



## Academical Education<sup>1</sup>

The rough outlines of a plan of Academical Education for Ireland are now before the country. The plan, as appears from Sir James Graham's very conciliatory speech, is to found three Colleges; to give them, £100,000 for buildings, and £6000 a year for expenses; to open them to all creeds; the education to be purely secular; the students not to live within the Colleges; and the professors to be named and removed, now and hereafter, by Government.

The announcement of this plan was received in the Commons with extravagant praise by the Irish Whig and Repeal members, nor was any hostility displayed except by the blockhead and bigot, Sir Robert Inglis—a preposterous fanatic, who demands the repeal of the Emancipation Act, and was never yet missed from the holy orgies of Exeter Hall, Out of doors it has had a darker reception; but now that the first storm of joy and anger is over, it is time for the People of Ireland to think of this measure.

It is for them to consider it—it is for them to decide on it—it is for them to profit by it. For centuries the Irish were paupers and serfs, because they were ignorant and divided. The Protestant hated the Catholic, and oppressed him—the Catholic hated the Protestant, and would not trust him. England fed the bigotry of both, and flourished on the ignorance of both. That ignorance was a barrier between our sects—left our merchant's till, our farmer's purse, and our state treasury empty—stupefied our councils in peace, and slackened our arm in war. Whatsoever plan will strengthen the soul of Ireland with knowledge, and knit the sects of Ireland in liberal and trusting friendship, will be better for us than if corn and wine were scattered from every cloud.

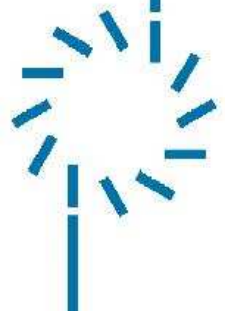
While 400,000 of the poor find instruction in the National Schools, the means of education for the middle and upper classes are as bad now as they were ten or fifty years ago. A farmer or a

shopkeeper in Ireland cannot, by any sacrifice, win for his son such an education as would be proffered to him in Germany. How can he afford to pay the expense of his son's living in the capital, in addition to Collegiate fees; and, if he could, why should he send his son where, unless he be an Episcopalian Protestant, those Collegiate offices which, though they could be held but by a few score, would influence hundreds, are denied him. Even to the gentry the distance and expense are oppressive; and to the Catholics and Presbyterians of them the monopoly is intolerable.

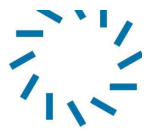
To bring Academical Education within the reach and means of the middle classes, to free it from the disease of ascendancy, and to make it a means of union as well as of instruction, should be the objects of him who legislates on this subject; and we implore the gentry and middle classes, whom it concerns, to examine this plan calmly and closely, and to act on their convictions like firm and sensible men. If such a measure cannot be discussed in a reasonable and decent way, our progress to self-government is a progress to giddy convulsions and shameful ruin.

Let us look into the details of the plan.

It grants, £100,000 and £18,000 a year for the foundation of three Provincial Colleges. The Colleges proposed are for the present numerous enough. It will be hard to get competed Professors for even these. Elementary Education has made great way; but the very ignorance for which these Institutions are meant as a remedy makes the class of Irishmen fit to fill Professors' chairs small indeed; and, small as it is, it yearly loses its best men by emigration to London, where they find rewards, fame, and excitement. The dismissal, hereafter, of incompetent men would be a painful, but—if pedants, dunces, and cheats were crammed into the chairs—an unavoidable task. A gradual increase of such Colleges will better suit the progress of Irish intelligence than a sudden and final endowment. But though the Colleges are enough, and the annual allowance sufficient, the building fund is inadequate—at



<sup>1</sup> From *The Nation*, May 17, 1845



least double the sum would be needed ; but this brings us to another part of the plan—the residence of the students outside the College.

