their instructions to their inspectors in 1840, that "no plan of education ought to be encouraged in which intellectual instruction is not subordinate to the regulation of the thoughts and habits of the children by the doctrines and precepts of revealed religion." Five-and-forty years have greatly altered the views of the Committee of Council. Under their present Code, reading, writing and arithmetic are obligatory. Other subjects, such as singing, drawing, and geography are optional. Specific subjects, such as Mechanics, Chemistry, Latin and French, may be taken by individual children in the upper classes. Over and above these, "instruction may be given in other secular subjects, and in religious subjects." This, I believe, is the only mention of religious teaching in the Code. A school may be classed as excellent in which not a prayer is offered, nor one verse of the Bible read, nor one syllable of religious instruction given from the beginning of the year to the end. We, as managers of Church schools, however, still remain faithful to the principle that intellectual instruction should be made "subordinate to the regulation of the thoughts and habits of the children by the doctrines and precepts of revealed religion." It is for this that we are spending our time, our money, and our labour upon our schools, our training colleges, and our system of diocesan inspection. It is this that we are defending against Mr. Chamberlain and his friends. I believe that the country is still loyal to religious teaching. In spite of the lavish expenditure of School Boards, and the great inducements they can offer, two-thirds of the children are still sent to voluntary schools. The result of this agitation, if it were successful, would be to deprive the people of these schools, which they have shown that they prefer. It would be to impose an enormous burden of taxation, under which the poor must chiefly suffer. It would be to take the education of children out of the hands of their parents and entrust it to the State. It would be to destroy a religious system, and to set up a secular system in its place. To all this, when the facts are plainly put before the country, I cannot believe that it will consent.

JOHN SHELLY.

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on my fellow-managers the importance of attending at the Diocesan Inspection, and of showing the teachers and children that they consider it to be at least of equal importance with the visit of the Government Inspector. It is also most necessary on engaging a new teacher to ask for the Report of the Diocesan Inspector as well as the Government Inspector on the teacher's previous work. I wish it were not needful to add that the religious instruction of the pupil teachers is of vital importance to the future as well as the present usefulness of our schools. Unless religious teaching is so real as to be worth fighting for, Churchmen cannot be expected to fight for it.