

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOL AND THE 1918 EDUCATION ACT

For this as for all schools in the country, the Education (Scotland) Act of 1918 was of vital significance. The act of 1872 had left Catholic schools in the unhappy position of receiving no help from the local rates; payment of teachers and provision of materials had depended on voluntary contributions from the parishioners; the acquiring and using of this money had been the responsibility of the parish priest. The government grants, as we have seen, upon which the building and maintaining of premises depended could be withdrawn or reduced if results were unsatisfactory. Catholic secondary education was confined to what was provided by the religious orders, and parents received little financial help. The 1918 Act changed everything, in theory, at least. Catholic schools came under the aegis of the new education authorities and were to be financially maintained by them. The authorities were empowered to provide not only buildings but also books, stationery, instruments for all subjects, and travelling expenses. At the same time, Catholic schools were to continue to exist as such, with time devoted to religious education and staffed as far as possible by Catholic teachers for as long as the Catholic population wanted this situation to continue. In addition, secondary education was to be provided, at least of the 'junior secondary' variety, for all pupils, with senior secondary education for those pupils who could be expected to benefit from it; such pupils were to receive not only travelling expenses but also bursaries and maintenance money. Catholic education in Kirkintilloch was particularly fortunate in having the guidance and representation on the local education authority of Rev. Father Jansen, a German refugee from Bismarck's Kulturkampf - the persecution of the Catholic church in Germany in the 1880's. Father Jansen was not only experienced in school management but had a much clearer vision of the value of secondary education than had most of his parishioners.

This priest's energy and initiative were to be the more necessary in that the working class community served by the school was not exactly blossoming with enthusiasm for higher education; as it was, only six per cent of the school roll ever reached the old supplementary class, and most reached the leaving age of fourteen while still sitting in classes lower down the primary school. Traditionally, secondary education had involved three to five years of travel to Glasgow at parental expense; obviously such children did not become wage earners till the age of seventeen or eighteen. Even before 1918, however, some parents did make the necessary sacrifice, as if proved by the early former pupils who did rise in such professions as medicine, the law, teaching and engineering, but these were a minority. Most Catholic parents in the area were working class, many being employed in the mines for very low wages; such people needed to have their children earning as soon as possible, and many were reluctant that their children should stay at school until the age of fourteen, far less that they should complete a full course of senior secondary education. Despite the provisions of the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act, such people could ill afford to do without their children's earnings. In addition, few could see any concrete value or advantage to be gained from senior secondary education, with the result that even after 1918, a great many pupils still left school early, and drifted into unskilled employment which offered little prospect of advancement and of a kind which was to be increasingly threatened by unemployment in the years to come. Much of Father Jansen's early work in the parish and as a member of the Education Authority was

devoted to breaking down these barriers and convincing parents that they must be willing to forego the wages of such children as could benefit from higher education. The process took a long time, and must have required endless patience and tact.

On January 20th, 1919, the first headmaster took up office; Mr. (later Doctor) William Barry, an Irishman, was to build on the foundations left by his predecessors, develop a full secondary school, and by his apparently powerful personality raise the general standards of the pupils, not only regarding academic achievement but also those involving appearance and good conduct. At this time the school had six hundred and ninety three pupils in twelve classes for which there were ten teachers. Mr. Barry immediately put in hand improvements in standards of dress, behaviour and hygiene; this he followed up with a detailed academic examination of all pupils in all the subjects taught. Personal inspections of classes by the headmaster were to be a regular feature of school life for many years to come. In May, 1919, a Senior Woman Assistant, Miss Hughes, was appointed, and in the same month the school acquired a janitor for the first time.

