

Mr. Balfour on Religious Education



CENTRAL meeting of the Parents' League was held recently at the Queen's Hall "for the purpose of declaring the attitude of the league towards the education question." Lord Salisbury, the president of the league, occupied the chair.

Lord Salisbury said that the principle of the league was the maintenance of the right of the parent to determine the religious education of his children in elementary schools. (Hear, hear.) It was not a new principle; it was as old as any jurisprudence in the world, and they had applied it to the great religious difficulty of the day and had made fair progress. This league had been in existence for only about nine months, and already it had between 70,000 and 80,000 members, drawn from all parts of the country. The league belonged to no political party, it was attached to no special school of thought in the Church. To hear some people talk one might think it was a special dodge of the High Church party. (Laughter.) It was nothing of the kind. The list of speakers for that evening demonstrated that fact, and there was the further evidence that among the many thousand members of the league was a large proportion of Nonconformists. (Cheers.) Their cry was for religious liberty—for the right of minorities, so that every child could be brought up in the religion of its parents. (Cheers.)

Mr. Balfour, who was received with prolonged applause, said:—My Lords and Gentlemen,—Your chairman has briefly but most clearly explained the principles underlying the Parents' League. As an abstract principle I doubt whether there is a single citizen of this country who does not feel the irresistible justice of the claim which it enshrines. There is no man who, if consulted as to whether he could find a scheme of education carrying it out to perfection, who would not adopt it—there is not a man to whom that question could be put who would not answer it, I believe, in the affirmative. But there is in this imperfect world of ours a large gap between the perfection of theory and the possibilities of practice; and I do not know that I should have come here to address you tonight upon the theory of the Parents' League if it were not that all the signs of the times point to the fact that, if there is to be any change in our existing system of elementary education, logic, principle and expediency all point in the direction of embodying as perfectly as may be the principles of the Parents' League in the educational system of the country. (Cheers.) We all know not only that the education controversy has absorbed an immense amount of the time of Parliament, has roused passions from one end of the country to the other, has filled the newspapers, and has given occasion to countless pamphlets; we all know that, and we all know that this question, debated now for more than a generation, has yet remained unsettled. There are many who think that a settlement must at all costs be immediately arrived at; and all hope, whatever their expectations may be, that that happy consummation may indeed be attained. But there is no use attempting to solve the existing inequalities and injustices, in so far as they exist, of the present system if you are going to substitute new inequalities and new injustices for those which you are going to remove (hear, hear); and when I hear the words "compromise" and "arrangement" whispered about, talked about, discussed in Parliament in general terms, I always from my heart desire that the aspirations embodied in these words may find a successful issue, but I wait in vain for that clear appreciation of the conditions of the problem which will alone make a final settlement possible.

The Education Acts.

May I begin by repeating the well-known and familiar fact that the Education Act of 1902 was, in so far as the religious question was concerned, based on the historic foundation of the act of 1870; and like all structures based upon historic foundations, it presents some arrangements, some plans, some ground-work which no architect would have chosen if he had been able to select his own site and had been free to choose his own method of operation. The Government in 1902 was undoubtedly right in building upon the historic foundation. It would have been absolutely impossible to deal with the religious question as well as with secular education on any other lines. And remember that as far as secular education is concerned every one admits that the plan laid down in 1902 is the plan on which hereafter, so far as prophecy can reach, the secular education of this country is going to be managed. It is not on the secular side, it is on the religious side, as we all know, that criticism has been made, and in connection with which difficulties have arisen. For my own part, judging as impartially as I can from the information which reaches me from all sides, I should say that even on the religious side there is gross exaggeration in the commentaries made upon the act of 1902. That act, carrying as it did some of the imperfections of the Act of 1870, mitigated them, alleviated them in all the respects of which the Nonconformists complained. It mitigated the grievance of the Nonconformist teacher; it mitigated the grievance of the single-school area. There is not one of the Nonconformist grievances which was not alleviated—I do not put it higher than that—by the Education Act of 1902. But I quite agree that it found anomalies, it found imperfections, which it might have mitigated, but which it did not wholly remove, and which remain to the present day;

and it is round these anomalies that the controversy has raged ever since. Now, what lessons may be learnt from this never-ending debate?

