

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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I wish to thank the *Westminster* for giving us the mature views of the Minister of Education for Ontario on this most important question. It is satisfactory to know that "in ninety per cent. of the schools a Scripture lesson is part of the daily exercise," which shows how strong is the approval of this being done throughout the province. That in a still larger number the schools are opened and closed with prayer; and that in cities and towns in every school but two the schools are closed with Scripture readings and devotional exercises, afford the strongest evidence of the desire of our people generally. I would like further to believe, if it is true, that to any great extent the Bible is read as a lesson by the pupils intelligently and carefully, and that the Ten Commandments and portions of Scripture are committed to memory as a part of the school exercise. Let us hope this will become more general than the Minister now says it is. In view of this desire so generally apparent and approved, what prevents Biblical (not religious) instruction from being made part of the imperative program of Public School instruction? Let us, in considering this question, not forget the conscience clause, which is not a regulation of the Department and changeable, but part of the School Act, which no one desires to see changed. The regulations of 1887 are quite satisfactory, and under them all that most Presbyterians desire can be accomplished. For we have no sympathy with any movement to destroy our school system by introducing Separate Schools or Voluntary Schools. We desire non-sectarian schools, in which the Word of God is intelligently read. And we think this can be done with the assent and co-

operation of even our Roman Catholic fellow citizens, who are as anxious as we to have the Bible taught as the foundation of our common Christian faith. Meanwhile, however, we do not propose to interfere with the privileges which they enjoy, and are willing to wait for the time which may before long come when they will prefer to have Roman Catholic and Protestant children educated together with mutual good feeling and respect.

Now, Hon. Dr. Ross tells us that "the crux of the whole religious difficulty" is that we insist that in order to be of substantial benefit to the pupils the teacher should be permitted both by comment and explanation to make the meaning clear when the Scripture is read. Let me assure Dr. Ross that, unwittingly no doubt, he misrepresents the view held by me and many others. It is one thing to make a pupil understand what he reads, but quite another thing to expound that meaning, comment thereon, and apply it. The former we desiderate, the latter we do not wish. Surely an unbeliever can make the meaning of the words and sentences clear, just as in the case of any historical passage or scientific illustration, without saying that what is stated is true and not fiction, right and not wrong. The teacher is not expected to discuss the substance of what is read, or deduce doctrines or practices therefrom. The regulation of the London (England) School Board is (or perhaps I should say was): "The Bible shall be read, and there shall be given such instruction therefrom in the principles of morality and religion as are suited to the capacity of the children, provided that no attempt be made in any such schools to attach children to any particular denomination."