Cookery classes for girls were begun, as was instruction in technical subjects for boys, the latter being held in Townhead school. The breadth of vision of the new headmaster was reflected in such new and no doubt interesting additions to formal education as attendance at lectures in the Town Hall; in the year 1919 to 1920, senior pupils were regaled by Major Dugdale on 'Hunting Big Game in East Africa with a Camera', by the Rev. M. Booth on Lapland and by Mr. Wild on the Shackleton Expedition. At last, the educational process was being removed from the narrow confines of the classroom and made relevant to the great outside world; indeed in April, 1920, initial and no doubt very valuable visits were being made to the Town Council's new spray baths. Science lessons were held for sixteen supplementary class boys in Lairdsland Public School from the 13th October, 1920, but these only lasted less than two months; the Lairdsland science teacher died. The month of November, 1920, proved to be an eventful one; Smallpox broke out in the Townhead district, and the medical authorities with commendable speed reacted by vaccinating all school children in the town. By the 10th November, 124 pupils were absent as a result of the vaccination, and by the 15th, only 392 were present out of a total of 716 - a 54.7% attendance, nearly the lowest in the school's history, and the school had to be thoroughly fumigated and swept. Further stirring events were to follow; Mr. Barry's log entry for 10th December, 1920 records the raiding of a classroom and searching of desks and cupboards by detectives and uniformed police; he suggests the rather surprising fact that this departure from everyday routine upset the children, but advances no reason for this invasion. Local tradition, however, suggests a possible connection between this raid and the discovery of Sinn Fein activity in the town at this time; nothing is recorded of any finding of any exciting substances in the classroom by the police, but the incident serves as a sharp reminder of the bitter warfare of the years 1918 to 1921 between the Irish people and British troops, a struggle which was to end in that cause of further bloodshed, the half-hearted 1921 treaty.

The miners' strike of 1921 made its impact in that free breakfast and dinner was provided in school for the children of the miners affected.

By 1922, the school roll was as follows: Primary - 671, Post qualifying - 135, Total - 806 (813 on 24.4.22). By this time, a small secondary department was beginning to develop; already staff had had consultations with their colleagues in Lenzie Academy regarding the setting and correcting of secondary examinations, and the report of the inspectorate, while pointing out that the post-qualifying class was not

yet finally organised, regards the prospects of secondary development as 'entirely hopeful'. After the summer holidays of 1922, forty two first year pupils joined the school from Croy and Twechar, the first step in developing the Kirkintilloch school as a centre of Catholic education for all of East Dunbartonshire. This trend was to continue to include Stirlingshire pupils, and, by 1929, one hundred and seventy pupils were being transported by bus from Falkirk, Stirling, Denny, Bonnybridge, Bannockburn, Kilsyth, Larbert, Grangemouth, Milton of Campsie and Lennoxton to Kirkintilloch; this situation was eventually altered by the opening of St. Modan's High School in Stirling. In 1922 with the inclusion of the Croy and Twechar pupils, the roll was fast approaching 850, with six post-primary teachers, twelve primary teachers and one teacher for backward pupils; the staffing situation was improving but only gradually. Since 1921, the Supplementary class had been discontinued and replaced by the lower stages of secondary education. The facilities made available by the 1918 Act and fully used by the education authority after 1921 made possible for the first time full secondary education for Catholics in Kirkintilloch; ironically enough, then, as now, the efficient operation of the school would not have been possible without the presence, help and co-operation of substantial numbers of non-Catholic teachers; in the 1920's these were particularly essential in technical and other practical subjects where the scarcity of Catholic teachers seems to have been greatest.

In August, 1922, the headmaster decided to end the practice of inflicting corporal punishment by means of canes; presumably more humane methods of corporal punishment were continued or introduced.

Of central importance in the everyday organisation of this and of every other similar school in Scotland was the School Management Committee. These committees were set up to organise on a local basis the education system in every Burgh in the country after the Education (Scotland) Act of 1918, and replaced the old School Boards into whose hands the 1872 Act had commended education. One significant difference was that the School Management Committees were responsible for all public authority schools including Catholic schools, while the parish School Boards had been concerned with non-denominational schools only. Before 1918, Catholic schools were voluntary and were regarded as the responsibility of the parish priest. After the 1918 Act, public education was to be the concern of the education committees of the County Councils and City Corporations; higher authority lay in the Scottish Education Department, and ultimate jurisdiction was in the hands of the Secretary of State for Scotland. However, in 1919 the School Management Committees were constituted to assist the Education Authorities on a purely local basis.

