

Ladies and Gentlemen. — In preparing this paper I have acted on the advice given by Dr. Sullivan as to the proper method of beginning to teach Geography. He advised, ^{as you know,} beginning with the school-room and grounds and afterwards going farther afield. So, some time ago, when it was proposed here that a paper should be read at each of our quarterly meetings, and when I was asked to prepare the first, in casting about for a suitable subject I thought it well to begin near home, taking as my theme

Some Aspects of Education in the Pesces.

It will be useful for us to consider the special difficulties, drawbacks, and discouragements which hinder our work of education in this Parish, and to see how far we can devise means to counteract their evil effects. The first hindrance which occurs to my mind, because I consider it the greatest, is the hiring out during the Summer and Harvest months of children of school-going, not to say tender age. These are parts of the Pesces where this is much more common and has, therefore, much more effect on the school work than in others; and I believe I am unfortunate enough to be located in a district where the evil operates in its very worst form; but it is more or less felt in all parts. I have known cases where children of only seven years of age had spent a season at service; I pointed out several such instances to Inspector Kelly when he had charge of this district; and I believe these were his basis for some forcible remarks which he afterwards made on this subject in a report of his which most of you have seen and may still remember. In the case of children who

who hire in the neighbourhood of their homes, for several years past I have been trying to get the parents to have different members of the family replace one another at service for a month or longer at a time, letting one in turn remain at home and attend school; and in this way six or seven have managed each year to barely qualify for Examination who, but for this method, would fall short of the requisite number of attendances. I should wish to hear others' experiences with this class of children. It may be argued that the poverty of the parents makes this hiring system an unavoidable necessity, but the poorest parents are ^{the only poor even} not ^A the greatest transgressors. Very many of those who send their children to service have no excuse or justification on the ground of poverty; their only reason for the practice is a disregard for the education of their children. I know, and I am sure you all know, cases plenty where well-to-do families, families, for instance, who can purchase any land that happens to be for sale in their neighbourhood, drive their junior members away to "the Laggan" or to some neighbour to serve their time as "white slaves". It has often been remarked that the Irish were very fond of learning and willing to make great sacrifices for its acquisition, and history shows that this was quite true in the past. But at the present time I fear it must be admitted that the love of £. S. D. is supplanting the love of learning in the breasts of our people. At an age when children should be allowed the benefit of their parents' and their teachers' protection, example, care, counsel, and instruction they are sent away among strangers to earn a paltry pittance. This is not as it should be. The new District Councils have power to prohibit the undue employment of child labour and

and to enforce attendance at School up to a certain age. It would be very much to the interest of the Teachers to ascertain how far the powers of the District Councils in these matters go, and to get the new bodies to beneficentially ^{discreetly} exercise these powers. I am not aware of any more crying grievance needing reform in this district; and I am sure your opinion on the matter coincides with mine.

Another great hindrance to the growth and spread of education in this Parish is the want of a taste for reading among our young people after they leave School. Every one of you is acquainted with boys and girls who may have successfully passed in both stages of Fifth Class, but who, when they grow up, allow their minds to become rusty, and in the course of a very few years forget almost all that ever they learned. Their reading is confined to the Prayers at Mass once a week, or twice if there happens to be a holiday, and to an occasional ballad which they buy at the fair. On the other hand we sometimes, but very rarely, meet persons who were, perhaps, only in Third or Fourth Class at School, but who by reading newspapers and books have expanded their minds and cultivated their intelligence to a surprising extent. Now, I think you will all agree with me that it is a very great help to the labours of a Teacher to have the elder members of a family capable of helping along their younger brothers and sisters in their studies and exercises. We all know from experience how much quicker and less troublesome to the Teacher is the progress in the case of a child who has the advantage of receiving some assistance at home than in the case of another child equally intelligent, perhaps,

