

EXCURSIONS

are numerous in summer and autumn by charrabancs, which are very comfortable and popular vehicles. Parties drive to the towns around, such as Poole, Wimbourne, Christchurch, Corfe Castle, the New Forest, etc.

Boscombe and its chine make a pleasant walk of two miles. There are many villas and residences all around it. There are also public gardens with rustic bridges. The Manor House here is the residence of Sir Percy F. Shelley, the son of the poet. The grounds around the house are extensive and laid out artistically. They are not open to the public. There is a large hotel here called the "Chine Hotel." A few miles farther on is Christchurch, on the Salisbury Avon, just above its confluence with the Stour. The town itself consists of a long straggling street, at the end of which, on the banks of the river, stands

THE PRIORY CHURCH.

which is very old, very interesting and very attractive, especially to students of architecture, because it embraces every style of English art from the earliest form of Norman down to the decadence of the Perpendicular Period, even to the introduction of Cinque-Cento ornamentation. It is longer than any of the Welsh, Irish or Scotch cathedrals, and of many even of the English. In its tower are eight bells, three of which have legends of the fourteenth century; the others appear to date from the time of Henry V. One inscription, when translated, reads thus: "Quick, Augustine (while yet the mighty preacher or herald sounds not, that the Holy Lucharistic Lamb may drive away ills from the Weary. Another. "All saints be our warning, since that is thy name, may the virtue of a bell make us live soberly."

Just within the porch, and almost the first object that met my eye, was a handsome marble monument, erected in 1854 to the memory of Percy Bysshe Shelley, the poet, who was drowned in the gulf of Spezzia in 1822, his body being burned on the shore and his head taken to Rome by Lord Byron, who had it buried beside the grave of Keats in the Protestant Cemetery. The lines on the monument are from one of his own poems, and are very appropriate.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night,
Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Shall taunt him not, and torture not again;

From the contagion of the world's low strain
He is secure, and now can never mourn.
Not when the spirit's self has ceased to burn
With sparkling ashes load an unlamented urn.

CORFE CASTLE,

in the Isle of Purbeck, Dorsetshire, is frequently visited, the ruin being historical, and always an object of deep interest. The site of the castle seems to have had a fortress on it in the reign of Alfred, because his daughter, Ethelgiva, the first Abbess of Shaftesbury, held certain rights in the castle. This would fix the earliest known period of its existence at the year 875 or 877. It is however, with Elfrida, the Queen of Edgar, that the history of these noble ruins commences. King John made the castle his residence; he deposited in it his regalia and converted it into a State prison, confining and starving to death twenty-two prisoners, the flower of the French chivalry. This was about 1202. In 1213 John surrendered "England and Ireland to God, St. Peter and St. Paul and to Pope Innocent and his successors," and did homage to the Pope's legate. The castle continued the property of the different kings or queens or their favourites down to 1643, when it was purchased by Sir John Banks. Then commenced the war between the King and Parliament, when most of the fortresses fell into the hands of the latter, Corfe Castle remaining almost alone in its loyalty. Lady Banks—her husband was absent with the king—bravely resisted all attempts upon her castle, until, by the treachery of an officer of her own garrison, it too was surrendered to the Parliament. Everything was then given up to plunder and destruction, the walls were undermined and blown up with gunpowder, and the noble edifice became the ruin it now remains.

We may be reconciled to the sacrifice of this grand historical structure, writes the historian, seeing that its destruction struck a blow at the feudal system, which paved the way to the freedom England now enjoys. We may be thankful, too, that the sufferings

long and bitter, which hundreds of prisoners endured within these walls, long, lingering misery, ended only by death, are now no longer possible. T. H.

Bournemouth, England, Dec., 1887.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

MR. EDITOR I feel bound, in the interest alike of sound religious teaching and of the traditional policy of the Presbyterian Church in relation to education, to protest against the views on this subject contained in Mr. Henderson's letter, in your issue of December 28th last. I am one of those who are willing to have religious instruction given in the public schools; but I am not willing to make the giving of religious instruction obligatory on the teachers by a general Provincial law. I am quite willing to leave this matter, where it ought always to be left, with the local authorities of each school. A district that wants to have religious instruction given by its teachers can then make provision for it by electing to its school board men who are in sympathy with the view; while other districts that do not want such an arrangement made can go on as they are now doing. While it would be easy and safe to make such provision in some districts, it would be neither easy nor safe in others. Why should Mr. Henderson want to deprive the people of their freedom in this respect? Such a proposal smacks of the persecuting spirit too strongly to be tolerated in this country.

For many years past, I have been favourably situated for learning the views of both our legislators and our teachers on this question, and I have no hesitation in saying that the former will need a great deal of persuasion to induce them to make religious instruction compulsory, and that the latter would so generally evade the obligation as to make the law a dead letter, if it were enacted. Surely Mr. Henderson knows that religious instruction can be reduced to the merest farce, while the teacher complies strictly with the letter of the law. Perhaps it has not occurred to him, that, in a large number of districts, the teachers would find themselves compelled either to stop giving religious instruction, or to give up their situations. It is easy to say that the Education Department could enforce the law by the usual penalty withholding the school grant, but it is quite safe to say that no Minister of Education will ever enter upon a task so gigantic, so dangerous, so useless and so senseless. The subject of religious instruction is troublesome enough now, it would be infinitely more so, were the instruction made compulsory.

