

EDUCATIONAL CONDITION OF IRELAND.

BY J. GEORGE HODGINS, LL.D.

The remarkably disturbed state of Ireland (at least in the west and south) has naturally called public attention, in an unusual degree, to the condition of that country. Its educational state is of especial interest, in view of the organized lawlessness so prevalent in the disturbed districts. So far, appearances indicate that increased intelligence has led to better organization and more embittered feeling.

It will be remembered that it is within the last half century that any systematic effort was made to reach and uplift the masses of the people by the potent means of popular education. In making this effort, English statesmen supposed that with it, in connection with the concession of the principle of the Ulster "tenant right," they had discovered an infallible panacea for allaying, if not curing, the chronic ills of Ireland. In this supposition they have now discovered an unfortunate mistake, and find that the first problem is more difficult of solution than ever.

As to the educational factors which are now combined to promote the great work of uplifting the masses and the nation generally, I may remark that some of the most important of them are of comparatively recent date. They embrace the following: I. The National system of mixed schools; II. The new system of Intermediate Schools; III. The somewhat localized and private schools, comprising: (1) The Royal Free Schools; (2) The Erasmus Smith's Schools; (3) The London Hibernian Society Schools, and (4) The Kildare Place Schools. IV. Universities: (1) Dublin; (2) Queen's, and (3) Catholic; V. Women's Colleges; VI. Professional and Science Schools.

It may be interesting, as a matter of history, to note the periods at which efforts were put forth to extend educational facilities in Ireland.

First of all, due credit must be given to the nondescript "Hedge Schools," which, up to a somewhat recent period, exercised no inconsiderable influence in promoting "book learning" among the rural peasantry. A recent writer, speaking of that inimitable pedagogue, the Hedge Schoolmaster, says: "Fearfully pedantic, woefully undisciplined, panning out terribly upon the classics and mathematics, which he could devour, without the need of going to college, from a few standard, precious and oracular works, bound everlastingly for Keefs, he was the wonder, the admiration, and yet the butt of the neighbourhood. Goldsmith gave only a weak imitation of him. He had words at will, sonorous, but used with charming disregard to their connection. If a country gawk offended him, he thought nothing of assailing him with the charge—'the correlations of your mental obliquity subtend the inordinate sphere of your congenital insubordination.' And when O'Connell squelched the Dublin fish-wife, Ly calling her 'the sub-duplicated hypotenuse of an isosceles triangle,' and charged her with keeping in her house that equivocal character, a 'Pneumatic barometer,' he was merely quoting a hedge Schoolmaster indigenous to Kerry."

The Royal Free Schools were founded in 1608. Eleven years after, and as feeders to the "College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, near Dublin," (*Juxta Dublin*) the Erasmus Smith's Schools were founded in 1788, and the London Hibernian Society Schools in 1811. The famous Irish National School system was projected in 1881, by Mr. Stanley—called by O'Connell "Scorpion Stanley"—(afterwards Earl of Derby), just fifty years ago. The Kildare Place Schools were soon after established by the Church of England and Ireland, as a protest against these national schools. The Queen's Colleges were projected by Sir Robert Peel in 1845. One of these colleges was established in each of the Provinces of

Ireland, viz.: at Belfast in Ulster, at Cork in Munster, and at Galway in Connaught. As Leinster already possessed Trinity College, no other college was established in that province. The chief governing body of these colleges was called the Queen's University; but this body was virtually superseded in 1879 by a provision in the Act for a National University body to be established by Her Majesty by Royal Charter. The "Catholic University" was founded in 1850, under the Presidency of Dr., now Cardinal Newman, who resigned in 1861. An abortive effort, as will be remembered, was made by Mr. Gladstone, a few years ago, to consolidate University Education in Ireland.

While these educational agencies were being extended, the important subject of female education received no attention worthy of the name, until in 1866, when, as part of a comprehensive scheme projected in England, Alexandra College was founded in Ireland, for the purpose of affording a sound systematic education for the upper and middle classes of women after the school period. In addition to this College in Dublin, there is the "Ladies' Institute" in Belfast. In 1869, too, a system of University Examinations was instituted by Trinity College and the Queen's University with marked success. The number of candidates increased from 28 in 1870 to 120 in 1878-9. In addition to these aids for the promotion of education, the Queen's Institute, for technical instruction in Art Industries, was established in Dublin in 1861. Extensive provision was also made in Dublin for giving technical instruction to men, under the direction of the Science and Art Department.

The most important movement, in Ireland, for the promotion of higher education was made in 1878, by the passing of an Act to promote "Intermediate Education." The object of the Act was to institute and carry on a system of public examination of students in the ancient language and literature of Greece and Rome, the language and literature of Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy; Mathematics, the Natural Sciences, Music and Drawing, etc. This scheme has largely superseded, so far as women are concerned, the University examination plan of 1869, and a large falling off was observable in 1879. The data as to results of these later schemes are not yet sufficient to do more than indicate a reasonable success in the future.

As to the progress of the National Schools—the schools of the masses of the people—it is alleged that there is a falling off, of late years, in the results of the schools themselves, as well as in the zeal of their promoters. In 1878, there were 7,552 schools in operation, with a daily average attendance of 485,054 children, or a decrease in the average attendance of 1878 of nearly 8,000 pupils. The character of the schools may be indicated by the status of the teachers employed. Of the 11,842 classified or certificated teachers, 7,329 were third-class, 8,460 second-class, and only 1,058, or about one in ten, first-class. The state of things contrasts favorably with that of Ontario, where the proportionate number of third-class teachers employed is in excess of that employed in Ireland. Besides, in Ireland, there were in addition nearly 4,000 assistant teachers, including 260 "work-mistresses" employed—a class of teachers almost wholly unknown in Ontario.

One of the most significant facts mentioned in the report of 1879 is that which indicates the decadence of the system. This is the systematic falling off since 1876 of the local rates for the support of the National Schools. In 1876, these local rates amounted to \$152,800; in 1879 they only reached the sum of \$94,000. In addition to this remarkable apathy, the Commissioners add: "We have to express our regret and disappointment at the apathy exhibited by the managers of National Schools—not availing themselves of the facilities afforded by law for providing suitable dwellings for teachers—there being now only one residence for every tenth teacher employed."