

Soup Dinners for School Children.

(A REPRINT, WITH ADDITIONS.)

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THE subject of Dinners for School Children was first noticed in Parliament by Mr. Mundella, Vice-President of the Committee of Privy Council on Education, when introducing the Education Estimates for England and Wales, on 26th July, 1883. The examples cited were the dinners given at the Jews' Free School, Spitalfields, and at a school of Sir Henry Peek's, at Rousdon, Devonshire.

When the Education Estimates for Scotland were brought forward, a few weeks later, the writer took occasion to describe to the House what had been done for some years past in the same direction, but on a somewhat different system, at the School of Farnell, in Forfarshire, where a soup dinner had been provided during the winter months for such of the scholars as chose to pay for it.

At the request of Sir Henry Peek, he afterwards gave some fuller information on the subject, in a letter dated Stracathro, Brechin, 1st September, 1883.

The letter was in these terms:—

“ I have much pleasure in responding to your request for some information as to the dinner which is given during the winter months in the school of Farnell, in this neighbourhood.

“ Let me state that Farnell is a small country parish, with an area of about six square miles, and a population of about 600. There is no village in it, and the population is pretty equally distributed over its area in farm-houses and cottages. The school is in a central situation. The only thing exceptional in the circumstances of the parish is that it contains Kinnaird Castle—the seat of the Earl of Southesk. The Earl's family and establishment contribute considerably to the population, but do not contribute in the same proportion to the number of children requiring the accommodation of the parish school. I

may add that the people of the parish, with the exception of those at Kinnaird Castle, are mostly farmers and working people.

“Some years ago it occurred to the parish minister, the Rev. T. A. Cameron, that the school children suffered a serious hardship during the winter months in not having the opportunity of getting a comfortable hot meal during the school day. Many of the scholars came some distance, leaving their homes about 8 a.m., and not getting home again until about 5 p.m.; and all the refreshment they had in the way of food was the ‘piece’ of bread and butter which they brought with them. He observed that in inclement weather the attendance was irregular. He was of opinion that the children would attend more regularly, and be better fitted to resist the effects of bad weather and to profit by the instruction in school, if, during the winter months at least, they had a good hot meal at mid-day.

“Lord and Lady Southesk entered heartily into the proposal, and the result was the institution of what may be called a school soup kitchen, which has now been in successful operation for five winters.

“By private gifts and subscriptions the ‘plant’ of the soup kitchen was provided. It consists of a boiler, erected in a wooden building which serves as a teachers’ washing-house, a couple of large tin cans, one or two ladles and other utensils, and 120 strong tin bowls. The bowls cost about £3. Mr. Cameron estimates that the whole necessary ‘plant’ for a similar school may be obtained for about £7.

“The children bring their own spoons. A Farnell scholar has regularly his spoon in his satchel along with his books. All that is supplied by the kitchen is the soup. Such of the children as eat bread with the soup bring their own bread, but a number take the soup without bread.

“The rotation of soups is pea-soup, potato-soup, and Scotch broth. In all of these vegetables are largely used, and pieces of meat are boiled down. The soup is made both palatable and nourishing.

“The children pay the usual school fees for their education. The soup dinner is something extra, and a separate charge is made for it. The charge is $\frac{1}{2}$ d. each child, but where there are more than two scholars of the same family only 1d. is charged for the family. Each child receives as much soup as he desires. He is not restricted to a single bowlful.

“During last winter, from 1st December until 9th March, the average daily attendance at the school was 114. The average daily number served with soup was 110, showing that nearly all the scholars availed themselves of the hot meal.

“The receipts for the winter were £10 7s. 3d., and the expenditure for the dinner was £10 1s. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., as per abstract subjoined, leaving a balance in hand of 5s. 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. To this expenditure, however, two items must be added in order to ascertain the full cost of what was given—(1) gifts of vegetables, meat, etc., which were received from parishioners, to the value of about £10, and (2) a sum of £3 5s., which was paid by the School Board in wages to the cook.

“The dinner or soup is served as follows: At the proper hour the principal teacher tells off a number of boys and girls to fetch the soup from the cooking

place, in pails, and to bring in the tin bowls. The teachers then, assisted by the elder scholars, serve out the bowls of soup to the scholars, who come up for it in regular order, and retire with it to their seats in the school-room. The younger scholars are served separately in the infants' class-room. Mr. Cameron writes—'There is no confusion. I have never heard of an accident. The whole 120 scholars have taken their dinner in less than twenty minutes from the time the soup was brought in. As the children finish their dinner they retire to the playground. When all have finished, the windows are opened and the rooms aired; and by the time school work is resumed there is not the faintest trace of dinner, or of any smell to indicate that the school had been used as a dining hall.'

