CABINET.

CHURCH SCHOOLS.

MEMORANDUM BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

The question of Church Schools has recently come up again in a form which should, I think, be considered by the Cabinet.

In February, 1927, I circulated a memorandum to the Cabinet (C.P. 45/27) describing the course of the discussions in regard to an Enabling Bill and the temporary deadlock in which those discussions had ended. It seemed obvious that these discussions could not usefully be renewed before the General Election. This has been the view generally taken, I think, by responsible people in the Church of England and I understand that the Archbishop's Commission on Religious Teaching do not contemplate issuing a report until after the Election.

Unfortunately, this view is not shared by some of the bishops and leading clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The problem of Roman Catholic schools has throughout offered more difficulty than that of Anglican schools. The Catholic Education Council who, under the Bishops, represent the Church in this matter, have never accepted the idea of an Enabling Bill, because they believe that certain local education authorities, in whose areas Roman Catholic schools are particularly strong, notably Manchester, would refuse to make use of the powers conferred by such a Bill. They have therefore insisted on the necessity of a national settlement, arrived at by national negotiations.
When the Cabinet authorised me to pursue a certain line of policy in regard to an Enabling Bill, it was on the distinct understanding that the Government should not be placed in the position of negotiating terms directly with any national religious body and I have therefore avoided anything but the most informal discussions with the Catholic Education Council or the Catholic Hierarchy, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this position. The Hierarchy has issued a Declaration on the subject, a copy of which will be found in the appendix, and they have gone so far as to recommend this declaration to the consideration of Catholics in connection with the coming election. The Catholic Education Council has, I believe, drafted a Bill which would raise in its most acute and dangerous form the whole question of Government grants in aid of the building of Church schools. They have not yet communicated this Bill to me, nor indeed have they yet approached me formally on the subject of an amendment of the present law; but they are being pressed to do so by some of their members and by some of the Bishops, who, moreover, wish, if my answer is unfavourable, to undertake negotiations with the other political parties. It is therefore too much to hope that the question can be entirely shelved until next summer.

On merits, there is a strong case for some amendment of the present law. To take only the most obvious anomaly, we are at present engaged in a comprehensive reorganisation of elementary schools into junior and senior schools. This is not only an educational improvement but also in many areas a considerable economy, the saving in staff more than counter-balancing the loan charges on new buildings. But in the case of voluntary schools under the existing
law, the loan charges fall on the voluntary body while the economy in staffing accrues to the local authority. The local authority can neither assist voluntary bodies in reorganising their schools nor require them to spend money themselves for that purpose.

To meet this and other difficulties, I have long had in mind a twofold amendment of the present law. In the first place, an Enabling Bill would give local authorities general powers of assisting voluntary bodies to bring their elementary schools up-to-date. In the second place, I contemplate a more fundamental change. The existing restrictions in regard to religious teaching and grants of public money in aid of denominational schools apply only to elementary, and not to higher, education. The existing line of demarcation between "elementary" and "higher" education is an artificial one and corresponds less and less to real distinctions between different types of school. The tendency nowadays is to regard all education from the age of about eleven as "secondary", and it would be natural to define "higher" education, which already includes the schools now known as secondary schools, as covering all education after that age, so long, at any rate, as it satisfies certain minimum conditions. An amendment of the law embodying such a definition would probably be positively popular on its own merits, and it would automatically remove the disabilities of voluntary schools, so far as concerns education for the last three years or so of compulsory school life. Opposition to these proposals would be the less likely if they were put forward as part of a general revision of the Education Act, many of whose provisions are becoming increasingly out of date. I am now working
on proposals for such a revision, which I hope to put before the Cabinet in due course.

Legislation on these lines, however, while it would in fact give great relief to voluntary schools and would be welcomed by all those, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, who have real knowledge of educational problems, would not at first sight be popular with Roman Catholics generally. As I have said, they are not attracted by the idea of local option under an Enabling Bill, and at the present moment they are even less attracted by the idea of re-organisation into junior and senior schools. Here we come to the special difficulty of the Roman Catholic problem. The Roman Catholics are the only voluntary body who are building new schools. The first ambition of every priest of a newly formed Roman Catholic parish is to have his own parish school, however small it may be and however impossible it may be to provide proper education for the older children in so small a school. This tendency is generally supported by the hierarchy and bitterly opposed by the Local Authorities, since nothing is so expensive as the staffing of small schools. The parish priests, and to a large extent their flocks, dislike any re-organisation which involves the removal of the older children from one parish school to another. This opposition will eventually die down, for many Roman Catholic parents are probably already beginning to be impressed by the improved education given to the older children in the re-organised Council Schools. But, for the moment, the announcement in an election programme of a proposed amendment of the law based upon the two principles of local option and re-organisation would not conciliate Roman Catholic opinion, which, in its present temper, would be content with nothing less than a direct repeal.
of the clause in the Education Act which forbids Parliamentary Grants in aid of the building of denominational schools.

It is needless to add that, if a programme of this kind would not conciliate Roman Catholics, it might seriously alarm Free Churchmen. The latter have already practically accepted the idea of an Enabling Bill and they would, I believe, be quite ready to acquiesce in a general revision of the law, including a re-definition of "elementary" and "higher" education which would be educationally sound and would incidentally turn the flank of the 1902 settlement; but it would be a very different thing to ask them to acquiesce in this policy if it were put forward as a frontal attack on that settlement. A general revision of the Education Act probably could not, for various reasons, be undertaken before the parliamentary session of 1931, and all arguments seem to be against its inclusion in an election programme.

In these circumstances, our only possible course would appear to be to endeavour to persuade the most influential members of the Catholic Education Council and the hierarchy to take the same view as has been taken by leaders of the Church of England: that whatever may be the prospects of a new settlement of the denominational schools question, those prospects could only be prejudiced by discussion in the atmosphere of a general election. The task of persuasion will not be easy but it is not, I think, impossible, especially if we can give some earnest of our good intentions by one or two minor and not very expensive concessions to voluntary schools within our present powers which I may be able to propose to the Chancellor of the
Exchequer, but to which I do not, of course, ask him to commit himself at the present moment. But this line of action will involve some measure of direct discussion with the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church and while I do not ask the Cabinet at this stage to take any new decision on the subject, I wish them to be fully informed of the situation which has arisen.

E.P.

Board of Education.
26th September, 1928.
APPENDIX.

DECLARATION OF THE HIERARCHY ON EDUCATION.

The Bishops at their Annual Meeting had again under review the present situation of the non-provided schools. They affirmed once more their conviction that the actual conditions were in no way contemplated when the compromise of 1902 was arrived at; and that these conditions now constitute a burden which is beyond the strength of the supporters of those schools to bear.

They desire to emphasise two principles which are essential to a just and lasting settlement of this urgent question.

(1) That to all parents there should be open some liberty of choice of school such as at present belongs in most cases only to the wealthier classes; and that liberty of this kind is possible only if the system of voluntary schools, whether primary or secondary, be maintained and extended. Any weakening of the voluntary system means inevitably a further lessening, in the case of poorer parents, of the very limited freedom of choice of school which they still possess.

(2) That precisely the same facilities of education should be given to those who regard definite religious teaching as an essential part of education, as to those who attach no such importance to teaching of that character.

We claim, therefore, a reasonable choice of school for parents of every social class, and equal educational facilities for all, unhampered by disabilities on the ground of religion.