

THE CONTEXT AND COURSE OF THOMAS ORDE'S PLAN OF EDUCATION OF 1787

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By the mid-1780s, the inadequacy of the existing tiers of education in Ireland had become a matter of common knowledge. Proposals for their reform were not quite as forthcoming; however, spurred on by the revelations of John Howard and Jeremiah Fitzpatrick and the suggestions of John Hely-Hutchinson, Thomas Orde, the chief secretary, undertook not just to reform but to reconstitute the whole of the Irish educational system. He gathered a large fund of information from a wide range of sources and devised an educational system of five tiers stretching from parish schools to universities, which he hoped would meet the diverse needs of the kingdom. This was well received in parliament in 1787, but the major religious denominations, especially the Church of Ireland which was expected to play a central part, were dissatisfied and their resistance, together with the indisposition and retirement of Orde, frustrated all attempts to implement the scheme.

The innovativeness and importance of the education initiatives in the nineteenth century which gave Ireland 'the first state system of popular schools in the English speaking world' (2, p. 58) has often been remarked upon (2; 16). The indebtedness of these initiatives, and specifically the national system, to preceding proposals and reports has likewise been noted and the seminal importance of the plan of education presented by Thomas Orde to the Irish parliament in 1787 indicated. However, relatively little attention has been afforded Orde's bold and ambitious plan which sought both to introduce new tiers of education and to reform the existing structures to create a new effective system. Coolahan (16) does not mention it at all in his history of Irish education; Dowling (18) and Jones (32) are equally unhelpful, while the earlier partial effort of Corcoran (17) is unreliable and incomplete. Atkinson (5) has outlined the main features of Orde's proposal but over-emphasises its objective of providing opportunity for all. Akenson (2), perhaps the premier historian of Irish education, has provided a fuller account, using Orde's papers, of the nature and dimensions of the proposal, but he has not assessed the factors and circum-

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stances which produced it or the reaction which caused it to be abandoned. By casting one's net more widely into contemporary sources and by utilizing pamphlets, newspapers and manuscripts, it is possible to establish these factors and to reconstruct the motives and tactics of those involved with the plans for redeveloping education in Ireland in the 1780s.

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IRELAND

The public educational system in eighteenth century Ireland was comprised of four basic constituents. First of all, there were the parish schools which were initiated in 1537 during the reign of Henry VIII to facilitate the preservation and strengthening of English cultural, religious, social, and political interests in Ireland. Despite supplemental legislative provision in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was clear by the mid eighteenth century that the parish schools had failed to accomplish these ambitious objectives and that they were unlikely ever to achieve them because of the inadequate number of schools, low numbers of pupils, and the catholic perception that they were little more than glorified proselytising agencies. An investigation carried out in the 1780s, which revealed that there were only 361 operative parish schools teaching 11,000 children from a population of some four million, vividly illustrates the extent of their failure (2).

Secondly, there were the diocesan schools which were introduced in the reign of Elizabeth and had pretty much the same 'civilizing' objectives as the parish schools but aimed at achieving a higher level of education by teaching academic subjects as well as basic literacy. Though organized at a diocesan level, the diocesan schools, like the parish schools, made slow headway. Specific legislation passed in 1725 and 1755, aimed at encouraging the Church of Ireland hierarchy and the grand juries to strengthen and improve the system had little impact and, by the late 1780s, there were only 18 schools (for 34 dioceses) catering for a miserly 324 pupils (2).

The third category were the 'royal' schools. Perceived by the early Stuarts as vital if the anglicization of Ireland was to be pursued effectively, James I and, subsequently, Charles I sought to provide for the establishment of free schools in every planted county. These were introduced, with some difficulty by James in Ulster, and Charles added to their number with new foundations in King's County, County Wicklow and County Tyrone, though, with no more than 211 pupils in the 1780s, their

impact was clearly minimal (2).

The fourth and final system of schooling of national dimension in the eighteenth century was also the most important and prominent. Granted its charter in 1733, the Incorporated Society in Dublin for Promoting English Protestant Schools in Ireland was an avowedly proselytizing and anglicizing organization with responsibility for maintaining and establishing sufficient Protestant schools to promote and disseminate amongst the young the English language and the protestant religion. Though well endowed financially by an extensive and munificent number of patrons, which included the Crown, their sister society in England, private donations and, from 1747, the Irish parliament, the charter schools achieved disappointingly little. Insensitive and intolerant in their efforts to secure the conversion of those put in their charge, the schools contrived to lose the good will of catholic parents, who had been well disposed at the outset towards the prospect of the free education and maintenance of their children, by their remorseless proselytising and mediocre standard of instruction (32, 39). To compound this, the organization of the Society proved sorely defective. With an overly elaborate national structure which bore little relationship to local needs and which proved incapable of establishing clear and realizable objectives, the society proved unable to use effectively, or efficiently, the substantial resources at its disposal and abuses became commonplace. As a result, it was hardly surprising that numbers disappointed. In 1776, it was maintained by the Society that the schools were responsible for 1,935 children and the provincial nurseries for 400 more (1). In 1786, the number cited was 1,710 (46, vol. vii, p. 67), but when a parliamentary authorized investigation was carried out two years later the Society's claim that it was responsible for 2,100 pupils proved unsustainable as only 1,400 could be verified (2).