Principles in Settling the Question.

For my own part I think that there are several principles that we may lay down which ought to guide, which must guide, every man who tries really to settle the question. In the first place it really is impossible to treat the great efforts which the Church of England has made for generations and is still making in the cause of elementary education as if they had never been made at all. (Cheers.) It really is absurd for any particular legislator to come forward—unless he avowedly comes forward as the mere tyrannical instrument of a temporary majority—it is quite absurd, I say, for any practical statesman to come forward and say that the Legislature may invite a great religious community to spend vast sums of money, to undergo enormous labor and cost, at the invitation of the State, and then to have the results of all those labors and all that expenditure swept away in a moment without consideration, without regard for the cause for which those labors and that expenditure were undertaken. (Cheers.) I do not believe that the Church of England will ever stand in the way of a sound system of education. I do not believe she will ever regard her interests, or her supposed interests, as being in any sense obstacles in the way of a really national system. But to tell me that all the sacrifices which have been made in the past are to count for nothing in the arrangements for the future, and that what is to be done is to be done irrespective of the wish of the great mass of the people—that, I say, is really absurd. (Hear, hear.) That is my first principle, or my first conclusion as to the late controversy.

Contracting Out.

My second is that no remedy for the present anomalies can be found in the direction of contracting out. It is not impossible, and it might not be disastrous, to allow schools of great wealth, possessed of ample endowments, to contract themselves out of the ordinary system, just as our great public schools and secondary schools are outside the system, and a large number of private adventure schools. I do not recommend it, but it would have no very disastrous effects. But what would clearly have disastrous effects, educationally, is to allow the poor schools to contract out. (Hear, hear.) Directly you allow the poor schools to contract out, and try to bring them up to their former rate-aided position by merely increasing the grant, you only raise the general level of the cost of elementary education. I cannot myself believe that any government will again suggest that contracting out is the proper solution of the question. The third principle I lay down is that no solution will ever be accepted by the people of this country which gives preferential treatment to the Roman Catholics. (Hear, hear.) I am perfectly ready to fight for the Roman Catholic parent, as I am for the Anglican parent; but I will never willingly consent, I will never be a party to any arrangement that gives special privileges to any one communion. (Hear, hear.) Now, if these propositions be granted, in what line is movement to take place if movement be necessary? If we are to alter the system of 1902, in what direction must we move?

Two Alternatives.

There are really only two directions—only

two, at all events, that my ingenuity or that of those I have consulted has ever suggested. One is a movement in the direction of abolishing religion altogether (No, no) as part of our national system; the other is in the direction of increasing as far as possible the control of the parents over the religion taught to their children, combined with some effective method of teaching that religion. (Cheers.) I do not propose to argue before such a meeting as this the first of these two alternatives. The more we observe the general tone of the educational movement throughout the world, the more convinced shall we become that no greater disaster could happen to any community than that it should banish religion, as a thing of no account, from the lessons which are to be taught to its children. (Hear, hear.) And if I am told, as by some I may be told, that religion is a very good thing—that religion ought to be taught to children, but that the people who ought to teach it are the parents, I say, Look around upon the actual facts of the civilization in which you live. If you compel the parents to give up their duties as regards secular education to the teachers of your appointment, how can you ask them to divide education in this kind of way, and require them, having taught their child, at the cost of the State, and by teachers in whose appointment the community has a voice, to teach them that their secular education has to be done by that machinery, but religious education is to be divorced from it? I, therefore, hold—and in this I know I speak the general feelings of my countrymen—I hold that it is not worth while arguing whether we shall preserve religion in the voluntary schools. Religion must be preserved and will be preserved. (Hear, hear.) Well, the only alternative, if you mean, and in so far as it is found necessary, to alter the present system; is to move in the direction of parents' rights (cheers), to modify your system so that parents shall feel what is very good for them to feel—that they have some responsibility with regard to the religion which has to be taught to their children, and that the religion shall be one, not chosen by any particular local authority, but chosen by the parents themselves. (Cheers.) Evidently, if the new system is to be on these lines it carries with it two conclusions, to one of which there would be Churchmen who would object, to the other of which there are many Nonconformists who would object.