"And now as to the results of the institution of this dinner:—

"I may mention that the general circumstances of the parish remain very much as they were five years ago. The population has remained stationary in number. The school is under the same teachers. All the difference is that there is now the hot soup in winter.

"The following are the statistics of the school, comparing the school year 1878—the year before the dinner was instituted—with the school year last ended:—

	1878.	1883.
Number of pupils on roll	150	195
Highest weekly average	101	135
Average for the year	90	113
Number presented in standards	88	97
Do. passed in reading	80	82
Do. do. writing	86	89
Do. do. arithmetic	84	92

"The grant earned by the school in 1878 was £89; in 1883 it was £99.

"It will be remembered that the dinner account showed a small balance of profit—5s. 3½d.—but that gifts of provisions had been received to the value of about £10. That cost to the parish has therefore been met by the additional grant of £10 earned by the school. There was also a cost to the School Board of £3 5s. for the cook's wages, but this may be held to be covered by the additional fees from the increased attendance of scholars. In other words, the dinner is given without cost to the parish.

"The only cost to the School Board is the payment of a wage of 1s. per day—£3 5s. last winter—to the woman who acts as cook. The elder girls in rotation assist the cook, and in this way get some practical lessons in domestic economy.

"As to the benefit to the children, Mr. Cameron writes:—'There can be no doubt of the physical advantage to the children—seen in the absence of any serious epidemic or illness among them, from which other schools in our neighbourhood have not been free, and in the buoyancy of their spirits. This latter is wanting for some time, so the teachers tell me, after the dinner is stopped.'

"I believe that the reduction of charge where there are more than two scholars of one family is felt to be a mistake. Now that the rule has been

introduced it is not easily altered. But in this respect the Farnell example need not be followed in other places. The reduction of charge is not necessary; and besides, it gives somewhat of a charity appearance to the dinner, which it is desirable to avoid.

“I think, too, that it would be an improvement if the spoons for the scholars were, like the bowls, part of the common ‘plant.’”

The following was the abstract of accounts appended:—

WINTER 1882-83—EXPENDITURE AT FARNELL SCHOOL.

Beef	..	...	...	...	...	£2	3	3
Sheeps' Heads (2)	...	...	...	...	...	0	1	2
Dripping	...	...	...	...	...	1	0	0
Barley	...	...	...	...	...	0	16	3
Potatoes	...	...	...	...	...	0	15	0
Peas	...	...	...	...	...	1	16	7
Carrots	...	...	...	...	...	1	0	10
Onions	...	...	...	...	...	0	19	8
Pepper and Salt	...	...	...	...	...	0	3	5½
Coals	...	...	...	...	...	0	14	4
Soft Soap	...	...	...	...	...	9	0	7
Soda	...	...	...	...	...	0	0	11
Tin Can	...	...	...	...	...	0	2	3
Towels	...	...	...	...	...	0	3	0
Carriage and Sundries	..	..	..	..	..	0	4	8
						<hr/>		
						£10	1	11½
						<hr/>		

The writer addressed a second letter to Sir Henry Peek, on 30th November, giving the following particulars as to other schools in the same district in which the Farnell example had been followed:—

1. MARYTON PUBLIC SCHOOL,* near Montrose.

The Rev. William R. Fraser, of Maryton, writes—

“I enclose an abstract of the expense of our school dinner for last year. In some respects it differs from that of Farnell. No dripping is used. An arrangement has been made by the master to receive five pounds of good beef daily. Every day there is fresh broth, potato-soup, or pea-soup, and it is provided that every child receive a small portion of the meat. The School Board has a kind of nominal superintendence, but nothing is taken from the school rate. The boiler was procured and fitted up, and the bowls, etc., were supplied by subscriptions received from the heritors and parishioners. A son of the chairman (Mr. Lyall, Old Montrose) acts as treasurer. A considerable sum (about £15 if I recollect aright) was procured at first, and it has been occasionally added to (that is, the balance, after furnishing,

* For the information of English readers it may be mentioned that “Public School” in Scotland means a school under the charge of a School Board. In Scotland there is a School Board in every parish.

has been increased from time to time), so that we have a small reserve fund. I have been always in the practice of giving lectures during the winter, and on these occasions there is now a *plate* at the door, the contents of which go to the fund.