In view of the rather abject failure of the four tiers of public schools to accomplish their pedagogic objectives, it was to be anticipated that there should be calls for the reformation of the educational system when the extent of their inadequacies became public as they did in the 1780s. Most attention and criticism were directed at the charter schools because they had the highest public profile. Moreover, they were in receipt of an annual parliamentary subvention which in the 1770s averaged £6,100 and in the 1780s no less than £9,000 per annum, and yet were, and had been since 1773, curtailing their activities (10, Ms 40,177 ff. 73-4). This was a potentially fruitful source of controversy, but much more perturbing was the condition of the schools themselves. Many were in, and many more

were descending into, a state of acute squalidness and, though the prevailing view of the schools was that provided by charity sermon panegyric, both John Wesley, the peripatetic preacher, and John Howard, the influential prison reformer, were sufficiently disquieted by rumours to the contrary that in 1782, when they came to Ireland, they visited and reported critically on the condition of the schools (9, 29, 55)

Neither Howard's nor Wesley's evidence stimulated the Incorporated Society or the individuals responsible to mend their defective ways. However, the repeal, also in 1782, of manifold penal disabilities against catholics, and specifically against catholic education, aroused sufficient controversy to keep education in the public eye. One of the issues of most acute concern to members of parliament in the often emotional debate which accompanied the bill was the education of catholics abroad. John Fitzgibbon, who was still at the outset of what was to be a long and often controversial political career, spoke for many when he described this phenomenon as a 'resort to regions of bigotry and superstition, to imbibe principles of positive obedience and every idea hostile to liberty' (46, vol 1, p 307). John Hely-Hutchinson, the secretary of state and provost of Trinity College, was in broad agreement and urged an increase in the number of diocesan schools to provide catholics with free education and the opening by Trinity College Dublin of all faculties, except divinity, to catholic attendance to provide a domestic alternative (46, vol 1). A restless, ambitious, and not always trustworthy politician, who had secured the provostship of Trinity in circumstances so contentious that he was never fully accepted by those over whom he administered, Hely Hutchinson brought his mercurial and not insubstantial intellect to bear on college affairs to the benefit of the university (37) and interested himself in educational matters to such an extent that he was one of the most advanced and informed contemporary thinkers on the subject. In 1783, for instance, on the presentation of a petition requesting financial aid from the Kilkenny School, he declared his support for the establishment 'of two or more great public schools, similar to Westminster and Eton' (46, vol 11, p 57) in Ireland and secured the appointment of a parliamentary committee to take this into consideration (33, vol xi). Nothing came of it but, in April 1784, he was again prominent, this time declaring his intention in the 1785 session to call for an enquiry into the state of the charter schools if someone else did not raise the subject (46, vol 11).

Hely-Hutchinson was motivated to profess his intention of calling for an investigation of the charter-school system by a conversation

he had with John Howard after the prison reformer had completed 'a circuit through the charter schools' (46, vol. iii, pp. 119-20) in 1783 (see also 29). There was deep-seated resistance to Howard's message generally, but criticism of the existing school system was one of the two decisive influences on contemporary debate on educational matters. The second was protestant disquiet with the tendency of catholics to go to Europe for their education. Obviously, a reformer such as Howard drew attention to and highlighted the views of those who advanced the first argument. He himself was anxious that 'the benefits of education were more generally extended over Ireland', preferably by means of 'free schools ... in every parish ...'. By these means, he pointed out, instruction could be given effectively to 'the lower parts in learning and the principles of morality—[and to] children of each sex and of all persuasions', which must 'soften the manners of the Irish poor, and enable their youth to resist the various temptations to which they are exposed in their crowded huts and cabins' (45, p. 177). Similarly grandiose expectations for the moral and political reformation of the kingdom by means of education, and the resolution of 'those groundless animosities and homely prejudices which ... have caused all sense of common interest to be lost' (15, p. 9) proved irresistibly tempting to others who considered the subject of catholic education. One pamphleteer favoured the establishment of a catholic university in Ireland because he believed it must cause Irish catholics to appreciate the evident superiority of protestantism. This would hasten the reduction of political tensions and, by causing catholics to turn their back on the points of view 'inimical to our welfare' (15, p. 15) they were absorbing from their continentally trained priests, achieve the desirable end of removing the need for Irish clerics to go abroad for training (15, 44). Like Hely-Hutchinson and the anonymous author of the pamphlet just considered, the liberal presbyterian Amyas Griffith, too, was anxious for educational reform in this area to dispose of the 'injurious partialities' he perceived were collected in France by catholic priests and disseminated throughout the kingdom. Griffith had a high opinion of the Carlow seminary and was of the belief that the education of the clergy at home, 'exposed to a liberal constitution', must benefit the kingdom since it would mean the priests, who 'possess an unlimited ascendancy over those of their communion, and can mould their opinions at pleasure', would no longer be influenced by an environment 'politically hostile to our establishments' (28, p. 12).

The bulk of contemporary thinking on education in Ireland in the 1780s was of this mode and was, consequently, highly politicised. For

protestants, it was very important, in the aftermath of the 1782 relief act and in the light of the proposal by the advocates of parliamentary reform in 1783 and 1784 to grant catholics access to the franchise, that the dilution of the penal laws and the slackening of their ability to safeguard their precarious dominance in Ireland through resort to these laws should be counter-poised by a diminution of the ideological and physical threat they perceived in catholic thinking and the catholic religion. For many, indeed, the object was nothing less than to win over catholics to their 'superior' protestant way of thinking. There were, of course, some with more mundane considerations. One who deserves mention was J Carey, a schoolmaster from Dorset Street in Dublin, because he affirms that in the midst of this ideological barrage there were some for whom basic financial and educational issues were still the priority. Carey was concerned by the unsatisfactory status of the fee paying grammar schools and argued that the problems affecting this sector could be alleviated by the payment of an annual salary of £50 to teachers, since this would eradicate the problems of ephemeral schools and transient teachers (11). This was a particular solution to a particular problem but, along with the more broadly ideological matter, it serves to illustrate the range of problems affecting education in Ireland and attests to the considerable interest in educational reform. Someone with conviction and determination was now needed to take advantage of this to reconstitute the educational system along lines more in tune with the needs of the time. The person who came closest to this was Thomas Orde, who took up the position of chief secretary to the Duke of Rutland in February 1784.