A School Management Committee consisted of the following: four members of the Education Committee, six representatives of parents, two representatives of teachers, one member to represent the transferred (i.e. Catholic) schools, one Town Council Member and one District Council Member.

In the summer of 1931, a scheme for the reconstruction of School Management Committees was passed by the Scottish Education Department and came into effect as from January 1st, 1933. The standing orders regulating the procedural methods of the Committees were revised, but little appreciable change was made. However, the formation of the Committees underwent alteration. Under the new regime, the representation of the Education Committee was increased to five; in Kirkintilloch of the five chosen in 1933 was Canon Jansen, parish priest of St. Ninian's and a member of the education committee. Parental representation was cut to three, and teachers were still represented by two members. Catholic schools

retained their own representative on each committee, while the Town and District Councils were represented by two members each. Thus while the total membership of a School Management Committee remained at fifteen, more representation and therefore more power passed to the Education Committee of the county or city, and to the town and district councils, with nine members amongst them as opposed to six before 1933, while parental representation was cut by half, from six members to three. Representation of transferred schools remained the same.

The duties of the School Management Committee when first constituted were entirely local in character, covering a wide range of aspects of educational organisation. Attendance and absence of pupils was one of the chief concerns of the committee; it had the power to grant exemption to children from school attendance, depending on domestic circumstances, and had the duty of initiating prosecution against parents who failed to send their children to school; early defaulters' records show a fair number of such prosecutions. The provision of school buildings was not within the committee's sphere of influence, but the maintenance, repairs and decoration up to a value of ten pounds was its responsibility, as also problems of equipment and supplies. Each committee had the right to pay visits to schools and to inspect and sign registers, presumably to check that the record of attendance was being accurately kept. Members of the committee could be called upon to adjudicate in any dispute involving parents and teachers, and to help in the selection of such personnel as janitors, cleaners and attendance officers. In times of economic hardship the School Management Committee attended to local requirements regarding the health, feeding and clothing of pupils, and had the power to provide for medical attention where required. It was to this committee that parents applied for free issues of clothing and footwear; many such applications were granted, although the committee had first to be satisfied that a genuine need existed, and applications could be and sometimes were rejected; in this connection, the minutes of the meeting for October, 1926 record that forty children in Kirkintilloch were absent from school owing to lack of footwear; while thirty others were attending despite lack of footwear of any kind, or with footwear in inadequate condition. In the 1920's, the committee kept a written record of the names of all to whom such assistance was given, but later minutes show that this practice was discontinued. These committees also were responsible for local playing fields, youth clubs and social work.

Specific examples of the function of the committee include considering the matter of enclosing the school corridors in St. Ninian's and subsequently referring this matter to the Education Committee in 1939 and attempting to persuade the Town Council to provide direct footpath access under the Forth and Clyde Canal between the Greens housing scheme and St. Ninian's, to shorten the distance to be walked to and from school. This suggestion the Town Council rejected in April, 1945 as being too complicated and therefore too costly. Minutes of the committee records cases of transport being provided for disabled pupils to and from school, including the re-routing of certain school buses in order to pick up and set down such pupils at their own doors. Back in 1919 the minutes record the receipt of a letter of application from the headmaster of St. Ninian's for the issue of a uniform to the janitor of the school; later come requests for kitchen equipment and an application for ground for the purpose of carrying on a gardening class. Such were the small matters of everyday administration which were the responsibility of the School Management Committee.

The minute of June 5th, 1923, tells of the occasion when St. Ninian's pupils 'drilled' in the Peel Park without permission, and the Reverend Dean Jansen is asked to report on this transgression of the commandments of small-town bureaucracy. On

December 29th, 1924 an application was received from St. Ninian's for playing fields; this was submitted to the education committee with a recommendation that the application be granted; on September 1st, 1925, a grant of ten pounds was made towards the rent of a playing field. These are but a few examples of the work of the local School Management Committee.