The Cowper-Temple Clause.

It is quite manifest that if you are going singly to endeavor to give the children an effective education in the religion desired by their parents, you have to modify the existing system in voluntary schools and you have altogether to break down that most anomalous and indefensible arrangement, the Cowper-Temple clause in the provided schools. (Cheers.) Your change must be a double change. There are Nonconformist reformers keenly alive to what they consider to be the justice of their own people, but absolutely blind to the equally obvious injustice—that their scheme would inflict upon Church people who wish for only one kind of scheme, and that the provided school. And so little do they know how to use the English language with accuracy (laughter) that they describe this system of universally-provided schools as the control by the locality of the religious education in conformity with the wishes of the majority of the locality. It is nothing of the kind. (Hear, hear.) I do not know that I have any

particular love for a majority (laughter); I do not know that I have any particular desire to see the children of all parents educated according to the wishes of the majority of some parents; but altogether apart from that, it is not folly to say that the local authority has under the Cowper-Temple clause the power of directing the religious education according to the wishes of the majority when, in fact, it cannot direct the religious education at all? (Cheers.) That has been settled for them by an Act of Parliament, obscure, ambiguous in its wording, but still intentionally designed to prevent the teaching of any particular denomination being given to the children of that denomination. Now, that is a system which breaks down altogether at the bar of reason, and which five minutes argument knocks to pieces, and which has not even the practical advantage of satisfying the community as a whole, but which must absolutely go if parents' rights are to be regarded. (Cheers.) In other words, if you really wish to have a stable and logical arrangement, you will have to allow, indeed to encourage, Nonconformist teaching in Church schools where the Nonconformist parents desire it, and you will have to allow effective denominational teaching in the council schools. That is not all. It is perfectly clear to me that, if religious education is to be effective, experience shows we must encourage the teachers to take part in it. (Cheers.) I do not say that the whole religious teaching need necessarily be carried out by the teachers of the school. I certainly should not refuse the aid of ministers of all denominations whose children were represented in the schools; but in the main, if you want the teaching to succeed, it is desirable to have teachers who will teach it. (Cheers.) On this point I do not pretend to have personal experience, but I have conversed with a large number of experts, and there is almost unanimity on the point that, especially in large schools, it is the teacher alone, broadly speaking—I do not lay down any universal proposition—to whom should be entrusted, not merely the giving of secular education, but of religious education. (Cheers.)

The Selection of Teachers.

If that be admitted, we are driven on again by irresistible logic to ask how the teachers who are to teach religion in accordance with the wishes of the parents are to be selected, and this is really the all-important point. I am not going to discuss the question of tests for teachers. That was made, I am well aware, a shibboleth of the platform, but it is a shibboleth quite useless except on the platform. (Laughter.) It carries with it no clear or definite meaning to any thinking man, and its whole object and effect is to call down cheers at the moment and possibly to obtain votes. (Laughter.) The recent discussions in the House of Commons themselves are aware of all the ambiguity which lurks under that well-worn formula. In the strict sense of the formula I do not believe that any human being wants to impose tests, and what is more, I do not believe tests have ever been imposed. (Cheers.) But if you ask whether the abolition of tests means that no inquiry is to be made, no information received as to the capacity of the teacher to undertake the teaching of religion which is part of his duties, I say, in the first place, that is an absolutely absurd position to put any of those responsible for teaching in; and, in the second place, the Government themselves, in the stress of argument and with the—I will not