THE NEED FOR REFORM

Thomas Orde was in many ways a most unlikely reformer. A protege of the Earl of Shelburne, he had gained administrative experience in Whitehall as under-secretary of state in the Home Department in 1782 and as secretary to the Treasury in Shelburne's short lived administration in 1782-3 (7, Ms 16, 359, 26, vol III). In these positions and in the more onerous one of Irish chief secretary, he had proved himself to be a careful, diligent, and hard working administrator. On the other hand, he was neither outgoing nor extroverted and was plainly ill at ease with the convivial niceties and public performances that were so integral a part of the chief secretary's duties. Indeed, Orde was invariably more content in the background administering than he was in parliament arguing a case and it is hardly surprising, in view of this, that his initial prompting to embark on educational reforms did not stem from a personal belief in the merits of

education. Nor did it derive, as Akenson maintains (2), from John Hely-Hutchinson's 1785 plan for 'a great school', but it was suggested to Orde prior to his departure for Ireland by his mentor, Lord Shelburne, an imaginative and enlightened politician who had a personal interest in that kingdom. There is little evidence of what precisely Shelburne's views were or what he advised the new chief secretary, but he did urge the establishment of 'public schools' (35).

However, Orde found he had little leisure either to investigate the educational services of the country or to contemplate embarking on a reform initiative once he was immersed in the detail of day-to-day affairs. Hely-Hutchinson promised not to stand in the way of the chief secretary in the spring of 1784 (35), but Orde was kept so fully occupied in 1784 and 1785 that it was not until the end of 1785 that he began to pursue his own investigations. In the interim, interest in education did not abate. Sir Jeremiah Fitzpatrick, inspector general of prisons in Ireland who was described by one well-wisher 'as a second reformer to mankind', began unofficially in 1785 to visit and report on the charter schools (36, 54), while the ever restless Hely-Hutchinson devised a detailed 'outline of a plan for a great school' (7, Ms. 15, 884/1) connected with Trinity which he presented to the chief secretary in December. An elaboration on the argument he had first enunciated in October 1783, the provost urged the foundation of a publicly-funded model 'great school' for the education of talented king's scholars in classical composition and polite literature. With small numbers and well-paid, well-qualified teachers, Hely-Hutchinson, with the interests and improvement of Trinity College prominent in his mind, envisaged the successful scholars of the school progressing to the university where, he anticipated, they would contribute to raise standards by stimulating the fellows and other students of the college 'to equal or excel them in classical learning and in the belles lettres' (7, Ms. 15, 884/1). No less importantly, Hutchinson argued that if parliament was forthcoming with the £2,000 or so he estimated it would take to implement his plan, the great school would be emulated by such schools as were 'in the gift of government', and he had hopes also for the great school in Kilkenny and for the diocesan and Erasmus Smith schools, with the result that the whole country, not just the educational system, would benefit:

... the religion and morals, as well as the taste and manners of the Irish nation may receive assistance ... it will raise the spirits and invigorate the exertions of the rising generation to see that education is become an object of public attention and solicitude (7, Ms. 15, 884/1).

But Hely Hutchinson's eagerness to advance learning and language and, above all, to foster the development of Trinity College did not blind him to the need to attend to the whole educational system. Towards the end of his detailed 'plan for a great school', he touched briefly upon the circumstances and needs of the existing system, and what he had to say was not reassuring. The English (royal) and diocesan schools, he informed Orde, required pecuniary aid, the charter schools needed 'looking into', and the parochial system could be greatly promoted by 'obliging every parish clergyman to keep such a school pursuant to statute' (7, Ms 15, 884/1). Much of this was new to Orde, and he was so evidently stimulated by the advice and information in the secretary of state's paper that he subjected it to an exhaustive and sometimes insightful examination.

Though he was quite well disposed to Hely Hutchinson's proposal and inclined to locate the proposed college in the neighbourhood of Portarlinton or Carlow, the parts of the secretary of state's plan which most interested the chief secretary were those dealing with the education system generally and he was in full accord with Hely Hutchinson in recognising the 'great importance' of and need to cultivate 'the diocesan schools and other lesser institutions of that sort' (7, Mss 15, 884/1, 15, 885/12/2, 15, 886/1). However, Orde lacked reliable information which would allow him easily to translate his commitment to educational reform into a definite programme. Advised by the provost that the best source was the hierarchy, he set about gathering information on a limited scale in early 1786. His interest at this point was primarily in 'the number and state of the free schools of royal foundation' and, by April, he had enough information (7, Ms 15, 881/1 3, 31, f 163) of a sufficiently unambiguous character to enable him to profess his reformatory intent to parliament. The nature of this information has not survived but it convinced the chief secretary that 'the youth of the kingdom derives very little advantage' (46, vol vi, p 448) from the endowed schools, that some of their masters were motivated solely by self interest, and that in future schools should be endowed in such a way so as to assist the pupils as well as the masters. His assertion that this would be a more economical way of proceeding was accepted by the Commons, which approved an address to the lord lieutenant authorizing the preparation of plans for the establishment of endowed schools and resolutions for the collection of detailed information on royal, diocesan, and other schools in all dioceses (46, vol vi).

