

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE BIBLE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY REV. ROBERT WALLACE.

A matter of very great importance to the future of our country has for some time been discussed in various forms—Shall the Bible, or a book of selections from it, be read in the Public Schools by Government appointment? It is affirmed that the State would step beyond its proper province to require this, because the State has no right to enforce religious teaching or observances.

Now, this is more plausible than in accordance with actual facts. Are not all the laws enacted by the State obligatory? The very Constitution of our country is confessedly founded on the principle that Ontario is a Christian country, and that all our legislation should be in accordance with Christian revelation. Hence, laws for the protection of the Sabbath, marriage, etc.; are not these laws compulsory? Certainly, for persons are often fined for violating them. Is the State overstepping the bounds when she enacts and enforces such laws? Assuredly not. She is only thereby owning Christ as the King of kings, from whom all rulers and governments hold any authority and power they possess; for the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the Governor among the nations.

WHAT WE ASK IS

that a class-book of selections from the Bible be prepared, with the concurrence and approval of representatives of the churches, including the Decalogue and portions of Scripture history, of its sublime poetry, and of its moral principles, as contained in Chronicles, Proverbs, and the Sermon on the Mount, as well as a summary of the Gospel and Acts of the Apostles, and that this be read by the teachers and scholars alike. At present only a few verses are read by the teacher as a general rule. There would be nothing improperly compulsory in this, for there must be a conscience clause so that parents who object may direct their children not to take this exercise. But surely the majority should rule in this as in all other national matters. The Roman Catholics hold the principle that religious instruction ought to be given, and we have granted them Separate Schools in which they may instruct in their own way. We may even hope that they would not object to their children reading such selections as would be agreed on for the Public Schools. All Protestants revere the Bible, and probably nine-tenths of those whose children attend Public Schools believe that its teachings are divine and beneficial. Shall that sacred Book on whose divine principles our constitution and laws are founded, and to which we look for the formation of the character, the moral and religious principles of the youth of our country, be kept out of the Public Schools? How any Christian patriot can disapprove of using such an important aid to the formation of the character of the youth of our country, I cannot comprehend. Many hold that

ONE OF THE CHIEF REASONS

why the Scottish people excel in religious knowledge and morality is because of the reading of the Scriptures in the Public Schools. This is just in accordance with the principle that knowledge is most durable and religious instruction most useful when imparted in early life. It is a law of our nature that we remember longest the knowledge we acquire by the greatest number of senses. Now a knowledge of the contents of the Bible is acquired in school by the aid of the eyes and the ears, for pupils repeat in an audible voice what they have read. Thus the events and characters described and the principles recorded seize upon all the faculties of the mind and the understanding, the memory, the imagination, the passions, and the moral powers are all addressed, and the truths set forth are impressed on the mind, and tend greatly to form the character. The native love of truth in the human mind early impresses ingenious youth with the evidences of the truth in the history of the Jews, above what we discover in the history of other nations, and therefore with the conviction that the Scriptures are a Divine record. There is a wonderful property in the memory which enables it in old age to recover the knowledge it had attained in early life, after it had been apparently forgotten for many years. How important then to fill the mind in youth with that species of knowledge, which, when recalled in the decline of life will support the soul under the

infirmities of age, and smooth the avenues of approaching death.

THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY BOOK

that can support the soul under the calamities of life and the infirmities of age, and give assured peace in the prospects of death. When Sir Walter Scott was dying he asked his son-in-law Lockhart to fetch him "the book." When asked "what book?" replied, "There is but one book," but one book of any value when approaching the borders of the spirit world.

It is also the best book for teaching mankind their rights and duties in the present life. On it are founded the jurisprudence and the codes of all enlightened and free nations. The industry and habits of order, and the moral principles which distinguished the most advanced nations have been derived from the Bible. It is objected that we would lower the sense of responsibility on the part of parents and the Christian Church by requiring the Bible to be read in Public Schools. No, we would then only help both parents and the Church—the teacher is more directly engaged in the formation of the character of the children than either the parents or the Church. And shall he merely be expected to impart to them secular knowledge, while the far more important department which relates to the formation of their moral character, and which decides whether they will be useful and worthy citizens and noble and happy as individuals, is to be altogether ignored? We hold that the parent, the Church, and the State are all interested in the formation of the moral character of our youth, and that they are all responsible and should all unite together in this matter; for all their efforts are needed, and when united are more likely to be successful. It has been objected that this demand is contrary to the law of love to our neighbour. But surely that law does not require that we should love a few objectors more than our own children—the children of the great body of the people who believe in the Bible? Surely we should not allow the children of the great majority to suffer to suit the ideas of a few agnostics?