say the case of the Church of England before them, for to that, I believe, they are wholly indifferent, but with the case of the Jews and of the Roman Catholics before them—the Government themselves have been obliged to admit that the idea of refusing to ask whether, for example, a teacher in a school, where all the children are Roman Catholics, is a Roman Catholic and a man of genuine piety and of teaching ability in religious matters—to refuse that right is really grotesque. What the Government would concede to the Roman Catholics or the Jews in this respect is a thing which the Church of England and every other denomination has the right to require. (Cheers.) I do not care what is to be in the Education Bill, provided it be left open to those who are responsible for the selecting of teachers, not to ask offensive questions, not to put preposterous tests, but simply to make themselves acquainted with the broad fact, Can this teacher teach that which we are employing him to teach? (Cheers.) Mr. Balfour, after giving a resume of his previous points, said:—There only remains the fifth step to take, which is to ask who is to have the control of the appointment of those teachers who are to give religious as well as secular education. I would venture to say that there must be some kind of veto by the parents upon the selection of the teacher who is to teach their children religion. That is in strict conformity with the objects of the great association which I am addressing, and it appears to me to be perfectly practicable. Whether this Government or any Government will feel that after all the debates we have had the real outstanding grievances of any class in the community are so great that the labor and turmoil of another Education Bill must be undertaken I know not. But if the task is again undertaken by a responsible Government there can, I think, be no doubt that the lines on which they ought to proceed are in the direction which I have ventured briefly to indicate. They are in conformity, as Lord Salisbury told you just now, with the natural jurisprudence which is older even than the common law of England. They are in conformity with all our instincts. They are, I believe, not impracticable. They are in harmony with the highest religious interests of the country. They favor no denomination above any other denomination. They give equal justice all round. In other words, it is a reform on lines which will stand the most rigid scrutiny and the most pitiless logical investigation. It has in it, therefore, some basis of perpetuity, and if the people of this country are indeed discontented with the historic foundation upon which the religious system of the Act of 1902 was founded, let them by all means sweep it away. But do not let them attempt to substitute for one anomaly another anomaly, for one cause of scandal and offence another and yet greater cause of scandal and offence. Let them boldly take the clear, rational, broadminded course which I have ventured to lay before you tonight, and then, and then only, we shall have found the method by which the highest interests of religion will be found compatible with State education. (Cheers.)

The Dean of Canterbury moved:—"That this meeting affirms the right of parents to determine the character of the religious teaching of their children in the schools of the country, and to have such teaching given in school hours by teachers who are qualified and believe in what they teach." He said that it was only within the last two years that in England, for the first time, an attempt had been made to override the elementary and primitive principle of the right of the parent to have his children educated according to his own religion. When elementary education was reorganized in 1870 under Mr. Forster and Mr. Gladstone, there was not a shadow of an attempt or a suggestion to dictate to the parents of England what should be the form of religious education which their children should receive. The question really, even by the admission of their opponents, came to this—whether there were deep characteristics in the Church of England education which they valued as much as the Roman Catholic and the Jews valued theirs. He asked them—Were there? (Loud cries of "Yes.") Then it was for them to stand firm and listen to no talk of compromise which would obliterate Church of England schools. (Cheers.) They might be a minority, but let them be a stiff-necked minority in this matter. (Cheers.) They had had signs in the last two or three months that in some quarters where they should look for leadership there might be too great a disposition for compromise; but the principle they were asserting that night was not one alone for the clergy and Bishops to maintain, but for the parents to fight for, and it, but so great a part as to permeate and influence the whole of the instruction given to the children. (Cheers.)

Lord Balfour, in seconding the resolution, said that he believed that no more unstatesmanlike utterance in this matter was ever made than the brief and prompt declaration that minorities must suffer. (Hear, hear.) If we were to have a national system of education, religious education must not only be a part of it, but so great a part as to permeate and influence the whole of the instruction given to the children. (Cheers.)

The resolution was carried with acclamation. Votes of thanks to Mr. Balfour and the chairman terminated the proceedings.

The Milton Tercentenary at Cambridge



THE tercentenary of the birth of John Milton was celebrated recently at his college, Christ's College, Cambridge, where an iconographical and bibliographical exhibition has been open during the last twelve weeks. The Master and Fellows of Christ's entertained at dinner in the college hall some leading members of the University and a number of distinguished men of letters.