This set the stage for the introduction of a major plan for educational reform and the summer of 1786 was spent gathering information on the educational system (31, f. 164; 44). Most of what was collected was distinctly unflattering and reports in the public prints that endowed schools had been converted into 'shameful sinecures', that Enniskillen school, which had land worth £1,200 p.a., had scarcely a pupil, that Raphoe worth £600 had none, and Armagh worth £700 had but a 'few boys', fuelled the demands for action (19). Additional impetus was provided by the growing realization that the ills which prevailed in the endowed schools were prevalent in all areas of education, that the parish clergy were as likely to pocket the money as to provide schools (47) and, above all, by the fact that the charter schools which were held in such high esteem by protestants but were currently under unofficial investigation by Jeremiah Fitzpatrick and John Wesley, were in 'wretched state' (7, Ms. 15, 881/5). Both Fitzpatrick and Wesley submitted reports to the Incorporated Society and the former, who was enrolled as an honorary member, secured the dismissal of 'several' unsuitable masters (7, Ms. 15 881/5; 36, 55, vol. vi). But instead of allaying disquiet, this served only to intensify the growing sense of concern and dovetailed with the pressure from committed protestants, such as the powerful Richard Woodward, Bishop of Cloyne, who interpreted the *Rightboy* disturbances in Munster of the mid-1780s as a manifestation of anti-protestant sectarianism and urged 'some prudent regulation' of catholic education (56, pp. 17-8), to heighten the demand for educational reform.

Orde, for his part, was unable to take advantage of the parliamentary recess, or of the growing support for educational reform, because he was indisposed and out of the country for much of the year. His return was long delayed but, when he did take up his duties, education was amongst his top priorities. It is not possible to trace the development of his thought on this subject in detail during this time but it is clear that he had decided to broaden significantly the scope of his plan for education because the lord lieutenant's speech opening the 1787 parliamentary session spoke of the need for a 'liberal and extensive plan for the general improvement of education' (46, vol. vii, p. 12).

With the way forward indicated, Orde set about, with his usual assiduity, devising a suitable document. He seems to have worked largely on his own, but he was open to and in receipt of information and advice from a wide range of sources. Jeremiah Fitzpatrick, who had been visiting charter schools since 1785, requested an audience in February to inform

him directly of his dissatisfaction with the schools he had examined (7, Ms 15, 881/5, 36) Edward Tighe, MP for Wicklow borough, who was well intentioned if rarely well informed, was always ready to proffer his opinions (38), while Charles Vallancey ensured the problem of catholic education was not lost sight of when he urged the provision of colleges for catholic education to cut off catholic contact with Europe (7, Mss 15, 882/3, 15, 883/15) As well as these voluntary sources of information and opinion, Orde had recourse to a range of interested parties He called upon John Cooper, secretary to the Erasmus Smith charity, which provided for its own schools, Lord Ranelagh of the Incorporated Society and Gibbons its secretary, Alderman Nathaniel Warren of the Blue Coat Hospital, the provost of Trinity, John Hely Hutchinson and others for detail relating to their respective charges (7, Ms 15, 887/2 6, 8, 9, 15, 877/10) He consulted the statutes governing the existing foundations and built up outlines of all the main branches of education including the 'several foreign establishments for education of Irish for service of Romish church in Ireland' (7, Mss 15, 887/1 9, 15, 937/4) This latter was an object of particular concern to Orde because elsewhere he identified education as a means 'of attaching the Roman Catholics' and 'of making their leaders in some degree dependant upon government' His strategy was to oblige prospective catholic clerics to be educated either in the College of Dublin or in some other 'acceptable institution', to oblige them to take 'an oath of allegiance', and to obtain 'licences to officiate' (7, Ms 16, 369, ff 1 2)

THE PLAN OF EDUCATION

Having gathered a large body of information on all aspects of education, Orde's next task was to devise an implementable plan He already had an outline which indicated he was contemplating founding 'one new university', some associated foundation schools leading to studentships in the two universities, four provincial schools along the lines of Christ's Hospital in London, and parish schools, but this was far from immutable It provided, in broad terms, the basic constituents of what he perceived a reformed educational system should contain and he was quite open to alternative suggestions He did, for instance, toy with the idea of having only one university – a new foundation outside of Dublin – and with 'turning the buildings [of Trinity College in] to courts of laws' He was even more amenable to advice as to how the plan should be financed, it was so ambitious that he recognised it was not possible 'to accomplish the whole system at once' (7, Mss 16, 369 f 3, 15, 887/10, 16, 360 f 1)

With his general outline established and a body of information at his disposal, Orde set out to tailor and to develop his ideas to meet the educational needs 'of the community'. In this process, the four-tiered system indicated in the 'outline' was increased to five by the addition of diocesan schools. Each section was to have a distinctive function and role and he outlined this and his own vision of how the whole system should operate in detail in two manuscript notebooks (2, pp. 62-3 n9; 7, Mss 16, 360, 16, 372; 41). The first, simply titled 'Of Education' contains his outline and aspirations for all sectors of education. Beginning with the parish schools, whose function would be 'to give the lowest class of the people such moderate advantages of instruction and precept as may make them more happy and useful members of the community' (7, Ms. 16, 360, p. 2), he was eager to correct the existing weaknesses and to establish the parish-school system on firm foundations. Consequently, a wide range of regulations, financial provisions and supervision by bishops and inspectors was suggested for the 900 schools that were envisaged. Precise criteria for the selection of schoolmasters, who were to be protestant though catholic school children were to be encouraged, were stipulated; the local protestant clergy were to contribute specified sums towards the upkeep of the schools, though parliament would help; and they were to be overseen by a new incorporated society which would take the place of the governors of the Erasmus Smith charity and the Incorporated Society and bear responsibility for all English parish and charity schools. For their part, children were to enter the schools at four years of age, to remain there for five years and to be taught the three Rs, with religious instruction on Sundays.