“ I cannot say that a single scholar has been added to the roll in consequence, but the attendance during the severe weather is improved. During the very severe weather a few winters ago, many of the mothers told me their children could not have attended but for the comfort and benefit they derived. The physical effects are undoubtedly good, and I believe will bear fruit during the whole future of some of the children. The charge is a halfpenny for one child and a penny for more than one of the same family. I am of a different opinion from what is expressed in your letter to Sir H. W. Peek on this head, so much so that I felt inclined to write you on the subject when your letter was first published. I look upon the restriction to a penny *per* family as the very backbone of the scheme. If there was to be any change I should prefer making it a penny only, whether the family consisted of one or more. But I think the present arrangement better. Speaking generally, if there is only one child at school, especially if there is but one child in the family, the privilege is not so essential. The probability is the child is better fed at home, and, judging from my own observation, it is when there are two or three from a house that the dinner is such a boon, and its nourishing effects are so apparent. In many cases a higher charge would prevent the whole family from enjoying its benefits. The expense may seem small, but then the other expenses of the house, not to speak of school fees, books, clothing, etc., are proportionately large. Unfortunately, the old provision for charging a reduced school-fee when there are three scholars from the family is now very rare, and I know that the present system presses very hard upon many such families. I know that the ‘charity’ argument is a very common one, but I confess it does not weigh very much with me. The fact is that in a parish like this (in which few of the parents are ratepayers) the percentage of the cost of education which falls upon the parent is much less than the percentage he is called upon to pay of the cost of the school dinner, even should he have three or four children partaking of it. Even in parishes in which a large proportion of the parents are ratepayers the case is not very much different. The principle so much dreaded in some quarters is already at work in every school, and in every family from which children go to a State-aided school, and the school-dinner is so much part and parcel of the school itself that I am satisfied no harm can accrue from the present arrangement. But the strongest safeguard against any such risk would be to secure that the better class of children attending our public schools should all share equally in the working of the scheme. Let the farmers’ children bring their spoons (when they are not otherwise provided) and partake along with the children of the ploughman, and all share and share alike, and I guarantee that there will be no thought of ‘pauperising’ in the scheme. This is a matter which I think might be pressed generally with some advantage.

“MARYTON SCHOOL DINNER, 1882-83.

Average number of scholars—60.

Time from December 16, 1882, March 15, 1883—62 days.

INCOME.

Scholars' pence	...	...	...	...	£5	8	1
Proceeds of Lectures	...	...	...	...	1	8	5½
Subscriptions	...	...	...	...	2	7	1
					<hr/>		
					£9	3	7½

EXPENDITURE.

Beef	...	...	...	...	£4	2	9½
Peas	...	...	...	...	1	14	0
Barley	...	...	...	...	0	15	9
Pepper and salt	...	...	...	...	0	3	10
Woman's wages at 9d. per day	...	...	...	...	2	7	3
					<hr/>		
					£9	3	7½

Coals taken from school supply.

*Potatoes and Vegetables from farmers and parents of children.**

Bread provided by children.”

2. LITTLE BRECHIN PUBLIC SCHOOL, near Brechin.

The teacher, Mr. James M. Mills, makes the following report:—

“I am very glad to give any information I can concerning the working of our Soup Kitchen.

“It has now been in existence two winters, and, as to plant, is similar to Farnell, with the exception that our building is of brick, and that we have two boilers, the spare one being very useful for supplying hot water for cleansing, etc. Our Committee are to supply the children with spoons this season, and we provide aprons for the girls who serve.

“Our method of charging and our variety of dinners are also similar to those at Farnell. I strongly advocate keeping the charges as they are, viz., ½d. each child, or 1d. for the family, however large, as we find it is generally poor men who have the largest families, and they might find it hard to give more; and well-to-do parents have and do take the opportunity of making a return for the small charge by gifts of potatoes, etc. As a rule, we restrict the children to one supply; but the bowls are large and one supply amply sufficient. We are thus enabled to improve the quality, as the cook can judge very nearly how much soup will be required. The dinner is taken in school, and never occupies (sweeping-up after included) more than thirty minutes. Any person in the neighbourhood may, by giving word beforehand, be supplied with soup. This is largely taken advantage of, and is found a great convenience. Dinner, I may mention, is served at 12.30.

“The School Board are at no cost except for fuel. All the expenses are defrayed by the children's pennies, the proceeds of lectures, private subscriptions, and gifts of provisions.

* Since the above was written, Mr. Fraser informs me that it has been agreed to rely upon contributions from farmers and others in the form of money, instead of potatoes, etc.

