

rate-payer of every religious persuasion, and each public school and library, in a maimed and humiliated position before the ecclesiastical and corporate authorities of separate schools.

I shall continue, as I have done, to give to separate schools all that the more than just, the indulgent provisions of the law, and the most liberal construction of it, will sanction; but I should be unfaithful to the trust reposed in me, and to the obligations of patriotic duty, not to maintain and defend the system of national schools against all attempts to weaken and destroy it.

QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

It now remains for me to make some remarks on the question of Religious Instruction. In the mind of every enlightened philanthropist and Christian, there can be but one opinion as to the necessity and importance of religious instruction as a part of education—indeed that there is no education, properly speaking, without religion, any more than that there is a man without a soul, or a world without an atmosphere, or day without a sun. Religion is the soul of education, as it is the life of the soul of man, the atmosphere in which he inhales the breath of immortality—the sun-light in which he beholds the face of the glory of God. The promises of Christianity are to children as well as to their parents; and to neglect the religious instruction of children, is to deprive them of their divine birth-right—is to send them forth morally maimed and diseased among their fellow-men—is to inflict upon them the direst calamities, and make them a curse, instead of a blessing to others.

The question is not, therefore, whether children are to be religiously instructed and trained, but, who are thus to instruct and train them, and how it is to be done? In each of my preceding reports, during the last three years, I have shown from the Holy Scriptures, and the Canons, Formularies and Disciplinary Regulations of religious persuasions, that the training up of children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” clearly devolves upon parents and the professed teachers of religion, and not upon civil government; that all countries where these laws of nature and religion have been violated, by transferring to the Government teacher of the day school what belongs to parents and pastors, have been characterised by both vice and ignorance; that, while it is the duty of the State to make provision for the instruction of each child in those branches of knowledge that are necessary for him to know in order to enter upon his duties as a citizen, it is the duty of each church or religious persuasion to provide for the religious instruction of its own; that the State is not to ignore the Churches of the land in its school system, any more than it is to be their servant, to teach their commands or collect their taxes to pay for teaching them. In countries where, by virtue of church and state union, the state is a tool of the church, or the church is a creature of the state, or both, the question of a system of public instruction is essentially a church question, and the consequences of it are apparent—ignorance of the masses, or the absence of constitutional liberty, or both. But in Upper Canada, no political union of church and state is acknowledged; and, therefore, the claim of any church to state support for its teaching, whether of the young or the old, is inconsistent with the avowed constitution of our government, and incompatible with the principles of equal rights and privileges amongst all religious persuasions and classes. This principle is now acknowledged and avowed by all Protestant denominations in Upper Canada, without exception. The

few members of the Church of England that have hitherto demanded separate schools for themselves, supported by public funds and taxes, have at length acquiesced in the sentiments and views of the great body of the members of that church and of the country at large. So that all attempts to seize upon supposed differences of opinion among Protestants, and to promote them as much as possible, in order to break down or weaken the public school system, have thus far failed. As the system has become developed, public opinion in its support has gained in strength and energy; and the last year has witnessed a stronger and more united expression of it in Upper Canada, than during any former year.

Assuming that our system of public schools shall not only be maintained but maintained in all its integrity, and that it is the duty of the parents and pastors of each religious persuasion to provide for the religious instruction of their own children, it only remains to be considered how far facilities shall be afforded for that purpose in the public schools. As the state has no right to give religious instruction itself; so it has no right to *compel* religious instruction or exercises of any kind. All it can do is to *recommend* and *provide facilities* for such instruction and exercises. What is common to all, is *recommended* and provided for the adoption of all. But in this, there can be *no compulsion upon trustees*; nor are they permitted to *compel* the attendance of any pupil at any religious exercise or instructions whatever against the wishes of his parents or guardians. The text books and the whole teaching and government of the school are required to be based upon and in harmony with christian principles, but the teaching any pupil to recite his catechism and his religious instruction (if desired at all at the school), must be matter of private voluntary arrangement between the parents and teacher, and must not interfere with the ordinary exercises of the school in regard to other pupils. The spirit of our school system is precisely that which the British House of Commons unanimously approved in the following words, as late as the 23rd of June, 1856, in regard to the system of National Schools in Ireland: “That this House has observed with satisfaction the progress made in the instruction of the poorer classes of Her Majesty’s Irish subjects, under the direction of the Commissioners of National Education; and is of opinion that in the administration of that system, or in any modification of its rules, there should be maintained a strict and undeviating adherence to its fundamental principles, securing parental authority and the rights of conscience to pupils of all denominations, by excluding all compulsory religious teaching, this House being convinced that no plan for the education of the Irish poor, however wisely and unexceptionably conceived in other respects, can be carried into effectual operation, unless it is explicitly avowed and clearly understood, as its leading principle, that no attempt shall be made to influence or disturb the peculiar religious tenets of any sect or denomination.”

The principal rule of the Irish National Commissioners, in regard to religious instruction is as follows: “Religious instruction must be so arranged that each school shall be opened to children of all communions; that due regard be had to parental right and authority; that accordingly, no child be compelled to receive, or to be present at any religious instruction of which his parents or guardians disapprove; and that the time for giving it be so fixed that no child shall be thereby, in effect, excluded, directly or indirectly, from the other advantages which the school affords.” Where the patrons (the