perhaps, but without ^{4.} this advantage. But in how very few families in the Rosses is there any help of this kind given, even where the grown-up members are capable of giving it. Unfortunately, these members prefer gossip at a neighbour's fireside to any improvement of their own or their brothers' or sisters' minds. I believe, however, if we could instil into these young people a taste for reading and induce them to provide themselves with interesting reading matter that it would have the effect of quickly doing away with their apathy and indifference in regard to the progress of the school-going members of their households. In a Scotch paper lately I read an article describing how the School Boards of Glasgow propose making a grant of £5 yearly to every School to get up School Libraries, and so provide suitable and interesting reading matter for the children. This cannot but be very useful to Teachers and pupils by creating that taste for reading the want of which in this Country we deplore. But as it would be vain to expect such generosity or such a beneficent policy from the Treasury which controls the expenditure of the Education Grants in this Country, it behoves the Teachers to take the matter in hand themselves and to do what in them lies to foster and encourage and inculcate a love for reading among their pupils; and if we could once create this taste our young people could be trusted themselves to find the means of gratifying it. Let it be newspapers, story-books, song-books, devotional books, any books, I care not what, so long as they contain nothing immoral or objectionable; let us try to get our people to become readers, and if we can do that the good effect on the Schools and the school-going children, and the increased interest which the

the people will take in education will, I believe, speedily become apparent. Our young men who remain at public works or other employments about towns in Scotland should be encouraged to spend their leisure time in the reading-rooms and working-men's libraries to be found in all those places. I knew several young men who used to do so during four or five years' residence in Scotland, and who, though only indifferent scholars when they left Ireland, could, on their return, talk almost like professors on nearly ~~any~~ ^{every} subject under the sun. Those of our young men who return home from Scotland for the winter should be asked to go into a bookshop in Glasgow or some other town on their route, and for 4/- or 5/- get a supply of reading matter to occupy their time and improve their minds during the long, weary, idle winter months; and with the same object they should be encouraged to subscribe for some paper. By talking occasionally about these matters to the pupils at school, and exhorting them to continue to be readers when they grow up, the advice would sink in their minds and would probably be carried out in future years, and some good would be thus gradually effected.

Another thing which has acted very injuriously on education in the Rosses is the raising of the average necessary for the appointment of a Monitor. Formerly almost every school in the Parish had its Monitor, and some had two; and when this was so, the prospect of these appointments kept ~~boys~~ ^{pupils} at school often for three or four years longer than they would otherwise have attended. This gave the teachers opportunities for the teaching of extras, and we had in
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the Parish a large number ^{6.} of boys and some girls as clever as could be found in any Country district in Ireland, inasmuch that an Officer of the Science and Art Department who had come here several years in succession to hold examinations in connection with the Science Classes then being held at Belanuit declared in a written report that "the cream of the talent of Donegal, if not of all Ireland, is in the Rosses." At that time if ever a vacancy occurred in a School in any of the four or five neighbouring Parishes there was always a young teacher ready in this Parish to fill it. How much things are changed since then; but as this change is due to a cause over which the teachers have no control, no suggestions for its removal can be offered.

The last obstacle to our labours of which I will speak and which has a very detrimental effect on Education here is the Results System. Irish Teachers hear and read so much about the evil effects of this elsewhere discarded and discredited educational appliance (if I may so call it) that really one should apologise for alluding to it at all. But it is a many-sided, a hydra-headed evil; and as some of its baneful influences make themselves felt with greater force in the Rosses than, perhaps, anywhere else in the Country I may be excused for adverting briefly to it. In my mind its most unjust and objectionable feature is its requirement of having Children in poor, remote Country districts examined on the same programme and with the same strictness as Children in towns and prosperous localities who have so many advantages over the former. Some time since I came across some remarks made by a speaker

Speaker at a meeting of the Co. Tyrone Teachers bearing on this aspect of the Results System and which are so much to the point that I will read them for you.