“The opinion of our Committee, however, is that all extra expenses should be borne by the School Board. Our expenditure is very much the same as that of Farnell, with the exception that we are a good deal more for beef, and somewhat lighter for vegetables.

“After paying all expenses during the first winter, we had a balance in hand of £5 15s. 3½d. This is accounted for by private subscriptions and proceeds (£3) of concert. In the second year, unfortunately, an epidemic of typhoid came in amongst us and deranged our plans. The school was shut for three weeks, and our lectures stopped. Still on the two years we hold a balance of £2 15s.

“My belief is that we are perfectly able to keep the scheme afloat. At the same time I agree with our Committee that assistance might well be given by the School Board, to the extent, at least, of paying the wages of the cook and providing fuel. Our lecture income should go to the keeping up of a library, etc.

“The benefits to the children are not, I think, to be measured by increase of numbers or grant, but by the incalculable good it does to the children’s health, and more especially to the weaker ones. It may save many a life. Of course it has an effect upon the regularity of attendance, but not to a great extent; for now-a-days earnest parents will send their children if at all possible. This is more especially the case in the winter time, as the children can do nothing at home, and the Government Examinations of rural schools occur mostly in the early part of the year. But certainly it must be a source of great satisfaction to the parents to know that their children will have a warm dinner at mid-day, instead of the ‘dry piece’ that they themselves were accustomed to.”

3. REDMYRE PUBLIC SCHOOL, Fordoun.

Mr. John Crabb, the teacher, reports as follows:—

“I may state by way of preface that Redmyre Public School is managed by a Committee consisting of two representatives from the School Boards of each of the four parishes of Fordoun, Laurencekirk, Garvock, and Arbuthnott. The district is a purely agricultural one, including the small village of Fordoun Station, with a population of about 120. With the exception of about 20 children from the Station, all come from the farms and cottar houses within a radius of about two miles. Out of a winter roll of 130, nearly one-third come from a distance of upwards of, or nearly, two miles.

“Hearing of the experiment of school dinners at Farnell, a proposal was made to try the same thing here during the winter months of 1881-2. Captain Carnegy of Redhall, who is a member of Farnell School Board, readily furnished us with information as to how the dinners were conducted there, and offered a handsome subscription. Mr. Pearson of Johnstone, Chairman of the School Committee, Dr. Johnston of Kair, and others connected with the school, entered heartily into the proposal. In a few weeks, from the neigh-

bouring proprietors, farmers, and others, funds were raised amply sufficient to provide the necessary plant. The management was entrusted to a committee mostly members of the School Board, but quite distinct from the latter, as it was thought better that, if possible, the scheme should be self-supporting, or at any rate that no grant should be made towards it from the school funds.

"The cooking has hitherto been done in the school-house kitchen and the large boiler attached to it used for cooking. A small wooden storehouse has been built for potatoes, etc., but large enough to hold a boiler should it be found necessary. Seventy strong tin bowls, two large pitchers for carrying the soup, two ladles, and other necessary articles were purchased, the whole costing from £7 to £8. A cook also is employed at 10d. per day.

"The usual rotation of soups is same as at Farnell, but, as the children show a decided preference for potato-soup, they get that rather oftener. Vegetables are largely used in all the soups. Large pieces of meat are boiled, cut down, and given in the soup, which is both palatable and nourishing. Each child is also supplied with one piece of bread.

"The charge is quite distinct from the school fees, and is as follows:—4d. per week for 1, 8d. per week for 2—being at the rate of four-fifths of a penny per day for each child—and 10d. per week for 3 or more of a family. Each child gets as much soup as he (or she) requires, and one piece of bread.

"During last winter, from 4th December to 2nd March, the average attendance at the school was 93, and the average daily number served with soup was from 50 to 60.

"Our receipts for the winter were £9 14s. 6d. of dinner pence; and coals, potatoes, etc., gifted, we estimated at £1 9s.—total received, £11 3s. 6d. The expenditure for the same period, as per abstract subjoined, was £9 19s. 0½d.

"It will thus be seen that had we purchased our coals, potatoes, etc., gifted, we should have been £1 13s. 6d. short of self-sustaining. Last winter, however, potatoes were exceptionally dear, and the winter before we were only £1 8s. short.

