

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

which they were total strangers. But, thanks be unto God! we have the same principles, the same hope, the same call from God, and the same blessed Saviour to be the Leader and Commander of His people. It is more difficult sometimes to maintain than to originate; but we may take courage from their experience, and remember that the same Lord who carried them through difficulties which seemed at the time to be insuperable, can help us through any difficulties which may arise, and enable us to hand on the sacred work unchanged in its principles, and vastly increased in its efficiency.

EDWARD HOARE.

ART. III.—THE IRISH UNIVERSITY ACT.

I.

AFTER many vain attempts and fruitless efforts to grapple with the question, a Bill has received the Royal assent, intituled "An Act to Promote the Advancement of Learning, and to Extend the Benefits connected with University Education in Ireland." Its passage through Parliament has been watched with no little anxiety by many persons, who, though willing to credit the Government with the best intentions, are unable to believe that it is possible to satisfy the so-called demands of the Irish people, without making concessions to the claims of the Ultramontane party, fatal to the advancement of sound learning in Ireland. It cannot be denied by any person acquainted with the subject that the claims of the Ultramontanes involve the submission of the education of Roman Catholics to the absolute authority of the Latin Church; nor can it be doubted by any well-informed and impartial person that education so conducted would narrow the mind and dwarf the intellectual stature. Under the most favourable conditions the aim would be rather to cultivate the memory than the reasoning powers of the pupils—the exercise of the latter being inconvenient; and when the standard could safely be kept low, without unfavourably attracting public attention, the results—as in Italy a few years ago—would be utterly unworthy to bear the name of education in any civilized country. No Government could long retain the confidence of the English people whose conduct justly exposed them to a suspicion that they were prepared to yield in this particular to the demands of the Roman hierarchy, whether advanced in their own name or in that of the people of Ireland. Suspicion is easily roused on this question, and it was perilous even to touch the subject. It is therefore not

surprising that the Bill promoted by the Government has been sharply criticized, and their policy severely handled.

It was asked, last July, why, if the Government could not give all that was desired, and if they would not give more than the Bill contained, did they stir the question at all? Why should they adopt a course which must end in disappointment for the Roman Catholics, and might lead to fresh embarrassments for themselves? These questions are plausible; they have been urged with considerable effect, and will doubtless be repeated; for it cannot be denied that with their present majority in the House of Commons the Government could have escaped for the moment from the difficulties of the position. One thing, however, ought to be borne in mind, in justice to the Government—that they did not stir the question. It is one which has been forced upon the consideration of every Government of recent years; indeed, it may be regarded as one of the questions, if not the main question, which broke up the Liberal party, brought about the downfall of the administration of Mr. Gladstone, the dissolution of Parliament, and the accession of the Conservatives to power. And though, as they were not bound by any pledges to deal with it, Lord Beaconsfield and his colleagues were for a time content—wisely, as we think—to let it alone, the Irish Papists in the House of Commons were not content to see it shelved. Ever on the watch to advance their own interests, and never unwilling to embarrass a Government, the Ultramontane party raised the question. The mistake they had made in 1873, and its result in 1874, seem to have taught them a lesson. They went warily to work. The late Mr. Butt was their agent. It was he who raised the question in 1876. His Bill gave it a definite shape in 1877; and when illness and death prevented him from prosecuting the notice which he had given for last Session, the question was taken up by the O'Connor Don. The Bill which he promoted as a measure for secular education proved on examination to be in fact a scheme for the endowment of denominational colleges, and, as such, it was met by the introduction of the Government Bill. It may be asked, why did they not content themselves with a statement of their objections to the proposal of the O'Connor Don, and rely upon their majority to defeat it? To understand this, we must dispassionately consider the position of the Government. Judging from the speeches made by Cabinet Ministers it would appear that their position was this:—

(1) They could not accept the Bill which was before them; they were not prepared to see a Roman Catholic University established in Ireland, and endowed with 1,500,000*l.* out of the Church funds. (2) They could not say that the existingsystem was in their opinion perfectly satisfactory, seeing that under it some

of the Roman Catholic subjects of the Crown were debarred by conscientious scruples—honest, though, as we think, mistaken—from giving their sons an University education. (3) They thought it right and just that these scruples should be respected, and were of opinion that they might be removed by a measure such as that which they subsequently introduced.