The second object of Orde's plan of education was the provision of provincial schools. There were no schools along these lines in Ireland, so Orde, who took Christ's Hospital in London as his model, envisaged they would become an 'improved substitute' for the charter schools, which had quite patently failed to achieve their goals. Responsibility for the new schools, of which there would be four — one in each province and the first two at the Blue Coat Hospital in Dublin and New Geneva, county Waterford — was to be entrusted to the new incorporated society and they were to be funded from the £13,000 currently granted to the charter schools. As with the parish schools, the role of the provincial schools was clearly defined. They were to provide predominantly middle-ranking protestant children with the qualifications necessary to allow them become mariners, mechanics, farmers, surveyors, and architects. For this reason, the curriculum of the schools was to be more ambitious than that of the lowly parish schools, and it included, as well as the three Rs, a host of

technical and professional subjects, such as navigation, mercantile knowledge, modern languages, trade, manufacture, mechanics, architecture, and husbandry. Preference in the schools was to be afforded to protestant children of middle or lower ranks, some of whom would be supported at public expense, though catholic 'objects of charity' would also be accepted and raised as protestants. Few pupils were expected to remain in the schools after the age of sixteen.

A classical education was not perceived necessary for students attending the provincial schools, though there was provision for sending some to university. With the diocesan schools – Orde's third tier of schooling – which aspired to improve on the current diocesan system, the provision of a classical education 'at a small expense' was central. The function of the diocesan schools was to furnish 'gentlemen of small fortune' and aspirants to the professions with a suitable education. In order to ensure this, the object was to establish 22 diocesan schools paid for and maintained by the local protestant bishops, but with provision for ex gratia payments from the public purse for construction and for subsidizing fee paying students. Responsibility for the schools was to be shared between the bishop and nominees of the lord lieutenant, to whom was reserved a wide range of supervisory powers.

With the collegiate schools – Orde's fourth educational tier – we arrive at the acme of pre-university schooling. The role of the two collegiate schools was that of providing a higher level of classical education than was furnished by the diocesan schools. As Orde explained it to parliament in April, their purpose was

to supply the richest source of the most polished erudition to the youth of high rank and noblest ambition, whose object and fair pretensions it may be to attempt the first lines of professional distinction and the highest offices of employment of the state (27, pp 29-30)

Modelled on Charterhouse in London, and heavily indebted both organisationally and structurally to the 'plan for a great school' presented by Hely-Hutchinson in December 1785, the two colleges were designed as elitist establishments for boys 'of genius and ability' (27, p 82) from whom would come the future leaders of society. Pupils would spend some seven to eight years in the school before moving on to university, where they were eligible for select fellowships and university scholarships.

At the peak of the educational tree, Orde perceived the need for a new university. He was not particularly forthcoming about this because he was not wholly convinced of the need for it. He did maintain, however, that Trinity College of the University of Dublin could not cope with the demand for its services, though his proposal was not intended to reflect 'injury or discredit to the University of Dublin' (27, p. 100); indeed, the new university should seek to emulate its achievements. He was unsure where to locate and how to constitute the proposed new establishment and, though he informed parliament in April that the north or north-west was the most desirable location and suggested combining the schools at Armagh with those of Raphoe, Cavan, and Enniskillen, he clearly had no definite plans (7, Mss. 16, 360, 15, 886/2; 27).

As well as these five tiers of schooling Orde also envisaged a college of visitors and inspectors attached to the new university or one of the collegiate schools. Their function would be to supervise all the diocesan, collegiate, and other schools to which exhibitions were attached and to report on their performance and management. The role of the visitors was to ensure that standards were maintained and the educational system, both academically and administratively, conducted in a due and proper fashion (7, Ms. 16, 372).

Orde's plan of education was the most sophisticated and ambitious proposal for educational reform yet proposed in Ireland. In effect, it was an attempt to reconstitute that part of the existing system represented by the parish and diocesan schools; to integrate those parts represented by the royal, charter, and Erasmus Smith schools into the parish and provincial schools; to introduce new branches of education in the form of the provincial and collegiate schools, and to double the university sector. As an experienced administrator, Orde was aware of the cost and complexity of what was being proposed and this was one reason why he prefaced the abstracts of his plan for education with a caveat, which he reiterated in parliament on April 12, 1787, disclaiming any intention 'of being able to accomplish the whole system at once' (7, Ms. 16, 360, p. 1). Indeed, throughout his elaboration of the plan of education, he demonstrated a willingness to do what was practicable in the short term and to implement the rest as circumstances allowed. It was such flexibility which permitted him to contemplate two rather than four provincial schools and one rather than two collegiate schools to begin with (7, Ms. 16, 360, pp. 26, 47).

Orde's pragmatism was determined by an anxiety to minimize the cost of the plan of education to the exchequer. As far as possible, he endeavoured to ensure that the cost of the system was carried by local interests and that minimum resort was made to the exchequer. Thus, the parish clergy, proprietors of rectorial and impropriate tithes, and other local sources were made responsible for defraying the current expenditure of the parish school system while the role of parliament was to be limited to providing occasional contributions towards capital costs. The diocesan schools were also to be funded locally and contributions were anticipated from bishops, deans and chapters, parochial clergy, and public officers in the diocese. The provincial and collegiate schools obviously could not be funded in this manner, but Orde was not without hopes that 'voluntary gifts and benefactions', perhaps even 'annual contributions' from 'well endowed' corporations would play a part in funding the four provincial schools (7, Ms 16, 360, pp 26-7). The bulk of the revenue necessary for their establishment, estimated at £11 12,000, would have to come from public funds but Orde calculated on employing the £13,000 currently allocated towards the upkeep of the charter schools to that purpose. The most problematic question of all was the financing of the collegiate schools. Orde assumed that the fellowships and scholarships would be paid for by the university, but the 'two great schools' would have to be sanctioned by parliament 'and supported by public expense' (7, Ms 16, 360, p 41). Overall, the total cost would amount to £20,000 p a (27), but this could be significantly moderated, the chief secretary calculated, if the uncertain status of the estates in crown hands forfeited as a result of the 1641 and 1688 rebellions was clarified and they were 'set or sold to the best advantage' and the money used 'for the establishment of seminaries of education' (14, 30/8/329, f 299, 30/8/330, ff 173-7).