"At one o'clock the children are arranged—the younger ones by themselves—in the two schoolrooms. Two of the older boys in rotation bring in the soup in the large pitchers; the older girls the bread and the bowls. The soup is served out by the teachers, and two or three of the girls carry it round. The bread, cut to the required size, is in like manner served out. When all are served the teacher collects the pence, and the children retire to the playground, the whole rarely occupying more than 20 minutes. The windows are then drawn, and the school thoroughly aired before re-assembling. The girls see everything carried off, and the benches wiped where necessary. Hitherto the arrangement has wrought very smoothly, and no more serious accident has happened than the *rare* overturning of a bowl of soup.

"I may note that the proportion of those who take dinner is much smaller than at Farnell. This may be accounted for partly from the fact that more of the children here are within easy distance of their homes, and partly because our charges are higher.

"As at Farnell, we wish to avoid the appearance of charity, and to make it

self-sustaining. Our charge is not high. I cannot see how it could be done for less, to be self-sustaining; and a very little more—say charging 5d. per week instead of 4d., or the full price for a family of more than two, would make up our deficit.

“For several reasons I think it would be a decided advantage were the Committee to add a supply of spoons to their plant.

“In conclusion, I may add that I am quite sensible of the great advantage to those children who avail themselves of the warm dinners. Apart from the additional bodily and mental vigour imparted by a warm dinner on a cold day, it is a good thing for both teachers and children to meet each other on these occasions. Habit may prefer bread and syrup, biscuit, or a cake of gingerbread to a warm dinner, but it does not require much knowledge of dietary principles to decide which is most beneficial.

“WINTER 1882-3—EXPENDITURE AT REDMYRE SCHOOL.

Peas,	...	...	...	...	...	£1	0	3½
Barley,	...	...	...	...	...	0	6	0
Bread,	...	...	...	...	...	1	15	0
Dripping,	...	...	...	...	...	0	11	0
Beef,	...	...	...	...	...	1	11	6½
Salt, Pepper, and Carbonate Soda,	...	...	...	...	...	0	4	1
Potatoes,	...	...	...	...	...	1	6	0
Carrots,	...	...	...	...	...	0	9	5
Onions,	...	...	...	...	...	0	2	2½
Pail, ...	...	...	...	...	...	0	1	6
Cleaning Materials and Sundries,	...	...	...	...	...	0	2	0
Cook,	...	...	...	...	...	2	10	0
							£9 19 0½”	

4. DRUMGEITH PUBLIC SCHOOL, near Dundee.

The following letter appeared in October, 1883, in the *Dundee Advertiser*:—

“TO THE EDITOR OF THE ‘DUNDEE ADVERTISER.’

“SIR,—In reading Mr. Henderson’s speech in to-day’s *Advertiser*, I notice that he made reference to the fact that ‘hot dinners’ were provided for the children attending several country schools, and that great benefit had been derived therefrom by the children. As it may interest many members of School Boards and teachers to have some idea how these dinners succeed, I beg leave to give a few particulars regarding the dining-room in connection with Drumgeith School, which was started last winter. At Martinmas last year a small room beside the school was rented for the purpose of being converted into a dining-room, chiefly for providing those children who come from a distance with a plateful of warm soup or broth at mid-day. The fitting-up of the room with tables, fire-place, goblet, plates, spoons, etc., cost £6 15s. 9d., which was met by £7 of subscriptions. The income and expenditure from December 5 to April 6 were as under—

INCOME.

From children at a halfpenny each per day, ...	£10	16	6
„ Subscription balance,	0	5	0
„ Value of potatoes received in donations, etc.,	4	0	0
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Total,	£15	1	6

EXPENDITURE.

To wages of woman who acted as cook, at 5s. per week,	£4	5	0
„ Grocers' and Butchers' accounts,	4	16	6
„ Rent for the year,	2	0	0
„ Value of goods received in donations,	4	0	0
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Total,	£15	1	6

Sixty-two children were served on an average each day with about a plateful-and-a-half of soup, at a total cost of something less than three farthings each. The children provided bread for themselves, but many of them found the soup sufficient. Owing to the smallness of the room the dinner was served in relays, the younger children first. Although a little pushing took place occasionally, only two plates were broken during the winter. The children seemed to enjoy their dinner very much, were more lively, and did their work in school better than in previous winters.—I am, &c.,

“JAMES KEITH.”

Mr. Keith having been applied to for further particulars, wrote as follows—

“I am glad to be able to give you some additional information regarding our dining-room. The average attendance at our school was 117 last year. The population is a scattered one, there being no village near, but a house or two here and there along the roadside, and what might be termed a hamlet on each side of the school, a mile to the east and west. The inhabitants are mostly employed in the linen-yarn bleachworks. Those children who do not take advantage of the dinner are mostly able to go home, but a considerable number bring their ‘piece’ and eat it in school or playground during the dinner hour.

