

you are striving to cover the country. We must have security that there is provision everywhere." What we said to them then we say to the supporters of the Birmingham League at this time, that we should have acted contrary to our duty if we had waited. Those children were to be the electors and voters of our Government, and it was necessary without a moment's delay that we should set to work and provide a system of national education. But supposing we had not done so, and supposing the delay would have been to their advantage? By no means. The field would have been left in the possession of the voluntary managers, and the longer we had waited the more powerful they would have become, and the more difficult would have been the introduction of any rate system. There is another thing, we might have disregarded the voluntary system altogether, and begun afresh, and set the State to perform its duty, disregarding those voluntary managers. It was a very difficult and hard work, and I think no one in his senses would have dismissed all the present workmen, and left us with nobody to perform it, or that it would have been advisable to give them notice to quit and that it would have been well to tell them we would use them for a time, and only for a time, and that we ought not merely to have provided a system, but a rate system by which, if they desired no longer to work in the cause of education, their place would be filled up, and to have arranged for their possible absorption if the force which induced them to act lost its power. Well, after much careful consideration the Government decided not to take this step, and why did the Cabinet come to this conclusion? In the first place we wanted the assistance of these men, and I do not think we could have got them on those terms. We wanted all the forces in the country to fight against the common enemy—ignorance. We brought into action a new force—the power of self-government acting through municipalities, and by ratepayers electing their representatives; and we cannot deny that in so far as we brought that into action, we did, to some extent, endanger the voluntary schools; because it is no temptation to a man to subscribe to voluntary schools, when he knows that a rate will be levied in his district, and when he knows that his next door neighbor, who has done nothing in aid of schools, will be forced to pay his share. But we found it necessary to bring in the rating system. There was no other way of providing for the country. It was not merely a matter of money; it was not that we wanted to diminish as much as we could the great difficulty in legislation in England—the ratepaying difficulty. But it was because there was something to be considered even more than money. We wanted to gain the help of those men who had already made great sacrifices for education. We acknowledge that neither in the town nor in the country were we at that time able to dispense with their services with safety to education. Nor are we now. I am not going into the motives of the clergymen or of the priests. It was their duty to gain whatever influence they could over them. Well, combined with this there has been a real desire on their part to promote good secular education; and that is a motive which the State, we consider, cannot safely disregard. What, then, did we do? We stated in the first place that we would admit the voluntary schools throughout the country, enormous numbers though they were, upon our conditions; these conditions being, in the first place, a security that no parent should have any religious teaching given to his child in one of these schools if he disliked it. That security was made more efficient as the Bill passed through Parliament by the time table conscience clause. The second security was that we should have at least four hours a day during which secular instruction should be given in all those schools. It is said that some of those schools give bad secular instruction, but those who

make this statement are very much mistaken if they suppose that any want of good secular education is owing to denominational management. For instance, some of the faults are faults ascribed to the Revised Code. The next thing we did was to declare in every school district throughout the kingdom that if the voluntary schools did not supply the deficiency of education the district must be compelled to provide it by means of rates. But there might be some cases in which there would be districts which might at once prefer the rate system, and which would at once prefer to have School Boards. In the Act we passed a provision that if there were such districts they should be allowed to elect a School Board, but we stated that, "If in a district you prefer to work out the voluntary system you may do so, provided you do the work. But the work must be done. If also you wish to have it upon those principles." The principles upon which we have administered the act are these; first, we have not thought it our duty to hamper and hinder any voluntary managers, but we have thought it our duty to insist upon their following the conditions of the Act which I have described; secondly, where School Boards have been formed, we have thought that we must pay this amount of deference to the representative system, that we ought to allow those who were elected by their fellow ratepayers, a good deal of discretion as to the mode in which they should do the work and supply the educational deficiencies of the country. While doing that we have insisted upon their supplying those deficiencies, and we shall insist upon it—though at the same time we have not forced them. We should have thought we were acting contrary to the Act in forcing them to put up schools where they considered they are not wanted. In like manner in the country parishes, and in the towns where there have been no School Boards formed, we have said, "We give you the opportunity provided by the Act of supplying the educational deficiency without a School Board, if you prefer to do so, but if you omit to supply it, we then must insist upon your forming a School Board." And lastly, we have not forgotten the section in the Act which gives power to any school district, whether its educational deficiency was supplied or not, to form a School Board. We have endeavored to facilitate the action of the section in two ways: first, by making ratepayers the most popular constituency that exist for any purpose; and secondly, by giving them the protection of the ballot. My colleague and old and honored friend, Mr. Bright, with whom I perhaps do not exactly see alike in the matter of education—has stated that he considers—although perhaps he may doubt one or two of the principles I have described—that they cannot be changed without subjecting them to further proof. Well, he, perhaps, may expect that proof will result in evidence of failure; but I am more sanguine. I do not expect failure; and I do not expect it, judging from our present success. In my opinion, these last three years have given us as much success in the operation of the Act as we could reasonably have hoped for. There is another matter which has taken up a great deal of public attention, and you will expect me therefore to make some allusion to it, that is the now famous 25th clause. There never was a provision in an Act of Parliament passed so quietly and so innocently—as to what might in the future be said about it. Even now, looking at the clause, it is very difficult for me to understand why so much should be said about it. It does seem not an unnatural thing that when you are providing education for the poor parent to send his child to school, you should give him the means of sending that child, because if he has not the means, he cannot well get his child taught. Well, does it not also seem extraordinary that you should tell him, "Well, although we pay for you, yet you may choose what school you like, provided that it gives what we consider an efficient secular education?" However, there is