Orde presented this comprehensive and detailed plan of education to the Irish parliament on April 12, 1787. In his three-hour speech he outlined the main features of his proposal. He also discoursed at length on the reasons why such a plan was apposite. Little that was new was articulated in this section of the speech but two points are noteworthy for the insight they give into Orde's thinking. The first was his assertion that the 'want of education' was the root cause of the violence and disorder endemic in Irish life and, that if parliament was 'disposed to throw the scourge of castigation behind' and to choose conciliation instead, education was the means to infuse 'the balm of information into the wound of ignorance'. How, he asked

is happiness or security to be traced in any community where the mind is debased below the susceptibility of reasonable enjoyment, and where violence and plunder have moved the spirit of charity almost to justify them as the only means of preservation from poverty and famine ... (27, p. 19).

And turning to his audience, he exhorted them to:

rescue [the people] from a state of being confounded with the brutes of the forest; lift them from the ground by the information of their minds, and elevate them into men, teach them the privileges and prerogatives of humanity; make them sensible of its dignity and superiority and instruct them above all things, that morals, truth, industry, honesty and peaceableness are the ornaments of it, and bring comfort and blessings to their company (27, p. 19).

Having adopted a high moral tone to justify his plan of education, Orde continued to rely on it in his observations on the effect of the measure on catholicism. The participation of catholics in the educational system would, he maintained, disperse 'the mists of ignorance' and encourage their appreciation 'of the superiority of our own [protestant] doctrines' (27, p. 29). No attempt was to be made 'to force an obligation upon other sects to seek their only means of education under our preceptors' (27, p. 28) but it was hoped that catholics would take advantage of the opportunity being offered them and that the plan of education would contribute to the reduction of division in Irish society.

REACTIONS TO THE PLAN

As presented on April 12, the sheer breadth, imaginativeness, and complexity of Orde's proposal made a strong impression on members of parliament. Sir John Blaquiére, a former chief secretary, was enthusiastic. Others, notably those expert in particular areas of education, were so obviously taken aback by the extent and vision of what was being suggested that they requested time to consider in detail the implications of what had been presented to them. These included James Stewart, MP for Tyrone, who was a spokesman for northern presbyterianism and who had presented a petition on February 14, 1787 requesting parliamentary aid for a seminary for the education of presbyterian ministers (34, Ms. 4, p. 388; 46, vol. vii), John Wolfe, MP for county Kildare, who represented the interests of the private schools and who had been consulted by Orde

on this subject (7, Ms 15, 887/5), and Arthur Browne, MP for Trinity College. John Hely Hutchinson was more forthcoming. He had much to say in favour of the plan and, although he was critical of certain points of detail and disapproving of the suggestion of a new university on the grounds that Trinity College was legally 'the sole university in Ireland' (46, vol vii, p 498), he seconded Orde's resolutions approving of the plan and calling on parliament to implement it in the 1788 session. Only two MPs had significant reservations. Sir Francis Hutchinson, MP for Jamestown, county Leitrim, railed against the plan on the grounds that the abolition of the charter schools represented 'the most fatal blow the protestant religion in Ireland ever received' (46, vol vii, p 500), while Richard Griffith, the MP for Askeaton, county Limerick, objected to what he perceived as the practical exclusion 'of the Roman catholics and presbyterian youth' (46, vol vii, p 503).

These were important criticisms but they elicited little support in mid April when reaction was overwhelmingly complimentary. The grand jury of Limerick applauded Orde for the way he combined 'universal philanthropy and liberality of sentiment' (7, Ms 15, 881/6). The Dublin press was also well disposed and replete with pious hopes (see, e.g., 49) that this might be the means to heal the 'prejudice and partiality' and the 'invidious religious distinctions' which were the cause of conflict and acrimony in Irish history (20). Opinion did not long remain so overwhelmingly positive but, by the time the press got round to perceiving that the plan might not meet its ambitious goals and recognized that the often expressed need for a catholic university was not being fulfilled (21), the resolutions had been approved by parliament with little more than whimpers of resistance from Arthur Browne, on behalf of Trinity College, Sir Francis Hutchinson, on behalf of the charter schools, and James Stewart who articulated the persistent anxiety of presbyterianism regarding training for their ministry (46, vol vii, 42, vol iii).

With the resolutions ratified, the way was clear for the administration to plan the introduction of the different tiers of schooling outlined by Orde. Little seems to have been done in the summer of 1787, however. To some extent, this was the inevitable consequence of Orde's illness but, as well as that, the evident unhappiness of several key interests and, above all, of the three major religious denominations, with what was being contemplated, encouraged circumspection. The most significant objections came from the Church of Ireland and there can be little doubt but that the eagerness of some reformers, fuelled by the lurid accounts of John Howard,

