

The principal features are—

1. The ignoring of sectarianism as a basis on which to construct an educational system.
2. The promotion of local interest, and the securing as much local management as is at present desirable.
3. Payment according to practical results, to be tested and ascertained by active inspection.
4. Which is really the only special part of the Act, the making the knowledge of the English language an indispensable requisite in all Native schools in receipt of Government aid.

With regard to the first point I would observe that instead of the plan hitherto adopted of entrusting the management of Native schools to religious bodies, it would seem in accordance with the Act, to be the duty of the State to recognize it as its distinct duty to take the matter of education into its own hands, and not to place itself in a position secondary to sectarian views and authority. At the same time the State does not preclude or even deny assistance to the efforts of religious bodies, so far as they subserve the general object in view. In dealing with these bodies it declines to assist them as propagators of any peculiar dogma or form of faith. As representing the whole community it refuses to make itself sectarian, and in administering funds which are the product of the taxation of all its members, it calls upon any bodies of men who claim its assistance to meet it on common ground as members of the same civil body.

It appears to me beside the purpose to discuss the question of whether dogmatic teaching is necessary to the inculcation of Christianity; whether it be so or not, it is a matter of which the State is incapable of taking cognizance and which it must let alone.

My own opinion is that there is a Christianity of which the world is becoming gradually more sensible, independent of sectarianism, that every form of sectarianism sooner or later degenerates into superstition, and tends to the enslavement of the mind and conscience, and that the State would do wrong in perpetuating or fostering in any way divisions and animosities which, whatever purpose they may serve, are in themselves essentially unchristian and opposed to the progress of real religion.

It is true that in England a vast structure has been erected upon a sectarian basis, but though the results have been great, it is found after the lapse of a quarter of a century, when it is too late entirely to remodel the system, that it does not meet the requirements of the masses of population, and that, in terms of Earl Russell's recent resolutions in the House of Lords,—“The diffusion of knowledge ought not to be hindered by religious differences.”

It is these religious differences which drive the State, though confessedly Christian, to deal with education apparently only in its secular aspect. I say apparently, because it is impossible that Christianity, interwoven as it is with our laws, literature, and institutions, can be excluded from any system of teaching, and it must proportionately exercise its influence on those under education.

On the general principle of making provision for secular teaching which all alike require, the Act prescribes a general machinery for any locality which wishes to avail itself of public funds; it invites local energy and interest by proportioning the subsidies given to the amount of local effort, and as land is more plentiful than money with the Native race, it puts a premium upon land endowments for the future by accepting land as an equivalent for cash contributions in certain cases.

Such endowments must of course be general and not in connection with any religious body.

Taking warning from the numerous instances throughout the Colony where buildings erected with public funds are lying idle or only available for public purposes on sufferance of private religious bodies, and from some cases where a confusion of ecclesiastical and educational trusts has tended to the prejudice of the interests of education, the Legislature has declined on the principle I have referred to above, to sanction any expenditure of public funds for buildings or improvements on sites over which the public has no control.

On the third point, viz., the payment according to results to be tested by inspection, I would quote the following words from Mr. Lowe's recent speech before the University at Edinburgh:—“A fourth principle was, that it was the duty of the State, above all things, to test and ascertain the nature of the education that was given. It was not right to leave to the persons who gave the instruction the power of testing their own work; but the instruction should be given by one set of persons, and the value of that instruction should be tested by the examination of another set. A fifth also which might be taken for granted was, that when the State gave aid for schools, it ought not to give it merely to schools for being in existence, as having on their books a certain number of scholars, or having a certain attendance; but it ought to be given in exchange for a certain amount of efficiency; that the State ought to decide as to the efficiency of the results of the education given, and then pay in proportion to these results.” And again—“The first sacrifice that the advocates and the friends of the present system would be called upon to make was that they would give up denominational inspection. He thought the State would have to confine itself altogether to the secular part of education, and to give up what it had at present—a sort of joint partnership in the inspectors with the different religious bodies. He thought also that the present schools might be made as efficient as possible for the education of all classes of Her Majesty's subjects, and that therefore the State ought not for the future to make grants of public money for the assistance of schools when built or maintained, unless they have a conscience clause—unless persons of all denominations are admitted without having anything done that would violate or infringe their opinions.” On the question of payment according to results, I think the Act is not so stringent as it might be. The war and consequent disorganization of the schools has rendered any very high standard of efficiency unattainable.

The above quotations leave nothing to be added on the subject of inspection. The appointment of a Roman Catholic Inspector for Roman Catholic schools, even if it were possible, as the law stands, would be a step backwards, which would, I submit, be most wrong and mischievous, and irreconcilable with the principle of the Act. I have written at this length at the risk of being thought troublesome, because I believe the subject to be one of immense future importance to the Colony, and because the experience of the old country shows how the admission of a wrong principle at first will inevitably lead to serious complications hereafter.

I think too that the Colony cannot too soon begin deliberately to adopt the principles upon which