The college was represented by the Master, Dr. Peile, Prof. Skeat, Mr. Cartmell, Dr. Shipley, Mr. Norman McLean, Dr. Haddon, and others, many of the guests being in academic robes. The scene in the hall, with its fine linen-fold oak panels—the hall where Milton studied and where he recited some of his early works—was striking. The menu card included a reproduction of the Onslow portrait of Milton and a poem in the Miltonic manner by Mr. Austin Dobson.

The toast of "the King" was proposed by the Master, who also offered a welcome to his guests; and the toast of "The Immortal Memory of John Milton" was proposed by Mr. J. W. Mackail, Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford.

Professor Mackail said that Milton's primacy in English poetry might be said to have been first publicly proclaimed by Addison and established by Johnson, but he had never wanted his followers, his admirers, his critics, in his own University. Johnson's suggestion that he was rebellious at college by his remaining there for nearly eight years. Cambridge left an indelible impress on his genius, and the only one of his contemporaries to be mentioned in "Paradise Lost" was Galileo, one of the intellectual founders of Cambridge. He called him "the Tuscan artist," as if to indicate that science and art were inseparably in con-

junction. So they were in Milton's poetry, in which the science was as wonderful as the art. The art was science applied to thought and language and transfigured by that creative imagination on which the discoveries of science, like the achievements of art, were ultimately based. In the science of his art Milton stood alone among the English poets, and it was this which made him, in the full sense of the word, a classic and set him in the same circle with Virgil and Sophocles, in lonely and splendid eminence. Thus in the dazzling roll of Cambridge poets, Christ's College took precedence of any other college, for the poet did what could only be done once in the progress of any literature—he attained perfection. Perfection was what Milton set before himself. He held aloof from the literature of his own time, and studied in silence, writing little, till the age of 30. "Comus" was written at six-and-twenty, and three more years passed before he allowed it to be published and even then with a cry of pain. It was not that he thought little of it; self-depreciation was never a feature of his character; but even of "Paradise Lost" he seemed to have felt that it was not good enough for John Milton to have written; for his pride and self-confidence were like those of his own fallen archangel. After "Comus" came a gap of 20 years, and then just as that long strenuous self-education was complete and perfection was on the point of attainment, he fell blind. When he thought of "Paradise Lost" composed in darkness, preserved in memory, dictated in fragments, it might well seem to us the most astonishing of all the products of high genius guided by unconquerable will. In the words of De Quincey, it was not a book among books, not a poem among poems, but a central force among forces. Milton moved on a higher plane, in a different atmosphere from his contemporaries, who were engaged in civilizing English poetry. He had little effect upon them; he founded no school and gave no impulse of letters, except the impulse given to all true artists when they saw and recognized perfect to art. For perfection he discarded all else, tears and laughter, the common sweetness of earth, the power to move the heart and to bring healing into the lives of men. He stood now as he stood then, awful, magnificent, alone. Professor Mackail concluded his speech by applying to Milton some lines written by Landor of Count Julian.

After dinner the company adjourned to the new theatre, where a large audience had assembled by invitation to see a performance of Comus by members of the University, assisted by certain ladies. To this performance we that it was a production of exceptional beauty and fitness, in which scenery, music, and acting alike were very highly to be commended. It may be recorded as an unusual circumstance that the performers, desiring that "the honor should rest solely with the author, were particularly anxious that their names should be kept a secret. The masque will be repeated before the public this afternoon, and the Milton exhibition will close this evening.

Governor Oglesby once visited the State penitentiary at Joliet to hear complaints of prisoners and inspect the premises. The governor stopped before a cell containing an unusually ugly man. "My man," said Governor Oglesby, pleasantly, "how did you get here?" "For abducting a girl," growled the man. Governor Oglesby looked him over critically and then said: "Well, I'll pardon you as soon as I get back to Springfield. You could not get a girl in any other way!"