Jeremiah Fitzpatrick and others of the existing schools and specifically of the charter schools (30, pp. 153-4; 36, pp. 90-91) to oblige the Church of Ireland clergy to fulfil their statutory duties in the educational arena, was perceived with alarm by many of the clergy. The *Dublin Evening Post* noted on April 19 that 'the idea of compelling the clergy to contribute towards the support of public schools has struck many reverend gentlemen with fear and trembling' (21). Some months later, it spoke of clerical 'trepidation' lest they should be deprived of money they were long used to (22), while John Howard, too, recognized that the 'spirit of improvement' which he had identified on his visit in June had to 'struggle with the vice of persons from the highest to the lowest' (25, pp. 140-41). The fears of the lower-order clergy were shared by some amongst the hierarchy, notably Archbishop Richard Robinson of Armagh who was reported by one reliable source to be 'cold, if not hostile to the whole scheme', except for the proposal to situate a university in Armagh (7, Ms. 15, 883/8). The Bishop of Cloyne, Dr Woodward, who was a more dangerous opponent, was even more forceful. Radicalized by the anti-tithe agitation of the Rightboys, which he interpreted as an attack on protestantism, he was opposed to any attempt to alter the status of the charter schools and he used his not inconsiderable influence to counter their critics (36). There was little public sympathy for the clergy, however, and both the popular *Dublin Evening Post* and the *Castle Volunteer Evening Post* were sharply critical of what was described as 'the criminal negligence' of clergymen who had allowed charitable bequests to the Erasmus Smith Society to be transformed into 'sinecure rapacity' (50), and funds, which were earmarked for education, to be consumed 'in gluttony or avarice' (22). But not all Church of Ireland clergy were hostile to Orde's plan. Charles Agar, Archbishop of Cashel, was the most eminent enthusiast for what he described as potentially 'one of the greatest blessings which providence can bestow on any people' (7, Ms. 15, 881/3) and he was supported by Charles Dodgson, Bishop of Elphin, who was also anxious that the plan should be implemented (7, Ms. 16, 354/54).

Of the other major denominations, the extent and nature of presbyterian reservations were the most public. Having petitioned parliament in February for 'a seminary of learning ... for the education of their youth for the sacred ministry' (46, vol. vii, pp. 169-70) and having been turned down, they perceived Orde's refusal to provide them with a separate and exclusive foundation with genuine disappointment. James Stewart articulated their disenchantment in parliament but his readiness to present a petition on behalf of 400,000 of that communion on the issue did not

influence the chief secretary and they declined to have anything more to do with his plan of education (13, p 70, 42, vol III, 46, vol VII, pp 376, 507)

The anxiety of the catholic church about education was longstanding and well known. In the spring of 1785, Archbishop James Butler of Cashel had impressed upon a receptive Thomas Orde the hierarchy's aversion to a proposal, attributed to Bishop Woodward of Cloyne, that catholic seminarians should be obliged to attend Trinity College (12, No 150). Nothing more was heard of this scheme, but Orde's own plan of education presented the catholic hierarchy with a dilemma. Reluctant to be seen to be critical of a chief secretary, not least one who harboured suspicions of catholics, they held their peace throughout 1787 despite obvious reservations and press calls urging the advantages of integrated education as a means of reducing 'bigotry' (24, 53). Not all were so reserved, however. Charles Brennan, a catholic pamphleteer, objected to the refusal of the chief secretary to countenance religious instruction other than that of the Church of Ireland in his school system and labelled it 'a barbarous penal law' (3, p 97) for this reason. On another occasion, he described it as 'a gothic edict against the improvement of our rational faculties' (4, pp xx-xxi). The hierarchy, meanwhile, still declined to get involved, and it was not until February 1788 when Alleyne Fitzherbert, Orde's successor, undertook to follow up on his predecessor's plan of education that John Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, sought to gather the sentiments of his fellow bishops on Orde's proposal. Those that replied were invariably hostile. Daniel Delany, Bishop of Kildare, likened the suggestion of state involvement in catholic affairs to 'the wolf' at the door. To him, it represented a 'sinister, insidious and illiberal business [of] disingenuous aspect' which had as its object 'the utter extirpation of our holy religion together with the property of its possessors' (48, No 63). James Caulfield, Bishop of Ferns, agreed with Delany that catholics alone should be responsible for 'the education of catholics', and on these grounds maintained that they should not participate in Orde's scheme. Caulfield's particular concern was for clerical education and he expressed his preference that catholic seminarians should continue to be educated abroad rather than run the religious and moral risks he associated with attendance at Trinity (48, No 65). These views were broadly shared by the Archbishop of Tuam, Boetius Egan, and his suffragans, who dismissed Orde's scheme as 'a deep laid and hostile plan against the interests of the catholic religion' (43, vol III, p 410). As far as Egan was concerned, the object of the scheme was to strengthen protestantism by establishing an

exclusively protestant educational system and it was vital that catholics should respond with their own scheme if they were to survive.

In view of the dislike of the three main religious denominations for Orde's plan of education, it is hardly surprising that the summer of 1787 did not witness much progress with the scheme. For most of the summer, indeed, nothing occurred. Even the public debate on the subject was fitful and unexciting. It received a fillip in late July when John Giffard's pamphlet account of the parliamentary debate of April 12 was published, but this was insufficient to elevate it to the level of public controversy (51; 22). Behind the scenes, too, little transpired. Orde met John Howard in July for discussion on the state of the charter schools (25, p. 142) and conducted a rather lack lustre correspondence, largely with Edward Tighe, on the recruitment of masters for the provincial schools (7, Mss. 15, 882/4-5, 15, 883/2-7). But it was not until September, by which time people were beginning to suspect that the plan of education would never come to anything and to comment approvingly on the improvement it had already prompted in the endowed schools (52), that Orde, recurrently ill, was prompted, presumably by his own infirmity, to employ John Reeves, an English legal writer, to assist him develop his plan before the new session of parliament (23).

Reeves spent over five weeks in Ireland seeking to prepare the ground for the implementation of Orde's educational plans. He began in mid-September with discussions with the Archbishop of Cashel who informed him of Archbishop Robinson's dislike of the scheme, but Reeves was hopeful that the primate could be persuaded to finance a university if it was based in Armagh. This was essential, because otherwise there was no prospect of a second university. The Archbishop of Cashel, by contrast, was well disposed in principle, though he was less happy with some details of the plan. He shared the primate's interest in a new university and was also in favour of the two collegiate schools, but not the college of visitors, which he labelled an 'unnecessary burthen'. He was even less well inclined towards the lower tiers of schooling envisaged by Orde. The existing diocesan schools could 'easily be reformed by the bishops', he opined, which would cut down on expense, and he held out few if any hopes for the parish schools and provincial academies (7, Ms. 15, 883/8).

