

schemes for the appointment of these education committees which may be suitable to the particular circumstances of each county. The schemes were to be referred to and approved by the Board of Education.

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Coming to the question of funds, Sir JOHN stated that the first money which the County Council would place at the disposal of the education committee would be the receipts from local taxation, which would be applicable to purposes of education of every kind, subject to certain reservations. The present appropriation was extended, and the technical instruction money might be applied to education generally, and the county might allocate to the committee such part, as it thinks fit, of the local taxation money for the committee to spend; and, in that way, this new committee will become the successor of the existing Technical Instruction committee, and carry on their work. The County Council have the power of levying a rate, restricted in the Bill to the amount of twopence in the £, on the rateable value of property. They may levy this rate either on the whole county, or upon any part of the county, for which it may be desirable to make provision, and these sums—the local taxation money and the produce of the rate which the county may think fit to levy—will be the funds at the disposal of the education committee. A question being interpolated as to the School Board rate, Sir JOHN replied that it was not proposed to interfere in any way with the present position—the present rating powers of School Boards. The Bill, he said, gave no directions whatever as to the objects, upon which the education committee was to spend the money provided. It was for education generally. It was thought better to leave it entirely to the discretion of the local authority, to spend the money in the way it thought fit, rather than to attempt to prescribe how, and on what particular object it should be expended. Although the Bill contains no provisions as to the objects for which the money is to be spent, it did, he said, contain provisions as to the objects on which it shall not be spent. The first was that it was not to be spent in making grants towards establishing or maintaining public elementary schools. It would be wrong, however, to say that none of it could be spent in reference to elementary education, because a great deal of the technical instruction money was now so spent. For example, the Technical Instruction committee of the County of London expended large sums in giving scholarships at schools conducted by the London School Board, and there will be restraint under the Bill upon County Councils spending their money in that way. There was another thing, Sir JOHN proceeded to say, in which money was spent, and that was, in getting children to school. School Boards had no power to do that. But there were many country places where the best way of getting the children to school was by sending a wagon round, and money was actually so spent. There was no objection to this, and the Bill would in no way interfere with such expenditure. Not only are the counties through the committees, not to maintain public elementary schools but neither Poor Law Schools, Reformatory or Industrial Schools, and they are not to maintain or establish schools conducted for private profit. This however would not prevent scholarships being given to private schools, it only forbids any of this money being given to such schools in the shape of grants in aid or establishment expenses.

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Sir JOHN proceeded to refer to what he termed the rather vexed question in Education legislation—the question of the conscience clause. He had always, he said, affirmed that there was very little importance in the conscience clause in regard to secondary schools, because the real control over the kind of religious instruction given in schools higher than elementary schools was with the parent; it was the wishes of parents that were carried out, and the school authorities were bound to and did comply with them. But really more to satisfy Parliament perhaps than to meet any necessity of the case it was proposed in the Bill that the following conditions should be imposed upon all schools which are aided, established or maintained out of the money at the disposal of county education committees. First of all there is to be no condition made that any particular kind of religion is or is not taught in a

school; and secondly the parents of every scholar are to have the power to withdraw him or her from any religious observance or instruction. It was, Sir JOHN declared, a very simple provision, and he hoped it would satisfy the House of Commons. He was sure it would be quite enough to secure perfect religious liberty in all these schools.

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The main effect of the Bill, which primarily deals with secondary and technical education, would seem to be to materially limit the arbitrary powers of the School Boards and transfer these to the County Councils and other local governing bodies elected on a popular basis and directly responsible to the people. The application of this principle in New Zealand would certainly seem to be most desirable. Under the existing system the Education Boards play most fantastic tricks, and generally resolve themselves into petty Parliaments, occupying their time with more or less irrelevant discussions instead of attending to the business of their statutory functions. Where it does not suit the opinions and prejudices of the members the law is set at defiance as instanced just now in the north as to the exemption of children attending private schools from the statutory attendance at the State schools; and the arbitrary refusal of certain Boards to allow their Inspectors to examine Catholic schools. The Otago Board find their chief occupation in quarrelling with the Education Department at Wellington—with whom they are chronically at loggerheads—and every week the local papers publish column after column of their long-winded debates, of which everybody is heartily sick.

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It may be interesting to note that elementary education in England and Wales is at present regulated by the Education Act of 1870 and subsequent amending Acts. The administrative authority vests in the Committee of Council on Education, and a member of the Council as Vice-President represents the department in the House of Commons. Boroughs and parishes are formed and grouped into school districts, each with its elected School Board. Voluntary schools are provided for under the Act of 1897, and, if necessitous, receive from the State an annual grant of five shillings for each child in average attendance. In Board schools unsectarian religious instruction is given; in voluntary schools sectarian doctrines may be inculcated. The Bill now before Parliament does not apparently interfere with these provisions or in any respect with the status of voluntary schools: since Cardinal VAUGHAN has expressed entire approval of the measure.

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The Price of Foodstuffs.

The heavy losses which the farmers in the coastal strip between North Canterbury and South Otago have sustained by the rains which fell at harvest time are to some extent mitigated by the high prices which now prevail for produce of all kinds. In this advantageous rise in prices those who are outside the locality indicated will of course more fully share, and many a farmer will now find himself well repaid for years of extremely low prices. To the non-producing section of the population this will no doubt mean an additional strain on resources, but they have been especially favoured by industrial legislation, and will have no difficulty in recognising that the prosperity of the producing classes in a colony like New Zealand, which largely depends upon its products, means the prosperity of all. Though it is probably not the case that the Millers' Trust, or Association, has, as yet, anything to do with the increased price of foodstuffs, it is undoubtedly the fact that a greater margin than before exists between the producer and the ultimate consumer. Wheat was almost as dear in 1898 as it is to-day, yet flour was much cheaper; To-day wheat brings about 5s in Australia, yet flour is £2 10s per ton cheaper than in New Zealand, and the difference in the qualities of the wheat for milling purposes will not nearly account for the disparity. The high price in Australia is accounted for by an unexpected shortage in the yields, the deficit amounting to upwards of ten millions of bushels. If this had not happened, there would have been a surplus for export, and Australian wheat would now be pouring in to New Zealand. Again, the area under crop this year in New Zealand is 60,000 acres less than it was last year, and this must have its influence on prices. The rise in the price of oats is of course due to the demand in South Africa, which has more than compensated for

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