

excluding all compulsory Religious teaching, this House being convinced that no plan for the education of the Irish poor, however wisely and unexceptionably conceived in other respects, can be carried into effectual operation, unless it is explicitly avowed and clearly understood, as its leading principle, that no attempt shall be made to influence, or disturb the peculiar Religious Tenets of any Sect, or Denomination."

4. The principle Rule of the Commissioners of Irish National Education in regard to Religious Instruction is as follows :

Religious Instruction must be so arranged that each School shall be opened to children of all Communions ; that due regard be had to parental right and authority ; that, accordingly, no child be compelled to receive, or to be present at any Religious Instruction, of which his Parents, or Guardians, disapprove ; and that the time for giving Religious Instruction be fixed so that no child shall be thereby, in effect, excluded, directly, or indirectly, from the other advantages which the School affords."

Where the Patrons, (the same as the majority of electors, or Trustees of a School Section in Upper Canada), are Roman Catholics, then the Public Religious Exercises of the School are more or less of that character ; but Protestant children are not required to attend them ; and vice versa.

5. The Mover and Seconder, in the British Legislature, of the Resolution above quoted, made certain references and statements, in their speeches on the occasion, which I cite in this place : In alluding to the evidence of the Reverend Doctor Cooke, (Presbyterian), of Belfast,* given before a recent Committee of the House of Lords, the Seconder of the Resolution, (Mr. Kirk,) remarked :

"Doctor Cooke stated, that he was not in favour of any system of compulsion, with regard to Religious Instruction, and he added, in answer to questions put by the Protestant Bishop of Ossory, (the acting Leader of the opposition to the Irish National Schools), that it would be a very dangerous principle, to say the least, to make the reading of the Scriptures obligatory upon children, because he held, as a Protestant, that no one ought to force religion upon another, contrary to his conscience. The Presbyterians, in their negotiations with the Irish National Board of Education had always shown an anxiety to maintain their own rights, and to extend the same liberty, which they enjoyed, to other Religious Denominations. They were not less desirous that the Scriptures should be read than the Members of the Church of England ; but they did not wish that others should be compelled to think as they did. He, (Doctor Cooke,) held, that the Bible would be rendered distasteful to children by being pressed upon them against their wish, as well as by being altogether kept from them.

A similar opinion, (continues Mr. Kirk,) was expressed by Doctor Thomas Chalmers, in his evidence before the Committee upon the Irish Poor Law :

Doctor Chalmers said that he would have no part of Religious Education made compulsory ; that no child ought no more to be compelled to attend a Bible Class than a Reading, or Arithmetic class, and that compulsion tended to limit and prevent the spread of Scriptural Education, and to establish in the minds of the people a most hurtful association with the Scriptures. He entirely concurred in these opinions. They clearly sanctioned the principles now embodied in the Rules of the Irish National Board. With regard to the results of "mixed education," although it had not succeeded to the extent once hoped for, this he thought must be attributed to the opposition of the Church Education Society. The Reverend Mr. Woodward, for sometime Secretary to the Church Education Society, had published a pamphlet in which he stated, that, in the first Report of the Society, he had advocated opposition to the National Board upon two main grounds:—First, that the Rules of the Commissioners of the Irish National Board of Education forbade the Church to instruct her children in her own holy faith ; and, Secondly, "that they withheld the Word of God from a class of our own Countrymen." But the Reverend Mr. Woodward, in a manly and candid manner, proceeded to retract these charges ; he said—"plain truth compels me to declare that I regard these two main objections as having been founded on assumption utterly unsupported by facts. Personal observations of Scriptural and Church instruction, actually given in Schools connected with the Irish National Board, shewed me that there was a discrepancy between my pre-conceived notions and the reality of the case. I was led to examine for myself. I found that I had wholly misconceived the truth. It seemed to me, as it now does, clearer than day, that the Irish National Board of Education is wholly guiltless of either of the charges, upon which I founded my original opposition."

6. Similar opposition, and upon similar grounds, has, in past years, been made to the System of Public Schools in Upper Canada ; but it has latterly been abandoned,—the assumptions on which it was founded having been shown to be utterly unsupported by facts. Mr. Fortescue, the Mover of the Resolutions in the British Parliament, concluded his speech in the following words :—

The great body of the Roman Catholics and Presbyterians of Ireland were satisfied with the working of the present Irish National System of Education ; the only class which was discontented with it being a portion, and merely a portion, of the adherents of the [former] Established Church. He wished to know on what grounds an alteration in the present Irish National School System was

* A Clergyman, after whom "Cooke's Presbyterian Church," on Queen's Street East, Toronto, is named.