Agar's reservations and Robinson's more general dislike of the scheme must have come as cold comfort to Thomas Orde who had devised the

plan to favour the established church. If so, he gave no inkling publicly, as John Fitzgibbon, the attorney general, prepared a bill to legalize the sale of the lands forfeited in the seventeenth century still in the crown's possession to 'raise a sum large enough to establish public schools'. This was an unexpectedly complex task because the lands forfeited in 1688 had been vested in the Crown by a British act and it was necessary to have an act of the British parliament authorizing their sale (7, Ms 15, 883/9). By this point, with Orde unable personally to engage in the elaboration of his plan and increasingly disposed to resign, it was becoming increasingly apparent, that little could be achieved in advance of the 1788 parliamentary session. All rested upon what John Reeves could accomplish and, by mid October, his mission was running out of steam. He had endeavoured, despite bureaucratic obstacles, the illness of his secretary and tensions in his relationship with Charles Vallancey and Edward Tighe, to procure the sentiments of the Church of Ireland hierarchy, to secure sites for parish schools and to gather information, but his enthusiasm was clearly flagging (7, Ms 15, 883/10). A week later, he had a farewell audience with the lord lieutenant, the Duke of Rutland, and, soon after, left the country (7, Ms 15, 883/13).

THE FAILURE OF THE PLAN

Reeve's departure, the demise shortly afterwards of the Duke of Rutland, and the resignation of Thomas Orde put a halt to all preparations for specific educational reform during the 1788 parliamentary session. There were still enthusiasts, such as John Hely-Hutchinson and the Bishop of Elphin, who were eager to advance the scheme (10, Ms 40, 179, f 139, 7, Ms 16, 354/54), but its future depended on the new lord lieutenant, the Marquis of Buckingham, and his chief secretary, Alleyne Fitzherbert. They were disposed to favour educational reform, if not Orde's proposal in all its specifics (2, 9). With information still coming in from the countryside on the state and condition of schools in various dioceses (31, f 163) and Jeremiah Fitzpatrick and John Howard pressing for the reformation of the charter schools, Fitzherbert's proposal in March of a bill to allow the lord lieutenant appoint commissioners to examine the condition of all schools to ensure a complete return of information was a sensible holding position. It committed the new administration to nothing and gave them time to assess opinion. It was also an eminently logical suggestion since Orde's 1787 request for returns of the state and finances of schools had not been complied with (2, 46, vol VIII, p 395).

With individuals such as Fitzherbert, John Hely-Hutchinson, and Denis Daly, the MP for county Galway, among the seven commissioners appointed to consider the state of schooling in Ireland, it is surprising that nothing came of the commissioners' investigations. It is even more surprising that no report was published. A draft was reputedly ready by late 1788 but no copy survives and since the complete report was not finalized until 1791 and then was neither presented to parliament nor published, the interest and enthusiasm engendered in educational reform by Thomas Orde in the mid-1780s had clearly dissipated (2).

There are many reasons why the attempt at educational reform embraced in the mid-1780s came to naught. The most obvious, and probably also the most important, was the resignation of Thomas Orde. He had brought to bear the commitment, administrative impetus, and organizational skill essential to transform vague ideas for the reform of a defective educational system into an overall plan for change. Had he remained in office, the full plan would have proved, as he himself recognized, very difficult to implement. But without his initiative and commitment, educational reform lost its champion and, with it, the impetus which had brought it to the verge of implementation.

Orde's departure was by no means the only cause of the failure of the Irish Parliament to embrace educational reform. Political exigencies in the shape of the regency crisis and the radicalizing impact of the French Revolution played their part by persuading the Irish administration and parliament of the demerits of innovation and, by throwing up crises and issues of greater moment and urgency, concentrated attention elsewhere. As well as this, powerful vested interests worked assiduously to frustrate all efforts at reform. The most effective were the main religious denominations. The presbyterians wanted their own seminary. Catholics were suspicious of proselytization and, in an attempt to allay their fears, the commissioners' 1791 report made provision for the appointment of two Catholics to the board of visitors of the parish schools and separate religious instruction. The most decisive objections, however, came from the Church of Ireland. Though by no means unanimous in their dislike of Orde's plan, hardline conservative Protestants, such as Bishop Woodward of Cloyne, and their allies in the Incorporated Society, sought vigorously to discredit the critics of the charter schools. Their primary foci were Jeremiah Fitzpatrick and John Howard whose criticisms, presented in detail to the parliamentary committee which in 1788 investigated the charter schools, made painful reading (36). Many,

including figures close to the episcopacy, found the weight of evidence alleging improprieties and mismanagement in the charter schools too overwhelming to discount (8, Ms 8894), but there were too many with influence who interpreted the criticisms as a challenge to the establishment which had to be resisted at all costs. They were ultimately successful and, as a result, the charter schools continued pretty much undisturbed with little other than minimal changes in personnel and cosmetic physical improvement (6, 32, 33, vol xii, 36, 40)

Finally, it must also be noted that the extent and scope of Orde's plan of education militated against its implementation. It was too ambitious for the age, certainly for an Irish parliament which was broadly conservative both attitudinally and fiscally. Orde shared these views and was prepared to proceed gradually, but his departure meant his energy was replaced by circumspection and his commitment by caution. The outcome represented a triumph for such circumspection and caution, with the result that Orde's plan of education became a monument to effort rather than to achievement.

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