Whether we can entirely sympathise with this view of the case or not, it is sufficiently clear that, this being their opinion, her Majesty's Ministers could not well avoid the introduction of a Bill on the subject. Had they contented themselves with a simple statement of their opinions, their conduct would have raised expectations in Ireland which it is beyond their power to satisfy, whilst it would have created an amount of alarm and uneasiness amongst their Protestant supporters, which, though not well founded, would have been most injurious to the Conservative party. It must be conceded that, entertaining the opinions with which they are credited above, they adopted the right course in embodying their proposals in a Bill for the consideration of Parliament. Whether it was introduced in the right manner, or at precisely the right time and in the right form, has been questioned and may be disputed. The reasons which influenced the Cabinet, if they were fully known, might, in the public estimation, justify their proceedings entirely; with that we are not now concerned. The present Paper is intended rather as an historical *résumé* of recent occurrences, than as an apology for or a defence of the Government.

It is desirable that the country should clearly understand what has taken place; but it is even more important that it should be borne in mind that this Bill is only a beginning, and that now we are mainly concerned with the future. Whatever may be the intentions of her Majesty's Ministers, the Home Rule party have their own ideas of the terms of settlement which they will accept; and they have already given us a sufficient indication of their policy. They will take what they can get, and will agitate for more. They accept the present Act only on account of the destructive elements which it contains—as an “unsettling” Act. Doubtless there is a struggle before us, for which we need to prepare; and it is more important for us to realize that, and to make ready for it, than to question or to justify the policy of the Government.

The foregoing remarks are intended to lead up to a due appreciation of the present position of affairs. Whether we like it or not, a new departure has been taken by the Legislature and by the Ultramontanes. By passing the University Bill in its amended form the Legislature has, in effect, said: “The Roman Catholics are subjects of the Crown. Some of them entertain conscientious scruples as to mixed education in Ireland, which we can no longer ignore. Their education in the higher branches

of learning is a thing to be desired. We will not entertain any proposal which involves sectarian endowment, whether in the form of a direct vote of money, or in the shape of result fees to be paid to denominational teachers; but we will extend to the Roman Catholic youth of Ireland increased facilities and substantial inducements to obtain in Ireland, without frequenting colleges of which they disapprove, a degree which shall mark a definite attainment in intellectual culture." By their zealous support of the Bill the Ultramontanes, in effect, have said: "We see that we shall get nothing at all if we do not take what is now offered. We cannot get all we want; we will take all we can get *as an instalment*, and agitate for more." Meanwhile, those who regard the question from a Protestant point of view have been somewhat divided—but rather in action than in opinion. Whilst all have agreed that the dissolution of the Queen's University is a misfortune, and the proposal to create a new University on its ruins is open to risks and dangers from which a scheme for an extension of an existing University would have been free—some, on this account, have opposed the measure as a whole, or challenged details of which they disapprove; others, chiefly those found in the Conservative ranks, have thought it right, in the main, steadily to support the Bill. Their action has been influenced, amongst other considerations, by the conviction (1) that, as Protestants, we ought to do what is in our power to promote the sound secular education of Roman Catholics, and to give them all the assistance which we should desire to obtain for ourselves were the circumstances of the case reversed. (2) That the concessions made in the Bill, great as they are, and even unnecessary as they may appear to some of us, do not involve any question of principle, and when proposed, were accompanied by a definite pledge on the part of the Government that they would not countenance any direct or indirect endowment of Roman Catholic colleges. (3) That power is reserved to Parliament to approve or disapprove the scheme to be prepared under the Act, and hereafter to exercise, if need be, a permanent control over it, by voting the money required for its development. They thus supported the Bill as an indication that they were ready to do all they could to meet the wishes and the religious convictions of their Roman Catholic fellow-subjects; and further, as a deliberate declaration that they would not endow out of the public purse any institution over which Parliament can have no control, and for the efficient working of which it can take no sufficient precautions.

So much for the past. As to the future working of the University Act, we can only observe in the present Paper that the ultimate success of the scheme is still problematical.

JAMES MADEN HOLT.