

EXTRACTS from the speech of Mr. Blackburn, on the motion for the second reading of the Lord Advocate's Education Bill for Scotland.

Mr. Blackburn, in moving as an amendment that the bill be read a second time that day six months, said, he would not occupy the time of the house by dwelling upon the advantages of education, or the importance of bringing it within the reach of the poorer classes. While, however, the importance, the advantages, and the necessity of rendering education available to those classes were evident, he thought the fact that three bills had been introduced on the subject by very distinguished members of that house, each proposing different systems, showed the difficulty of establishing any plan which might not be open to numerous objections. That circumstance, in his opinion, also showed the necessity of caution in dealing with a country which possessed a system of education that had acted well, in the hope of introducing some plan that would act still better. Scotland had been fortunate in possessing a system of education which had worked well for three centuries, having been introduced at the time of the Reformation by John Knox, and those who were called "the fathers of the Church." About the year 1600 a very large number of parochial schools had been established in Scotland by the Church, and in 1616 the Privy Council recognised these schools, and passed an act in their favour, which was subsequently confirmed. In 1646 another act was passed on the subject, which might be considered to have established the parochial schools as they now existed, and which, although it was repealed at the Restoration, was re-enacted in 1696. The parochial schools of Scotland might be considered to have existed for nearly two centuries, and they were essentially Church schools. (Hear.) There was no law laid down as to what was to be taught in them, but they were given over to the management of the Church, and the education afforded in them was to be a religious education under the charge of the Church of Scotland. He thought an attempt was now being made to overthrow that principle and to substitute a new one in its place. He believed it was universally admitted that the schools established by the Church of Scotland, and which had been adopted by the State, had worked remarkably well. The right hon. member for Edinburgh (Mr. Macaulay) had expressed his opinion that the establishment of parochial schools in Scotland effected such an improvement as the world has never seen in the intellectual and moral character of the people. The Marquis of Lansdowne, the late President of the Committee of Council on Education, also stated in 1850, that though he was far from saying that the schools in Scotland were in a perfect state, or that they were sufficiently developed to meet the wants of the country, still he would much regret seeing any system of education attempted in that country the basis of which was not founded on the principle of the parochial schools, which had been the means of giving to Scotland the great national pre-eminence in education that she had so long enjoyed. He (Mr. Blackburn) did not mean to say those schools were perfect, but he thought nothing could be more distinct than Lord Lansdowne's testimony to the principle on which they were established—that of connection with the Church. The hon. and learned gentleman (the Lord Advocate) who brought in this bill, had also stated, that at present the parochial schools in Scotland were

more efficient than they had ever been before, and that they were decidedly more efficient than they were 20 years ago. Another testimony in favour of the existing system might be deduced from the preamble of the learned lord's bill, which said:—"And whereas instruction in the principles of religious knowledge and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, as heretofore in use in the parochial and other schools in that country, is consonant to the opinions and religious profession of a great body of the people, while at the same time ordinary secular instruction has been, and should be, available to children of all denominations." &c. What higher testimony could be borne to the principle of the schools than the admission that for 200 years past they had given exactly the religious teaching that was desired by the great body of the people, and had communicated secular instruction to the children of those who dissented from the Established Church? The great feature of the present bill was, that it severed the existing connection between the Church of Scotland and the parochial schools, and thereby destroyed the principle which produced such excellent results up to the present time. Why had this bill been proposed when it was admitted that the schools had worked so well and had effected so much good? He thought the true reason had been assigned by the Duke of Argyll, who in 1850 stated in his place in the House of Lords, that the agitation which had been raised for the overthrow of the parochial system was founded in the main on those feelings which all dissenters bore to all established churches, especially to those which they had lately left, and from which they differed least.

