

THE WEEK.

Seventh Year.
Vol. VII. No. 30.

TORONTO, FRIDAY, JUNE 27th, 1890.

\$3.00 per Annum
Single Copies, 10 Cents.

THE WEEK :

AN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL OF POLITICS, LITERATURE, SCIENCE AND ART

TERMS:—One year, \$3.00; eight months, \$2.00; four months, \$1.00
Subscriptions payable in advance.

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Subscribers in Great Britain and Ireland supplied, postage prepaid, on terms following:—One year, 12s. 6d. stg.; half-year, 6s. 6d. stg. Remittances by P. O. order or draft should be made payable and addressed to the Publisher.

No advertisements charged less than five lines. Address—T. R. O'LOUGHER, Business Manager, 6 Jordan Street, Toronto.

C. BLACKETT ROBINSON, Publisher.

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PROBABLY the most difficult, and unquestionably the most important problem now before the people of Canada for solution is that of the Public schools in their relation to the Churches and religious instruction. Recent discussions in the Church courts have set in a pretty clear light the objections that lie against any solution yet proposed. It will be admitted by most of those who have given thought to the subject, and whose opinions carry weight, that the existing educational methods are unsatisfactory in more than one respect. They are politically unsatisfactory, because they accord special privileges to one section of the population, and permit funds collected by the agency of the State to be used for the propagation of religious tenets which are not only peculiar to one Church, but deemed erroneous and hurtful by the members of all the other Churches, that is, by a large majority of the whole people. The Public schools are unsatisfactory on moral grounds, because they fail to impart that thorough moral training which is the most potent influence in the formation of good character, and consequently essential to the best interests of society and the State, and which, in the opinion of many of those who have given thought to the subject, can be made effective only when based on definite and positive religious teachings. As a matter of fact and experience, nearly all competent educators and nearly all thoughtful and observant men and women of every class must admit that, viewed from the standpoint of their success in moulding virtuous character and giving to the State highminded as well as intelligent citizens, the Public school systems of Canada and the United States have been more or less disappointing. The expectations so fondly cherished a generation or two ago, of great things to be accomplished through the agency of free schools and universal education in the way of diminishing vice and crime, have certainly not been realized. Many are, we dare say, ready to go much farther and agree with Mr. LeSueur that the vaunted free schools have, to a large extent, failed even in that work of mere mind-training or intellectual development which is too often made their almost exclusive aim, to the neglect of those

higher faculties of the soul which must always be the criterion of the truest manhood and womanhood. But, leaving aside for the present this branch of the subject and confining our attention wholly to political and ethical considerations, the still unsolved problem is to devise a Public school system which shall include the essentials of sound religious instruction, and yet neither do violence to the rights or convictions of any citizen, nor permit unwarrantable intrusion by either State or Church within the exclusive domain of the other.

SPEAKING generally, the modes of dealing with this difficult question, which have been proposed and advocated, may be reduced to three. First, it is proposed that the State should undertake, in connection with the Churches and subject to their approval, the work of unsectarian religious instruction. It is recommended that the Churches should agree upon a series of Scripture readings, and, we presume, expository or catechetical exercises in connection therewith, and that the course of religious instruction thus agreed on by the Churches should be made compulsory by the Government upon the teachers. This may be said to resemble, to some extent, the system now in vogue in Ontario, but it would go much farther. Though the course of Scripture readings now prescribed by the Education Department had the sanction of individual clergymen of the various denominations, they were not prepared by representatives of the Churches, nor were the leading clergymen who are said to have approved them authorized, so far as we are aware, to represent in the matter the various religious bodies of which they were members. Moreover, no religious instruction is prescribed or permitted in connection with the Scripture readings. The plan for concerted denominational action above outlined seems to have the approval of at least large and influential sections of most of the leading Protestant denominations. It is open, however, to very serious and, in the opinion of many, fatal objections. It takes no account of the views and convictions of agnostic, Jewish and infidel parents, and of many Christians as well, who might not approve of the selections or the accompanying instruction. It trenches upon the principles which are generally in America considered sound touching the relations of Church and State. It empowers the State to impose upon its officers, the teachers of the Public schools, religious duties which lie beyond its proper sphere. It virtually authorizes and requires the Government to undertake religious teaching as a part of its duties, thus implying that the Government shall undertake to enquire into the religious opinions of candidates for the teacher's office. It also tacitly involves the exclusion of sceptics of all classes from the teaching profession, inasmuch as there would be an impropriety and lack of good faith in religious instruction imparted by irreligious, or agnostic, not to say atheistic teachers. All Christians will, no doubt, agree that religious teaching, which is merely perfunctory, much more that which is irreverent or hypocritical, is worse than none. Moreover, *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* When the Government undertakes the work of religious instruction and of testing the religious qualifications of teachers who shall instruct or test the Government, and the chiefs of the Education-Department, in order to be sure of their fitness to superintend such a work? Difficulties multiply on every hand. It is tolerably clear that the solution of the problem can never be found in religious training by the State.