“The only difference worth noticing between the Farnell system and ours is that we have a small thatched cottage fitted up as a dining-room, with a large ordinary grate, and a goblet instead of a boiler. The goblet can make soup for fully eighty children, giving each a full plate of large size. As it costs very little to provide for twenty extra platefuls, we intend to have another smaller goblet this year in order to provide more soup for anyone who may want it. The ordinary fire-place has one advantage over the boiler, that the children get themselves nicely warmed at it during cold days. I may mention that I neglected to take into account the cost of the fuel, as the School Board provide the same out of the school coal-cellar, which is the only item which they defray. But I may safely state that one shilling a week would be quite sufficient to pay for fuel.

“The bill of fare is potato-soup and ordinary broth; all the common vegetables, such as cabbages, carrots, onions, etc., being used. The children prefer potato-soup, which can be made from dripping and bones fully cheaper than broth.

“Tin checks are given out in school during the forenoon. The dinner-hour is at 1 p.m. On getting out of the school, each child presents his check at the dining-room door, and on entering receives his soup if there be a vacant place; if not, he waits till some one has finished. The cook manages the serving of the dinner with the help of the older girls, and I have only to look down occasionally to see how things are going on. The whole of the children are served in half-an-hour. Then the dishes are washed, the place tidied up, and the door locked about 2.30. The management of the whole affair in connection with the supply of beef, barley, salt, etc., falls upon myself, but it is really very little trouble.

“I may mention that every child pays his halfpenny, but provides nothing else, unless it may be bread to his soup.

“As to the beneficial effects in the children, I am unable to give any particular information, seeing that last winter was the first trial of the dinners. However, as far as I remember, no serious sickness occurred among the children, and they had a warmer-like look in the afternoon than they used to have.

“We have begun this year again, and hope to be able to make ends meet with the help of potatoes (which are mostly supplied by the neighbouring farmers) without asking subscriptions.

“I enclose a copy of the account for fitting-up dining-room, etc.

“P.S.—Only those children are supplied who come from a distance, and any of those near on ‘washing-days.’

“ COST OF UTENSILS.

Six salt-cellar	...	...	...	...	£0	0	6
Grater, 3d.; ladle, 4d.	...	...	...	...	0	0	7
Potstick, 1d.; six pepper-boxes, 6d.	...	...	...	...	0	0	7
Pail, 1s. 2d.; basin, 2s.	...	...	...	...	0	3	2
Water-pan	...	...	...	...	0	2	6
Basket	...	...	...	...	0	2	6
Six towels (3½d. each)	...	...	...	...	0	1	9
One No. 8 round goblet, with cover	...	...	...	...	0	12	0
Forty tinned spoons	...	...	...	...	0	4	0
Forty delft plates	...	...	...	...	0	6	8
Carriage of goods	...	...	...	...	0	1	0
					£1	15	3

FITTING-UP DINING-ROOM.

Paid to mason	...	...	...	...	£0	12	3
„ blacksmith	...	...	...	...	1	0	6
„ joiner for tables, press, &c.	...	...	...	...	3	7	9
					£5	0	6

Total expenditure for utensils and fitting-up dining-room for Drumgeith School £6 15 9”

These were all the schools the writer knew of at the time as having adopted, with variations in detail, the system introduced at Farnell. He has since, however, received particulars of another in the same district at which the system has been in operation for several years past, viz.:—

5. CRAIG PUBLIC SCHOOL, near Montrose.

The following particulars have been received from the teacher, Mr. Graham, viz.:—

“The charge per scholar is $\frac{1}{2}$ d.; for three of a family, 1d.; for four, $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.

“REPORT FOR WINTER, 1883-4.

Number of days on which dinners were served, 71.			
Amount received from scholars	... ..		£13 14 1
Paid butcher's account, for meat at 5d. per lb.	... ..	£7 1 3	
„ grocer's account, for peas, barley, etc.	... ..	2 1 0	
„ cook, at 1s. per day	... ..	3 11 0	
„ for potatoes (on an emergency)	... ..	0 7 6	£13 0 9
			<hr/>
Balance of receipts, applied to repairs on premises			0 13 4

“N.B.—Potatoes and other vegetables are supplied *gratis* by proprietors, farmers, and others.”

These instances, it is believed, exhaust the number of schools which can claim to have had more than one or two years' experience of the Soup Dinners. Their example, however, has now been followed in many other schools in different parts of Scotland, and the movement is rapidly extending.

