

## RELIGIOUS TEACHING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PUBLIC AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS OF THE  
PROVINCE OF ONTARIO.

DEAR FRIENDS:—

THE Rev. Dr. Sutherland, in his address to the Ontario Teachers' Association, which I find reprinted in the pages of this magazine, has stated, with much apparent earnestness, his reasons for holding that the education imparted in our Public and High Schools should comprise a distinct and substantial religious element. It is assumed throughout his address that the religious instruction which he desiderates and demands is to be administered, not by the clergy of the several denominations, but by you. At the outset he speaks as though he would require you to give lessons, not only in Christian ethics, but also in Christian evidences. He states that the question he proposes to discuss is: "Shall our educational system be entirely secular, or shall the religious element, in the form of Christian evidences and Christian ethics, be incorporated therewith?" We naturally expect that he will conclude in favour of a course of "Christian evidences and Christian ethics;" but, later on, when he comes to formulate his demands, he drops the "evidence," without any explanations, and offers to be content with certain devotional exercises (including Bible reading) and the inculcation of Christian ethics. These then are the duties which it is proposed should be exacted of you: (1) To lead your scholars in prayer. (2) To read the Bible to them as the inspired Word of God. And (3) To inculcate the principles of Christian morality.

Now, for my part, I see practical

difficulties in the way of the realization of this programme; and, though I am not a teacher, perhaps you will bear with me, as you did with Dr. Sutherland, who likewise is not a teacher, if I try to show you how I regard the whole question. In this country we are supposed to enjoy religious liberty. By that I understand that all creeds, positive and negative, stand on an equality before the law—that, so far as the action of the State is concerned, no man either reaps any advantage or is placed at any disadvantage on account of his religious opinions. If the true idea of religious liberty is not as comprehensive as this, I should like some one to define it for me, and show just what it does embrace. Proceeding meanwhile upon my own definition. I remark that the demands put forward by Dr. Sutherland violate the principle of religious liberty in this respect at least, that they impose upon you duties which some of you might well have conscientious objections to performing. Supposing, for example, that some of you either do not regard the Bible as an inspired book, or incline to the view of a merely partial inspiration, one not extending, let us say, to matters of history or science, would it not place you in a difficult position to have to read that book to your scholars in such a way as to imply that every word contained in it was literally true, and that the book throughout was infallible? Some of you may perhaps not be believers in the miraculous; it is a very common case with thinking men to-day; we