THE LATE DR. DUFF, OF INDIA,

one of the greatest educationists of the age, held most strongly that it is the duty of the State to require the reading of the Bible in the Public Schools, on the ground that we are a Christian nation; and he laid it down as a maxim that "wherever Christianity is sacrificed on the altar of expediency, there must the supreme good of man lie bleeding at the base." Dr. Duff declares that the great secret of the wonderful hold which both Brahminism and Islamism have upon their votaries, is because their sacred books are daily read in all their Public Schools. The Hon. Wm. E. Gladstone says that the connection of any State system of education with religion "is an indissoluble union, the bonds of which are inseparable from the nature of education." This principle is recognized and acted on in all the State systems of education in Europe and the United States. We have receded from the position which this matter once held in Ontario when the Scripture extracts of the Irish National Board were read in the Public Schools. We only ask that our education department return to this system, and that provision be made the same as for anything else—that a book of selections from the Bible be read by the pupils in our Public Schools. To train the children of our land in secular knowledge without teaching them the sacred principles of Christian morality, is only making them capable of committing perjury and other crimes. Such conduct would be like pressing on all sail on a vessel not properly ballasted, which led to the sinking of the steamer *Asia* in Lake Huron in 1883, and which would lead to many a disaster in the moral world.

A RESTORED CHURCH.

MR. EDITOR.—Canada, with its ancient forests and its deep, blue sky, its mighty lakes and vast rivers, has no place of distinction in the records of historic lore. No ivy-covered ruins of a thousand centuries and dismal dungeons with their dark tales of oppression and cruelty. Its remote ages are wrapt in silence and mystery. Canada is a fair and happy land, where the laws of eternal truth and liberty have shed their benign influences.

Where industry is rewarded by an honourable and manly independence, and where every man may sit, if he so wills, under the shadow of his own umbrageous homestead, and reap the abundant harvest of his

toll and frugality. But our happy and beautiful land is not altogether without what is called the glory of war, nor its sons without their laurels, and we can point to places the memory of which shall live in history.

The church, too, has had its upheavals and its disorders, and there is one old building that is a monument of the struggle which disturbed the unity of the Presbyterian Church thirty-five years ago.

In the 17th con. of Indian Lands, there has stood in the midst of God's acre for the last fifty-five years, an edifice belonging to no special class of architectural form; unpicturesque, and with little to attract the eye of the passing traveller; but associated in the minds of many with solemn and tender thoughts; in others, with resentful and injured feeling. This old church has emerged from the unsightliness of its former aspect and is now clothed in the freshness of modern grace and ornament. Gothic windows filled in with stained glass have taken the place of the old square lights, and its walls are clothed anew. The interior is greatly altered; a projection for the pulpit having been made in the rear of the building, leaving a wider space for a suite of neat and commodious pews.

It is now a most comfortable place of worship, and the venerable associations of this ancient church give it a dignity possessed by few buildings of the kind in Canada; while a better glory now shines from it—being a trophy and an expression of that unity and peace which ought to distinguish all people who are followers of the Lord Jesus.

The busy village of Maxville is growing rapidly beside it—a place singular for its healthfulness. It can boast of no mineral springs, no seabeach nor lake. Why it is healthy we cannot tell. Perhaps the emanations from its soil are pure and life-giving, or it may be that the surrounding cedar forests, full of clear and limpid springs, possess the secret; we do not know, but persons out of health become well in that favoured place.

C. C. A. F.

PRESBYTERIAL VISITATION.

MR. EDITOR.—In reference to the letter of my friend, Mr. Roger, on the subject of visitation by Assembly deputations, allow me to say: Dr. James, the former convener of the Committee on the State of Religion, requested me to take charge of preparing and presenting the report at the Assembly. On the first opportunity possible I called for a meeting of the Committee on the State of Religion, by intimation in the usual manner. Dr. James, though not a member of the Assembly, put himself about to be present, the only other members of Committee present were Mr. Ferguson, Vankleek Hill, and myself. We gave all the consideration possible to the subject in the circumstances. We found in last year's report six recommendations which were adopted by the Assembly. The manner in which these recommendations were dealt with by congregations and Presbyteries did not encourage us, nor did it seem to us wise to offer any recommendation to the General Assembly on the subject referred to by Mr. Roger. The subject remitted to the committee by last year's Assembly, was a very large and very important one. We who met were not unacquainted with it; but, after giving it such consideration as we could, we thought best to adventure nothing upon it. In presenting the report, I stated this to the Assembly. This is all the explanation I can give why nothing more was done in reference to this point. I might say further, that I am in full sympathy with Mr. Roger, and with your editorial remarks on this subject; and I trust the matter will not be lost sight of. But, before any wise and acceptable scheme can be imposed authoritatively, it is absolutely necessary that the Assembly should devote more attention to this department of its work. Also that the committee should be appointed with a view to its holding one or more meetings during the year. Our Church does not do justice to this vital element of its mission; and I believe if the Assembly were aware of the good that has been done, and is being done, through this committee's work, much more generous treatment would be given it in the way of consideration and discussion of its reports. It does not seem the highest wisdom to treat the state of religion as a question of subordinate importance.

Let me add that a recommendation of a radical kind was adopted by the Assembly which will test the interest of the Church in this question. Objections have often been taken to the questions sent down to