It may be useful to describe how the system is worked at a school in which it has recently been introduced, and where advantage has been taken of the experience, so far as applicable, of the schools which have been mentioned above.

At STRACATHRO PUBLIC SCHOOL a Soup Dinner was begun last winter. The parish is a rural one, with a population of about 500. The school has an average attendance of over 70 children. A few of them live near enough the school to go home at mid-day for dinner, but the large majority have had to bring their luncheon or dinner “piece” with them. Several come a considerable distance—fully two miles. It can be understood that in winter the cold, dry “piece” was but poor sustenance, more especially if, as was sometimes found, it had been to some extent nibbled on the way to school in the morning. There was accordingly a suggestion to start a Soup Dinner.

The School Board entered heartily into the proposal, and agreed to pay one shilling per day to the cook. This was the whole expense

to which the Board, or the ratepayers, were to be put in the matter. The principle on which the Board agreed to make this payment was that value would be received for it educationally.

The kitchen and plant were provided by private gift. A kitchen, a well-lighted apartment, measuring inside about 11 feet square, was built at the end of the teacher's house, adjoining the school. It was furnished with a 30-gallon portable boiler with hot water attachment,* a pump and sink, a dresser or working counter, with drawer and presses below for storing away the utensils, and a bunker, with lid, to hold vegetables, etc. The floor space left free measures about 11 feet by 6 feet.

The utensils consist of three tin pitchers with covers (costing 4s. 6d. each), two serving ladles † (costing 1s. 6d. each), strong tin bowls or basins (costing 4s. 6d. per dozen), tin spoons (costing 10d. per dozen, but a better spoon would be preferable), one large spoon (costing 1s. 7d.), three knives, one grater, two pepper boxes, and a basket for carrying the bowls. There are also aprons for the cook and assistants, and a few towels.

The question was considered whether bread as well as soup should be supplied, in which case the charge must have been 1d. per scholar, but it was found that it would be more acceptable to the parents, as well as more convenient in every way, to supply soup only, leaving the children to bring their own pieces of bread to eat with it. The charge was therefore fixed at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per scholar only. The fourth child of a family taking the soup was not to be charged for—the same allowance being made with regard to the school fees. If there was any extra soup to dispose of, it was to be sold to outsiders at 1d. per bowl.

The teacher, Mr. R. M'Lellan (now of Damacre Public School, Breehin) and his wife took much interest in the arrangements for the dinner, and in conducting it when begun. The parish was also fortunate in the school cook, who did every justice to the part of the work entrusted to her.

* The portable boiler requires no building in, and is very economical of fuel. All that is needed to complete it for use is a tin lid and a smoke pipe. The hot water attachment is a great convenience—giving without an additional fire a supply of hot water for washing up. The cost of a 30-gallon boiler (Smith & Wellstood, Dixon Street, Glasgow), is £3 4s. The hot-water attachment, including a galvanized iron cistern holding 15 gallons, costs £2 8s. extra. The plain boiler, not galvanized, is sufficient. It requires, however, to be scoured and cleaned, and to have some coarse vegetables boiled in it for a couple of days before it is used for cooking.

† The serving ladle is of such size that a single ladleful is a sufficient portion for a bowl. This economises time in the serving. The utensils were supplied by Mr. Lackie, ironmonger, Montrose.

The following is from a letter of Mr. McLellan's:—

“The dinner was served in the larger school-room, under the superintendence of the master or mistress. Every week two of the senior girls were told off to assist the cook in the preparation and serving of the meal, and afterwards to tidy the room and wash the dishes. Punctually at the hour, those children who did not intend to take the dinner were dismissed; and while the others were taking their appointed places at the desks, the soup was brought in by the cook and her assistants. The younger pupils were served first—this arrangement enabling all to finish and be dismissed simultaneously to the playground within half-an-hour. One of the older boys had then to draw down the windows for ventilation; the girls cleared away the dishes, etc., and tidied the room, and when the children again assembled all trace and odour of the dinner had disappeared.”

It may here be added that every child received as much soup as he or she desired. The asking for more was done silently—by standing up. Those serving the soup saw thus at a glance where an additional ladleful was wanted.

And now as to the financial result.

The dinners were begun on 12th December last, and continued till 28th March—*i.e.*, for 74 days. The average daily number of children taking the dinner was 55.