That is the great fault of the System - there is too much cast-iron inflexibility and too little elasticity in its administration, no account taken, no allowance made for the very great disadvantages which the Teachers labour under here as compared with more favourably circumstanced places. This is one of the ways in which the evils of the Results System press more heavily on us here in the Rosses than, perhaps, anywhere else in Ireland. Another feature of the System quite as unjust is the requirement of having all the children in a class examined equally strictly irrespective of the differences in the numbers of their attendances. Still another way in which the System harms education is by spreading the children's time over too many subjects and leaving too little time for the more necessary ones. The bluntest Rosses-man you meet will tell you that "I do not see the use of my wee Paddy learning Grammar, & Geography, and Digriculture, and them other thingumees at School; he is only wasting his time; if he spent the time reading, figuring, writing, and spelling he'd be far better engaged and be more of a Credit to you". I believe myself that the Countryman who so expresses himself takes a more correct view of the proper programme for junior children than the great Dublin educationists who lay down the law for us. Grammar and Geography might, I think, with advantage be deferred for a few years longer than is at present the case; if children are only allowed to remain long enough at School to pass, say, out of 4th. Class, I hold that their knowledge of Geography, and still less their knowledge of Grammar, will

will never be of the least practical use to them. If it is seen that they are going to get a few more years at School, then let them begin these subjects, and, with their riper minds and increased understanding their progress will be rapid, and they will speedily attain the proficiency now expected of our 5th. Class. The education of any of the old people who were taught in the hedge schools, and who are now rapidly passing away, but of whom there are yet a few specimens in every townland - their education was, so far as it went, very thorough. One of these old fellows will spell antitrinitarian for you, and divide it into syllables, and splice these syllables together, and pronounce and define the word as freshly and correctly today as when he trudged barefooted, 80 or 90 odd years ago, to the sod hut by the roadside with the Dublin Spelling-Book, and old Gough, and two sods of turf under his arm; and so with any other part of the education he got. Their time was spent on a few subjects, and what they learned they learned well. Now things are the other way - children get a superficial smattering of a variety of subjects quickly taken into and more quickly let out of their minds. There can be no manner of doubt which of the two systems develops the intelligence better; these old people I speak of were all through their lives remarkable for the sensible, intelligent manner in which they could converse on any subject. I fear as much cannot be said for many of those who now pass through our Schools. Well, to turn to another phase of the Results System - the Teachers suffer from it in having their work measured by a false standard. The Inspectors and other authorities base their estimates of the educational value of the schools on the numbers examined for Results and

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on the proportion of these in ⁹the Senior Classes without considering at all the - to the parents and pupils - far more important and valuable education imparted to those children who do not qualify by attendance for Examination at all. Pupils here, as a rule, will make the requisite number of attendances for Examination only until reaching 4th. Class. After that age they sometimes make as many as 80 or 90 attendances in the year, but very rarely qualify for Examⁿ. It is not at all to be assumed, however, that they learn nothing after they cease to be examined. On the contrary, it is just then that they learn all or the greater part of what is most useful and necessary to them in after life. To the credit of the Teachers be it said that they ~~devote as much~~ generously and unselfishly, without the expectation of fee or reward, or even of a word of praise, devote as much or more of their time and labour to this class of pupils as they do to those who are examined, often risking by so doing the incurring of censure for neglecting the Examination pupils. Again the Inspectors consider the education practically valueless except in the case of pupils examined in the Senior Classes. From their lofty height they look down with a glance of scorn on the humble attainments of our school children, and they tell us that pupils who pass only in 4th. Class are practically illiterate. Now, I consider this a very wrong view, so far at least as this district is concerned. When the school-going children of the Rosses grow up they either migrate to "the Laggan" and to Scotland or emigrate to America. In either case the only benefit they ever expect to gain by their education is to be able to read and write letters, and so to be spared the humiliation of having to confide their wants and secrets and those of their families and relatives at home to

to strangers to read and write about. Scanty as their education may appear to our college - taught and university - trained Inspectors, I am glad to say that, with very rare exceptions, it is quite sufficient for their own needs in this respect, and is thus of as much practical use to them in their own humble walk of life as a college or university education is to those who can afford themselves such a luxury.

There are other drawbacks to our advancements here, such as unsuitable houses, &c., but as I fear I have tried your patience too much by the length of my remarks I do not intend to enter into these other ~~matters~~ ^{subjects}. I have endeavoured, in the remarks I have jotted down, to deal with matters which specially affect us here. You may or may not agree with the points I have raised; but I have only expressed my own opinion, and am open to conviction on any matter ~~if~~ which it can be shown that I have taken a wrong view.