A SECOND method is that proposed by Dr. Langtry and approved no doubt by a considerable section of the Christian population—denominational schools supported by state-imposed taxes, but managed and controlled by the different religious denominations; in short, Separate schools not only for Roman Catholics but for each of the various bodies of Protestants, or such combinations of them as might be agreed upon. This plan would certainly have its advantages. It would leave each Christian sect free to exert its fullest influence in the work of moral and religious instruction. But it would be beset with difficulties at the outset and a host of minor evils would follow in its train. In the first place the limits of the aggregated Christian Churches are by no means identical

with those of the whole population. A large number of citizens of various nationalities and of non-Christian creeds, or of no creed at all, would thus be left unprovided for. The children of such parentage must either be forced within the precincts of one or another of the sectarian schools, or the State must provide secular schools for them, leaving the problem of religious education still unsolved so far as those who most need it are concerned; or worse still, these children must be wholly neglected. The Government must either undertake the invidious task of supervising and inspecting religious schools, or prove recreant to the political principle that Government supervision is the correlative of Government aid. There would be an end of all uniformity, and schools would overlap each other as churches now do far beyond the needs of the different localities or their ability to support competent teachers. Petty and perpetual rivalries and jealousies would spring up amongst the competing sects. Both education and religion would be very likely to suffer and the last state of public education would be worse than the first. Moreover what could be more wasteful and absurd than for the Government to use its money and machinery to educate the children of the country in religious systems in many respects diametrically opposed to each other, knowing that a large part of the powers thus developed would be devoted in after life to mutually combatting the doctrines inculcated at school. Clearly the solution of the educational problem is not to be found in a denominational or sectarian system of Public schools.

THERE remains only, so far as we can see, the method of absolute secularization of the Public schools, so far as the laws and regulations of the State are concerned. This does not imply, as we may presently show, that the schools must necessarily be destitute of religious teaching and influence of the best kind. Because the Government may not prescribe it does not follow that it must forbid. It is certainly its duty—there can be no quarrel or question on this point—to prescribe and enforce a course of thorough moral training in the schools, and it is worthy of serious consideration whether it is not now a radical defect in our Ontario system that no text-book, dealing with questions of character and conduct and the right and wrong of things connected with civil and social life, is in the hands of teachers and pupils. Surely a book can be had and prescribed such as will meet the approval of all classes, and be of great service in inducing that habit of moral thoughtfulness to which Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, rightly attached so much importance. A basis for the morality inculcated in such a book, which should, of course, avoid dogmatism on doubtful or difficult questions, could be found in the individual conscience on the one hand, and in such axiomatic principles as the Golden Rule on the other. As such teaching should be entirely practical, aiming solely at the development of judgment and conscience, no troublesome questions of the origin and nature of the moral faculty need be raised, at least in the elementary schools. The fact of the existence of this faculty with large capacity for culture is all that is needed. But, further, assuming that the teacher in a given school is a man or woman of high religious character, and profoundly convinced that to be forbidden to appeal to religious motives of a direct and positive kind is to be deprived of incomparably the best means of cultivating the moral nature and forming high character in the pupils, and assuming that the patrons of the school are all of the same way of thinking, should such teacher be prohibited from doing his best work in his own way? In a word, could not and should not the question of religious exercises and teaching in the schools be left entirely to local option, with ample provisions for guarding the rights of conscience in the case of individuals? If so, the way is open for religious training in the schools, of the only kind which can ever be made effective; that is, as imparted by teachers who are themselves intelligently and sincerely devout. To whatever exception our remarks on this very difficult topic may be open in other respects, we affirm with confidence two conclusions of no trifling importance: First, whatever system may ultimately prevail, immediate provision should be made, at the sacrifice, if necessary, of some other less important subjects on the programme, for clear, systematic, and positive moral training