Mr. Henderson is quite willing to have religious instruction "in the letter of the Divine word" given by men who are not themselves religious. He goes further still, and avows his desire to have the law so changed that even irreligious teachers shall be compelled to give religious instruction. If I have put a wrong construction on his own words, he can easily set me right; but the position I have just stated is so shocking to me, that I expect other people to say I have misrepresented him. How many Christian parents, who are earnestly endeavouring to educate their children, not merely in the letter, but in the spirit of the Divine word, would be willing to take their chance of the kind of instruction in the letter which Mr. Henderson is willing to accept. If such a law were passed and enforced, thousands of children would be withdrawn from the public schools and sent to private institutions.

Such a change in the law as Mr. Henderson wants would arouse sectarian feeling and controversy in many districts, where denominational harmony has hitherto prevailed. So long as giving religious instruction is not obligatory on the teacher, no effort is made by the members of any sect to have a teacher of their own persuasion. All this would be changed by a change in the law. Every school section would soon become such a sectarian bear garden, that the law would have to be restored to the condition it is now in.

Mr. Henderson makes light of the difficulty about having the Bible taught by agnostics, that is by those who do not believe it. His first answer to the objections urged is, that it is not desirable to have an agnostic for a teacher. Admitting the soundness of this view, I ask him how agnostics can be prevented from becoming teachers. They cannot be kept out of the profession by means of tests, because the Legis-

lature would never consent to impose them, and they would be of no use if they were imposed. Once in the profession, they cannot be kept out of the schools, because trustees have no means of recognizing them. Moreover, there are thousands of sensible trustees who, so long as an agnostic respects the religious proprieties, will refuse to dismiss him, simply because they are told he is an agnostic. And if an agnostic chooses to keep his opinions, or want of opinions, to himself, how can Mr. Henderson use his influence to have him removed? What kind of proof will he furnish to a school board in such a case?

His second answer is, that the use of the Bible will aid in discovering the agnostic where he already may be. Not necessarily. Mr. Henderson ought to know that it is quite possible for a skilful agnostic to saturate his pupils with utterly unorthodox views about the Bible and religion, without leaving it possible for any person to object, with success, to any particular part of his teaching. In these days when eminent Protestant Churchmen are divided in their opinions on the canon of Scripture itself, very extreme views may be taught in school about the cosmogony of Genesis, the journeyings of the Israelites, the character of David, the theocracy and religion of the Jews, and even the teachings and miracles of Christ, by agnostics, sheltering themselves under the aegis of the Church. Such agnostics are usually quite willing to let this subject alone, but if they are compelled to teach the Bible they will certainly teach it in their own way.

Mr. Henderson's third answer is, that a man may cherish a doubt about the Bible, and yet not treat it with disrespect. I am compelled to wonder what kind of agnostics Mr. Henderson has become acquainted with. He seems to think that disrespect for the Bible is a necessary characteristic of agnosticism. It is nothing of the sort. The true, and I may add, the dangerous agnostic, is an earnest seeker after truth, who takes a scientific interest in the Bible as he takes a scientific interest in other early literary productions of the human race. Apart from inspiration and the miraculous altogether, the Bible is unquestionably the most valuable source of light we possess on the origin and early progress of civilization, and in this character it is earnestly, and even reverently, studied by the scientific agnostic. In this character also, it would be taught by him, and in that fact lurks the danger which I most fear.

I need not enter into the separate school difficulty which Mr. Henderson underrates, simply because he overlooks the fact that it is a physical impossibility for all Roman Catholics to enjoy separate school privileges.

WILLIAM HOUSTON.

Toronto, January 2, 1888.

INFORMATION WANTED.

MR. EDITOR, - Would you kindly inform me whether there is a set of questions prepared by the Assembly's Committee on the State of Religion, to be answered by Sessions? I have written to every one who, I thought could give any information on the subject, but to no purpose. My predecessor as Convener of the Presbyterian Committee tells me that, last year, the questions came about the 1st of February. Now, our Presbytery meets in the end of February, and it is unreasonable to expect that, in so short notice, anything like all Sessions could reply. If there are to be questions sent, why could they not be sent in December as well as in February? If no questions are to be sent, Presbyteries should know, so that they could take steps to gather such information as they thought necessary. A CONVENER.

THE Philadelphia Presbyterian makes an appeal to contemporaries on a matter that has taxed its inventive ingenuity. It says Doubtless you, like ourselves, are often perplexed in replying to lady correspondents, who are strangers, as to whether the prefix Mrs. or Miss is the proper one to use. We have decided to adopt the simple abbreviation *Ms.* in all such cases until somebody suggests something better. Suggestions are in order. At the present moment time is too pressing to afford leisure to grapple with a new problem. As, however suggestions are in order, it may be remarked that the proposed abbreviation has been pre-empted. As lady correspondents, who write both prose and poetry, know that *Ms.* stands for "manuscript," they may suspect an ambiguous allusion in the secondary use of the contraction.