To the extern residence we are decidedly opposed. It works well in Germany, where the whole grown population are educated; but in Ireland, where the adult population are unhappily otherwise, 'tis a matter of consequence to keep the students together, to foster an academic spirit and character, and to preserve them from the stupefying influences of common society. However, this point is but secondary, so we pass from it, and come to the two great principles of the Bill.

They are—Mixed Education and Government Nomination; and we are as resolute for the first as we are against the second.

The objections to separate Education are immense; the reasons for it are reasons for separate life, for mutual animosity, for penal laws, for religious wars. 'Tis said that communication between students of different creeds will taint their faith and endanger their souls. They who say so should prohibit the students from associating *out* of the Colleges even more than *in* them. In the Colleges they will be joined in studying mathematics, natural philosophy, engineering, chemistry, the principles of reasoning, the constitution of man. Surely union in these studies would less peril their faith than free communication out of doors. Come, come, let those who insist on unqualified separate Education follow out their principles—let them prohibit Catholic and Protestant boys from playing, or talking, or walking together—let them mark out every frank or indiscreet man for a similar prohibition—let them establish a theological police—let them rail off each sect (as the Jews used to be cooped) into a separate quarter; or rather, to save preliminaries, let each of them proclaim war in the name of his creed on the men of all other creeds, and fight till death, triumph, or disgust shall leave him leisure to revise his principles.

These are the logical consequences of the doctrine of Separate Education, but we acquit the friends of it of that or any

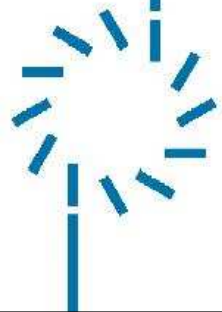
other such ferocious purpose. Their intentions are pious and sincere—their argument is dangerous, for they might find followers with less virtue and more dogged consistency.

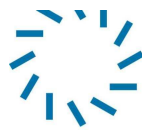
We say "an *unqualified* separate Education," because it is said, with some plausibility, that the manner in which theology mixes up with history and moral philosophy renders common instruction in them almost impossible. The reasoning is pushed too far. Yet the objection should be well weighed ; though we warn those who push it very far not to fall into the extravagance of a valued friend of ours, who protested against one person attempting to teach medicine to Catholics and Protestants, as one creed acknowledged miraculous cures and demoniacal possessions, and the other rejected both!

It should be noted too that this demand for separate *Professors* does not involve separate Colleges, does not assume that any evil would result from the friendship of the students, and does not lead to the desperate, though unforeseen, conclusions which follow from the other notion.

'Tis also a different thing to propose the establishment of Deans in each College to inspect the religious discipline and moral conduct of the students—a Catholic Dean, appointed by the Catholic Church, watching over the Catholic students; and so of the Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Such Deans, and Halls for religious teaching, will be absolutely necessary, should a residence in the Colleges be required; but should a system of residence in registered lodgings and boarding-houses be preferred, similar duties to the Deans might be performed by persons nominated by the Catholic, Protestant, and Presbyterian Churches respectively, without the direct interposition of the College; for each parent would take care to put his child under the control of his own Church. An adequate provision in some sufficient manner for religious discipline is essential, and to be dispensed with on no pretence.

These, however, are details of great consequence to be discussed in the Commons' Committee; but we repeat on claim for mixed education, because it has worked well among the





students of Trinity College, and would work better were its offices free, because it is the principle approved by Ireland when she demanded the opening of those offices, and when she accepted the National Schools—because it is the principle of the Cork, the Limerick, and the Derry meetings ; but, above all, because it is consistent with piety, and favourable to that union of Irishmen of different sects, for want of which Ireland is in rags and chains.

