

Scotians are in this respect very much like Englishmen ; but the Englishmen are a little in advance :

"Sir John Gorst, who was loudly cheered, said the cost of the schools of this country was mainly provided from three sources. The rates contributed in round numbers £4,000,000 sterling, the voluntary contributions amounted to £1,000,000, and the taxes to no less than £7,000,000. He wanted to show how this great provision—as far as money was concerned, liberal enough—was thrown away. The buildings were there ; excellent teachers were in them ; apparatus, if not always quite satisfactory, was at any rate extremely good. But where were the children ? It was a fact that in this country on an average, out of five children who ought to be at school, there were only four there, and when it was remembered that there were places like Longton, where the attendance was excellent, it would be seen that there must be many districts where it was very bad to bring the general average so low as 81 per cent. If parents all over the country were really alive to the true interests of their children, regularity of attendance at school would not need any law to enforce it. But there was a law. The nation at large, having provided schools and teachers, had a right to require the children's attendance. Only three excuses for non-attendance were allowed. The first was that a child was being satisfactorily taught elsewhere, the second was sickness, and the third was that no school existed within a distance—usually put at two miles—which the child could conveniently attend. But although this law existed, it was very imperfectly enforced. In many places where education was most wanted justices who were supposed to administer the law very frequently refused to convict and impose the fines which the law prescribed ; and in many districts, particularly in rural districts, the attendance officers appointed ostensibly to see the law carried out, were appointed really to take care that the law should be violated with impunity. (Laughter.) He could produce numerous cases, particularly in country parishes, where the members of the School Boards themselves were the greatest violators of the law, and where the attendance officer knew very well that he only held place on condition that he should not put the law in force. (Renewed laughter.) It was irregularity of attendance which most kept down the efficiency of a school, and caused waste in the provision made by the public for education. What was done in this matter abroad ? We could not have a better example than Switzerland, a republic of workers which for its size exported more manufactures than any country in Europe. What did its government, which was purely democratic, and carried on for the benefit of the workers, do about education ? If a boy or a girl did not arrive at school on any particular day, the parent next morning got notice from a public authority that he had been fined so many francs. (Laughter.) If he did not send the child to school the second day, he was fined an increased amount, till by the time the child had been absent two or three days, the parent had really a serious sum to pay. The consequence was that in Switzerland the children have often long distances to go to school, and would laugh at our prohibitory two miles ; they seldom absented themselves at all. The Board law of Great Britain, that a child should attend between the ages of five and fourteen years, was an excellent law, but that law was made of none effect by the exemptions, which were extremely intricate and puzzling. Up to the age of eleven years all was plain, but after the age of eleven there were two distinct doors open by which a child could escape school. First of all, the child could become a half-timer, and go to work in factory or workshop, on condition of attending school for half the day. Sometimes the standard was fixed by local by-laws for this exemption from attendance for half the day, but these local by-laws presented the most extraordinary variety, making the standard anything from the first to the fifth. There were 91 parishes which made the standard for partial exemption the first standard—(laughter)—there were 1,513 parishes and 28 municipal boroughs which made the second standard the standard of partial