The bill before the house proposed to transfer the entire management of schools in Scotland to a board. He thought the Scotch members would rather abolish some of the boards that already existed in Edinburgh than aid in the establishment of a new one. He believed that even the member for Edinburgh would hardly be in favour of a new board, though, no doubt, some of his constituents derived considerable advantage from those that already existed. (A laugh.) It would be infinitely better that the inspectors should report at once to a minister in London—say a Minister of Instruction; or, failing a Minister of Instruction, to some one charged with the administration of Scotch business, who would leave the learned Lord Advocate time to attend to his important duties, than to have a board constituted as was proposed by this bill. (Hear.) The board was to consist of 17 persons, of whom 8 were to be nominees of the Government, the President of the Educational Institute, and four representatives from the four universities of Scotland. Now, last year the test was abolished in the universities with regard to all the chairs except that of Divinity, so that the Professors were not necessarily religious men—they were only philosophers. But the next four members of the board were not philosophers but provosts. (Laughter.) The provosts of Scotland—analogue to mayors in England—were, no doubt, a respectable body, but they were a most extraordinary class from whom to choose those who were to have the control of the whole education of Scotland. The provosts of the four towns who were to be members of the board were highly respectable gentlemen; but not one of them dreamed, when elected, of being put over the education of the country. (Hear.) The effect would be, that either the provosts would not be fit to direct the education of Scotland,

though they might be excellent provosts, or, if they were selected for their qualities in regard to education, that they would not be good provosts. (Laughter.) Taking the board as a whole, he believed it to be one of the worst ever constructed, while its powers were absolute and perfectly free from control. It would have the control of the religious education that was to be given, and in all cases the schoolmaster would have to obey its orders. (Hear, hear.) If a clergyman took exception to the religious opinions of a schoolmaster, if, for example, Dr. Candlish and Dr. Cunningham—and he should be sorry at present to mention the one and not the other—should object to the religious views of a schoolmaster, they could do nothing in opposition to the board. (Hear.) Say that the doctrine of original sin, which was a favourite doctrine with the people of Scotland, was in question. The board would no doubt reflect the Government views upon that subject, and it so happened that we knew what those views were—(laughter.)—for the noble Lord at the head of the Government had stated that all people were born good, and that therefore there was no such thing as original sin in the world. (Laughter.) The people of Scotland thought there was nothing so bad as Erastianism. The spirit of Erastianism was subjecting religious questions to the authority of a civil tribunal. Viewed in that light, this bill savoured of the grossest Erastianism, for it would subject the religious education of Scotland to a civil board. (Hear, hear.) He did not think that with such powers vested in the board respectable people would consent to become members of the school committees. (Hear, hear.)

It would be a mistake to suppose that the people of Scotland thought of religion as a thing set apart from the rest of life, and the examination of the schoolmaster was a test and not a qualification. Another general accusation was, that the Church of Scotland wanted to monopolise the teaching of the young. But the friends of the church offered, that if the Government would leave these schools alone, they would join the learned lord in enacting a provision for schools for those places which were destitute at present. (Cheers.) The members of the Church of Scotland did not want a monopoly of the whole education of Scotland, but only wished to keep their own schools to themselves. It was equally untrue to say that the parochial schools of Scotland were sectarian. The schools of Scotland never had been sectarian, but they had taught the religion of 95 per cent. of the Scottish people, as had been admitted by the Lord Advocate himself. The fact was it was not what was taught in those schools to which people objected, but those by whom it was taught. (Hear.) The late Mr. Hume bore testimony to the harmonious working of the system in his youth, and to the absence of distinction between religious sects, and the system had gone on in the same manner ever since.

There was one general argument against interfering with these schools, to which he did not wish to attach undue importance; but by the Act of Union, the schools of Scotland were secured to the management of the Presbytery. He did not wish to speak of the Act of Union as if it resembled the laws of the Medes and Persians, but what the right hon. gentleman the member for the University of Oxford said the other night of the Act of Uniformity, might be said of the Act of Union, that it must be considered a fundamental law, which, without strong necessity ought not