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TORONTO, FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1878.

THE BIBLE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

OUR readers will have read with much satisfaction the report we gave in the last issue of this journal of the proceedings of the Synod of Hamilton and London, at its meeting lately held in Knox Church, Stratford. Among other matters, a deputation from the Synod consisting of its late moderator, the Rev. John Laing, M.A., and the Rev. W. Cochrane, D.D., reported an interview they had held with the Minister of Education, and also subsequent correspondence with him in reference to the use of the Bible in public schools. After quoting at length from the school law the Minister of Education advises the Synod, *firstly*, that school boards and trustees can lawfully require their teachers to use the Bible, or portions thereof, as part of the ordinary exercises of the school, giving, however, such explanations only as are needed for a proper understanding of what is read; and, *secondly*, that there is nothing in the regulations or programme respecting the public schools now in force which can prevent the introduction of such reading of the Holy Scriptures as part of the regular course of instruction and work of the school, when the trustees or school boards require this to be done. The law, on the contrary, permits, and the regulations strongly recommend, the daily practice of such religious exercises. The Synod passed a series of resolutions thanking the Minister of Education for his courteous answer, expressing their great satisfaction with the conclusions at which he had arrived, and indicating other steps to be taken by the other courts of the Church, and by co-operation with other evangelical bodies to secure united action in the direction indicated.

This authoritative declaration of the law and regulations affecting the use of the Holy Scriptures in public schools, is most valuable. The Synod of Hamilton and London deserves the thanks of the Protestant community for the timely and effective work it has done through its able and zealous representatives. No more vital subject can be entertained by any Church court than this; and had this Synod not added to this matter any other of

the important items of business which our report contained, its attention to the vital question of the Bible in public schools would alone be a vindication of the influence of the Synod as a court of the Church. For the Bible in the public school is one of the bulwarks of Protestantism. While it is true that according to the Minister's interpretation of the law, there may be a number of schools from which the Holy Scriptures are banished out of sight, there is a way provided by which the Bible may be retained or introduced in a great many of the public schools. It cannot be excluded in other than a constitutional manner. Neither bishop nor priest, nor even a section of the boards, can of their own authority prevent the Bible from thus being publicly read. The question must be settled according to the genius of the constitution—that is, by majorities, and by that we are willing to abide. Where the Scriptures are not thus used, it is within the power of parents and guardians to agitate the matter. It is for those most interested in this to do their duty at the polls, and to secure by lawful election a class of trustees who will fairly represent their views in the school boards. Remissness on their part may lead, for the time being, to the exclusion of the word of God from the schools. It is therefore impressed upon all such as a pressing responsibility to see that men are returned as trustees who will co-operate with them upon this important question. Nor should it be forgotten that the very earnestness and zeal of such influential bodies as the Synod of Hamilton and London, will lead to alertness and corresponding determination on the part of those who are opposed to the use of the Bible in the public schools.

The Bible in the school performs an invaluable service in the education of the young. In this place, we refer only to the intellectual training which it imparts. If it be of consequence to teach children in the histories of nations, what more important study can there be than the history of the Jewish people? Setting aside for a moment the supernatural origin of the laws and constitution and government of the Theocratic nation, these contain the very essential principles upon which Society can alone be successfully constructed. They have to a large extent moulded the laws, the constitution and government of other nations. And if it be thought necessary to scholarly attainment to be acquainted with the histories of ancient Greece and Rome, or with the rise and growth of the empire of the Cæsars, or with the historical development of Great Britain and America, is it not at least of equal importance to master the very rudiments of all history as they are found in the sacred books? For this reason alone, the Bible ought to have a commanding place in every school. Education will not be complete without it. Beginning with history further down the stream of time is very well in its place. But this is to leave out the origin of all genuine history, and to set aside a valuable factor in the training of the human mind. Proper education, again, seeks to make the young acquainted with the master statesmen and lawgivers and poets and philosophers who have impressed their genius upon the literature of their age and country. Though the most ancient of books, the Bible holds its place as a volume of literary merit. Passages

of wonderful beauty are of frequent occurrence. The speech of Judah to Joseph, when pleading on behalf of Benjamin, is perfect eloquence in its tender simplicity and earnest pathos. What more statesmanlike figure can be studied than that of Moses, the lawgiver and prophet? What more soldierly character can be presented than that of Joshua, the captain of the Israelitish host? For genuine poetry, can anything equal the writings of David? Or where will we obtain a more accurate knowledge of the principles of political economy than in the Proverbs of Solomon? The New Testament abounds with passages of great poetical force and beauty, but it is of much value also in throwing light upon contemporaneous history. Besides, with all that may be said about the translation of the Bible, we question whether teachers could from other books present to their scholars purer examples of English composition, or sentences more tersely expressed, combining the opposite qualities of simplicity and power; so much so, that Lord Macaulay, a master of composition, says that no person can pretend to write well the English language without having King James' version at his finger-ends. The influence of the Bible is felt in the classics of English literature. And for these considerations we maintain that it ought to have a place in every public school. Look alone to Scotland as an evidence of the service it performs in intellectual training. It is read daily in every school. It is largely committed to memory. It is the book most familiar for quotation, and the ideal Scotsman, who has been educated in the parish school, will stand second to none in point of mental calibre.

It may of course be said that the Bible read at home will accomplish these invaluable results. Yes, the reading of the Scriptures at every fireside will without doubt do much in the direction we have indicated. But its chief value in the family is its moral and religious influence upon the hearts of the young. There are very many families, however, in which the Bible is a closed book. In very many it is only cursorily read. How seldom will you find even a devout student of Scripture reading from the Bible with equal zest, passages which for poetic fire and beauty are equal if not superior to those he culls from classical writers with unbounded admiration. Even the Sabbath School is chiefly valuable for the moral and religious influence it exerts upon the young. It does not pretend to study the book as a classic, or as a volume of literary power and valuable history, though we confess much is being done in this way by the more advanced classes. There is something in the regularity and professed object of a public school, that is wanting even in family reading of the Scriptures or in the weekly study of the Sunday School, or even in private perusal. And though we have purposely kept this point out of view in this article, there is something grand and of high authority in the word of God being honored in the public school as the book of books. If it have a moral and religious influence when read in the family or in the Church, will it have less of this when used properly in the public school? The Minister of Education admirably concludes his communication to the Synod of Hamilton and London with these pregnant words, "It is open to parents gener-