The following is the statement of accounts:—

INCOME.				
Half-pence for 3577 dinners,	£7	9	0½	
Pence for 277 dinners,	1	3	1	
Free places for 203 dinners,	—			
Donations of vegetables,	0	14	3	
Total,	£9	6	4½	
EXPENDITURE.				
Potatoes (3 bolls),	£1	10	0	
Onions (35 lbs.),	0	3	6	
Carrots (1¼ cwt.),	0	8	4	
Barley (1 cwt.),	0	14	0	
Peas (¾ cwt.),	0	10	6	
Salt (63 lbs.),	0	2	3	
Pepper (2 lbs.),	0	1	8	
Dripping (11 lbs.),	0	6	2	
Beef, shin of (69½ lbs.),	1	16	9	
Ox heart,	0	2	9	
Bones,	0	6	11	
Ox heads (5 half heads),	0	5	0	
Vegetables, donation of	0	14	3	
Coals used (12 cwt.),	0	9	4	
Sundries for cleaning,	0	1	8	
Carriage paid,	0	2	8	
Total expenditure,	£7	15	9	
Leaving a balance of profit of	£1	10	7½	

Mr. M'Lellan remarks—

“A certain deduction would have to be made from this balance to represent the value of a few small donations, and the amount realized from the sale of soup to outsiders ; but even after this there is a small balance in favour of the soup kitchen.”

The varieties of soup given were Scotch broth, potato-soup, and pea-soup.

It may be useful to give the receipts to which the cook worked—for soup for 65 or thereby—

SCOTCH BROTH (FOR TWO DAYS).

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
5 lbs. Shin of Beef, at 6½d.,	2	8½
5 lbs. Barley, at 1½d.,	0	7½
Vegetables—Cabbage, Carrots, Turnips, and Onions,	0	10½
Pepper and Salt,	0	0½
	<hr/>	
	4	3
Or for one day,	2	1½

POTATO SOUP.

1½ stone Potatoes, about 5d. per stone,*	0	7½
Carrots, Turnips, and Onions,	0	7
Marrow Bones and ¼ lb. Dripping,	0	7½
Pepper and Salt,	0	0¼
	<hr/>	
	1	10¼

PEA SOUP.

12 lbs. Peas, at 1½d.,	1	6
Marrow Bones, and ¼ lb. Dripping,	0	7½
Vegetables—Carrots, Onions, Turnips, and Leeks, ...	0	7½
Pepper and Salt,	0	0¼
	<hr/>	
	2	9¼

As to the good effects of the Soup Dinner, Mr. M'Lellan writes as follows :—

“The advantages of such a system are immediate and obvious to all. Beyond the mere physical benefit derived by the children from a hot dinner in winter, there was a manifest improvement in the character of the work performed in the afternoon. The restlessness of the hungry is proverbial ; and anything that tends to remove its cause improves the order and discipline of a school. In this respect the experiment was beneficial, while the simple rules observed to ensure promptness and order in its working had also a good effect. The girls, moreover, shared in the work, and thus received a practical insight into a branch of domestic economy not to be obtained from mere book-teaching, or even in the ordinary cookery class.”

From the foregoing particulars it will be observed that, with a charge for soup restricted to ½d. per scholar, the current expenses may be fully

* Potatoes are unusually cheap at present. Last year they cost from 8d. to 10d. per stone.

met if either (1) the School Board pay the cook's wages, or (2) some considerable gifts of vegetables, etc., are received. There is little difficulty in obtaining the gifts when necessary; but the advantage of having the cook paid by the school managers is that the school kitchen can then be made self-supporting, and be freed from any appearance of depending on charitable aid.

There appear to be three essentials to the successful institution of a soup dinner for school children, viz.:—The kitchen and plant must be supplied; the services of an active and tidy woman as cook must be available; and there must be cordial sympathy and co-operation on the part of the teacher. And surely these will not fail to be found, wherever there is really need for a provision of the kind. Given the case of a school where there is a considerable attendance of children who cannot go home to dinner during the recreation hour, can it be doubted that when the want is made known there will be a readiness on the part of neighbours and friends to contribute the £7 or £10 required to set up the kitchen and furnish the plant? As to a cook, if there is no suitable person at hand who can be permanently engaged for the duty, can we suppose that the mansion-houses, the manses, the farm-houses, nay the cottages, of the Christian parishioners, will be unable to supply a substitute for a time? And as to the teacher, he cannot but be sympathetic and hearty in the cause, if he knows how the system works where it is in operation. Let him inquire of any of the teachers named in the foregoing pages, and he will be assured that instead of proving any trouble or hindrance, the school dinner is a pleasure and a help to the teacher, and in every respect a benefit to the school.

JAS. ALEX. CAMPBELL.

STRACATHRO, BRECHIN,
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