Against the nomination of Professors by Government we protest altogether. We speak alike of Whig or Tory. The nomination would be *looked on* as a political bribe, the removal as a political punishment. Nay, the nomination *would* be political. Under great public excitement a just nomination might be made, but in quiet times it would be given to the best mathematician or naturalist who attended the levee and wrote against the opposition. And it would be an enormous power; for it would not merely control the immediate candidates, but hundreds, who thought they might some ten years after be solicitors for professorships, would shrink from committing themselves to uncourtly politics, or qualify by Ministerial partisanship, not philosophical study, for that distant day. A better engine for corrupting that great literary class which is the best hope of Ireland could not be devised; and if it be retained in the Bill, that Bill must be resisted and defeated, whether in or out of Parliament. We warn the Minister!

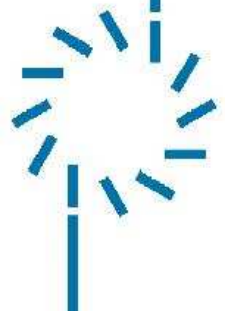
We have omitted a strange objection to the Bill—that it does not give mixed education. It is said the Colleges of Cork and Galway would be attended only by Catholics, and that of Belfast by Protestants. Both are errors. The middle class of Protestants in Cork is numerous — they and the poorer gentry would send their sons to the Cork College to save expense. The Catholics would assuredly do the same in Belfast; they do so with the Institution in the Academy there already; and though the Catholics in Cork, and the Protestants in Belfast, would be the majorities, enough of the opposite creed would be in each to produce all the wholesome restraint, and much of the wholesome toleration and goodwill, of the mixed system of Trinity. Were the objection good, however, it ought to content the advocates of separate education.

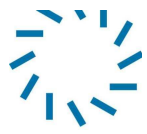
It has been said too that the Bill recognises a religious ascendancy in the case of Belfast. This seems to us a total misconception of the words of the Minister. He suggested that the Southern College should be in Cork, the Western in Limerick or Galway, the Northern in Derry or Belfast. Had he stopped at Derry the mistake could never have occurred; but he went on to say that if the College were planted in Belfast, the building now used for the Belfast Academy would serve for the new College, and unless the echoes of the old theological professors be more permanent than common, we cannot understand the sectarianism of the *building* in Belfast.

A more valid objection would be that the measure was not more complete; and the University system will certainly be crippled and impotent unless residence for a year at least in it be essential to a University degree.

The main defect of the Bill is its omitting to deal with Trinity College. It is said that the property is and was Protestant; but the Bill of '93, which admitted Catholics to be educated on this Protestant foundation, broke down the title; and, at all events, the property is as public as the Corporation, and is liable to all the demands of public convenience. But it is added that the property of Trinity College is not more than, £30,000 or £40,000 a year, and that the grant for Catholic Clerical Education alone is, £26,000 a year; and certainly till the Protestant Church be equalised to the wants of the Protestant population there will be something in the argument. When that Reformation comes, a third of the funds should be given for Protestant Clerical Education, and the College livings transferred to the Clerical College, and the remaining two-thirds preserved to Trinity College as a secular University.

Waiting that settlement, we see nothing better than tin-proposal so admirably urged by the *Morning Chronicle*, of the grant of £6000—we say, £10,000—a year, for the foundation of Catholic fellowships and scholarships in Trinity College. Some such change must be made, for it would be the grossest injustice to give Catholics a share, or the whole, of one or two





**Source:** Davis, T., *Prose Writings: Essays on Ireland*, London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co.,1889, 273-279

new, untried, characterless Provincial Academies, and exclude them from the offices of the ancient, celebrated, and national University. If there is to be religious equality, Trinity College must be opened, or augmented by Catholic endowment. For this no demand can be too loud and vehement, for the refusal will be an affront and a grievance to the Catholics of Ireland.

We have only run over the merits and faults of this plan. Next to a Tenure or a Militia Bill, it is the most important possible. Questions must arise on every section of it; and, however these questions be decided, we trust in God they will be decided without acrimony or recrimination, and that so divine a subject as Education will not lead to disunions which would prostrate our country.



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