

the requirements in money, time, and residence, are as nothing in comparison with the opening of almost the whole civil and military service to competition, so that the old selection of young men of breeding or of influence has passed away, and our armies, offices, provinces—in fact, almost our whole public interests—are managed by young men of all sorts and conditions, chosen with little reference to good traditions, or fine physique, or attractive manners, but simply from the reports of examiners who have often not even seen the candidates, but who have laboured through their examination-papers.

These things are so familiar to us all that any detailed description is unnecessary. We may pass on at once to review the practical good attained by these great changes, as well as the reservations which may be necessary in our commendation. And, first of all, let us consider what seems the most obviously desirable of all, the compulsion laid upon parents to send their children to school. This is supposed to apply only to the very poor and ignorant. I can assure the reader that the law, if impartially applied, will punish a great number of people, calling themselves gentry, in Ireland, who allow their children to grow up to the age of twelve or fourteen without any instruction except, perhaps, learning to read. Even this and ordinary writing have to be taught in numerous cases to boys of fourteen, sent at last, after many postponements, delays, and haggling about school fees, to Irish schoolmasters, who are severely criticised because these boys are found raw and ignorant when they attempt to enter colleges or professional schools at the age of seventeen. It is with the intellect as it is with the land of Ireland. A great part of both is lying waste for want of diligence and decent thrift. When both are

fairly cultivated the wealth of the country will be astonishing.<sup>1</sup> When parents of the quasi-upper classes behave in this way, it is high time for the law to interfere, and teach them that they have duties towards their children.

But I greatly fear that, in Ireland at least, the stringency of the law will be shown to the very poor, and the police will hesitate to enforce school attendance upon the squireen, while they diligently coerce the peasant, to whom schools bring far less palpable advantages. For to the very poor in Ireland, and I suppose in England too, compulsory attendance upon schools often brings great hardships both on parents who send and children who go. I remember attending a Social Science Conference in Dublin some years ago, when I went into a debate in the Education section to advocate compulsory schooling for the poor. Before the debate was over I was persuaded that I was mistaken. The very poor in Ireland are often scattered thinly over large areas; their children are badly fed and clad; even the youngest of them can help their parents at home. The herding of cattle or goats, which must be kept from trespassing on unfenced crops, occupies many from the age of four years old. Unless, therefore, schools are within easy distance, unless the weather is fair, unless the children have a good breakfast before starting, there may be great sustained cruelty in such coercion, and in many cases the children only obtain the teaching

<sup>1</sup> A very experienced Englishman, and, moreover, what we call a thorough Saxon, with no Irish sympathies, who was head of a large Dublin school for some years, assured me that while in any ordinary English class ten out of twelve boys were stupid and hard to teach, the same proportion in an Irish class were distinctly clever. He added that, as soon as the parents learned to begin soon enough, and the boys and their masters learned method, they would win all the competitions in the empire.