

PART II.

PROPOSED EXTENSION OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN ENGLAND.

Some years since (in 1858), a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the state of popular education in England. The report of this Commission was laid before Parliament in 1861, and consists of accounts of the state of primary education in Scotland, Germany, and other countries, and general recommendations of the Commissioners. The conclusion at which they arrived in respect to the subject of this report is, that "the difficulties and evils of any general measure of compulsion would outweigh any good results which could be expected from it in the present state of things."

The last report of the Committee of Council does not express any positive opinion on this question of attendance, but directs attention to the opinions of the Inspectors in the following terms:—"The Inspectors who refer to the question of compulsory education express themselves, without exception, as favourable to the principle of it." They refer to the remarks of Mr. Tregarthen, p. 256; Du Port, p. 82; Routledge, p. 184; Sandford, p. 207; Mitchell, p. 140; French, p. 97; Howard, p. 119; Waddington, p. 297; and Steele, p. 228.

The following extracts are taken from the reports alluded to:—

"Rev. G. French, M.A., Inspector of Schools, says:—'The proper education of the farm labourer is a problem most difficult of solution. The introduction of machinery in agricultural operations seems to call for intelligence and education in addition to mere physical strength. No half-time Act could work satisfactorily in an agricultural district unless it were that boys should work three days and attend school three days. The greatest difficulty is in the apathy and carelessness of the parents. If the children are to be educated at all costs, and if the difficulties I have noticed can be overcome, I see no other remedy than some sort of compulsory attendance at schools up to a certain age.'"

"The Rev. W. Howard, Inspector of Schools, says that 'some legislative measure is needed which shall compel the attendance of children, that they may benefit by the education offered.'"

"Rev. M. Mitchell, M.A., Inspector of Schools, denies the necessity of any general compulsory Act, but proceeds to say that 'an Act which only applies to the base will be disapproved of only by the base, the number of whom the Act will tend continually to diminish.'"

In view of fresh legislation on this subject, two large societies have been recently organized in England, viz., the National Education League and the National Education Union. The principles for which the former of these two bodies is agitating are, that education should be gratuitous, compulsory, and unsectarian. The latter, whilst recognizing the inadequacy of the present system, considers that it would be sufficient to supplement the denominational system by unsectarian schools; that education should not be free except to the children of paupers; and that the only form in which compulsion can be advantageously applied is by an extension of the half-time Acts.

The following extract from the report of their first meeting, held at Manchester, will show the views entertained by the leading members of the Union:—

"The Rev. Dr. Rigg, Principal of the Wesleyan Training College, Westminster, said: 'The Manchester Union assumes the principle of compulsory education. The educational legislation of the last quarter of a century has adopted it as a postulate. But I do not believe that it is practicable to pass into law, or to apply and enforce, an honest and thorough, an important and equitable measure of direct compulsory education.'"

"Mr. Buxton, M.P., thought that it would be sufficient to give the local authorities power to deal with vagabond children in the streets, and forbid the employment of any child under thirteen without a certificate of education."

"The following additional legislation is, in the opinion of the National Education Union, required:—

- "1. In agricultural districts compulsory attendance at school should be required on alternate days or weeks or for a given number of days in the year; a certificate of attendance to be a condition of work under thirteen years of age.
- "2. Denison's Act to be made compulsory.
- "3. No children of the age of thirteen or older to be allowed to work full time without a certificate of having attended school and of having passed a satisfactory examination in reading, writing, and arithmetic."

Since the Manchester Congress, however, the policy of the Union seems to have become more liberal and have more nearly approached that advocated by the League, which will be presently described.

The *Times* of January 11, 1870, contains an outline of two Bills drawn up by a committee of the Union in order to give a definite form to their opinions.

One provides for establishing national unsectarian schools, to be partly supported by local rates in places where voluntary effort does not satisfy the educational needs of the district. The