

Special Papers.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The elementary school system of Ontario consists of three sections, viz: 1st, Public schools, which are non-denominational, and number 5,204. 2nd, Roman Catholic separate schools, which number 224. 3rd, Protestant separate schools which number 7. The Public School system of this Province was first established on a non-sectarian basis, but in 1841 an act was passed recognizing the principle of separate schools, for both Roman Catholics and Protestants, and notwithstanding repeated amendments since that time the distinctive non-denominational character of the one and the distinctive religious or sectarian character on the other have been strictly maintained. If the common school was not Catholic enough for the Catholic, or Protestant enough for the Protestant, each had the right under certain circumstances to establish schools with those denominational characteristics which were desired and which could not be engrafted upon the common school system. The history of religious instruction in Ontario extends over a very large period of time, for we find the Provincial Board of Upper Canada recommending the following in the year 1816: 1st, That the labors of the day commence with prayer; 2nd, That they conclude with rendering publicly and solemnly a few verses of the New Testament, proceeding regularly through the Gospels; 3rd, That the forenoon of each Saturday be devoted to religious instruction. These recommendations were amended and revised from time to time; but until 1884 religious instruction was merely recommendatory, not obligatory, or in other words the policy of the department was passive, not positive, in this matter.

With the increase of separate schools for Roman Catholics and with the privilege which followed, because of their very nature, to give such religious instruction as their supporters desired, an agitation arose in favor of increased religious instruction in the public schools. It was asserted then as it is now, that the public schools of Ontario are Protestant schools, but this assertion is untrue, as the public schools are free to children of all nationalities and creeds. If a comparison is to be made with the Roman Catholic separate schools, it is with the Protestant separate schools, and not the public schools, it should be made. It was alleged, however, by many supporters of the public schools that it was not enough for the state to make regulations and recommend religious instruction, but that it should positively not passively lend itself to the task of teaching children the doctrines of the Bible, and for this purpose the teachers employed in the state schools should be directed to give formal religious instruction. They said that it was not enough that 3,136 had followed the recommendations of the department voluntarily. The law should be mandatory, due allowance being made for conscientious scruples. To this demand the department yielded to a certain extent. It was the general opinion that some passages of Scripture were more suitable than others to be read in a school-room, accordingly a book of collections was compiled, but before it was authorized it was revised by a committee composed of the leading Divines of the different denominations of the Province. Religious instruction was then made mandatory. Regulation 250, reading as follows: that, "The portions of Scripture used shall be taken from the selections authorized for that purpose by the Department of Education, and shall be read without comment or explanation." The book of selections was accordingly introduced into the schools of the Province. But some person made the terrible discovery that Archbishop Lynch had been consulted regarding the revision of the selections. Although this was nothing more than justice, seeing that there was a large number of Roman Catholic children attending our public schools, much excited discussion followed. The book of selections thus became a battle-ground for party strife and was contemptuously named the "Ross Bible." Those dissatisfied with the book then raised the cry for the Bible and the whole Bible. The Minister of Education then

to meet the views of the minority, and to allay if possible the ill-feeling that had been engendered, amended regulation 250 to read as follows: "The Scriptures shall be read daily and systematically without comment or explanation, and the portions used may be taken from the book of selections adopted by the Department for that purpose, or from the Bible, as the trustees by resolution may direct." And, in order to remove the objections to the first volume, the Minister, in September 1887, invited the persons formerly appointed by the different religious bodies to revise the first volume authorized, and to consider whether they could render it more useful and acceptable by a second revision.

With one exception they cordially undertook the task assigned to them and on the 21st of December, 1887, submitted their report which was approved and confirmed by the Department, on the 26th of January, 1888. The principal changes made were: 1st, Each lesson contains a continuous selection from the Bible, and its place in the text is indicated by chapter and verse. 2nd, the historical portions are given with greater fullness. 3rd, The selections are so tabulated that a list, indicating their place in the Bible, may be conveniently published in separate form. Now, it will be seen that the Minister has gone as far in this matter as he possibly can without ruining our non-denominational system. But there is an organization of over-zealous clergymen in Toronto, known as the Ministerial Association, whose motive, if they could agree among themselves, appears to be to make our public schools sectarian in their scope and operation. Some of them wish to have the Bible used as a text book, others that the teacher should be allowed to make such comments and explanations as may be deemed necessary to enable the pupil to better understand the lesson read. But if comments and explanations are allowed at all what security would there be as to their limits, as there would be a tendency on the part of many teachers to dogmatise and thus thrust their particular denominational views upon the minds of their pupils. Teachers are now taught thoroughly every subject on the school programme, examined as to their knowledge of these subjects, and also trained how to teach them. If they are to teach religion from the Bible, or any other book, is it to be done with less preparation than is given to reading or arithmetic? Before any teacher would be competent to teach religion he would require to take a course in theology and exegetics. Besides, this scheme would involve a change in the whole educational machinery of the Province. A curriculum in religious instruction would have to be provided, text books prescribed, and the orthodoxy of every teacher tested by persons appointed for this purpose. Who could do this satisfactorily to the various denominations? A regular system of examinations would have to be organized, and the qualifications of examiners appointed for this purpose would have to be determined according to their religious attainments. If the examiners were all of one creed they might reject candidates who answered questions according to the tenets of another creed and thus the work of building one creed and crushing others would go on.

Our schools are supported by persons of all creeds. Would it be possible for the teacher to explain without offending some of them? If he has the right of exposition at all, he must exercise it conscientiously, otherwise he would either act the hypocrite or sink his manhood in order to maintain the law. No such obligation is imposed by law upon any other citizen. Why upon the teacher? Has the state any interest in the denominational differences which divide its citizens? If not, should it legislate so as to aggravate them even indirectly? Would not this privilege actuate trustees to appoint teachers for other reasons than because of their literary attainments and character? Would the denominational element in the choice, should it arise, add to the usefulness of the profession? Would there not be further danger that the election of Trustees would be affected by the denominational complexion of the school section, and that the majority would take care to be represented on the board in order, not that the best teacher should be employed, but that a teacher of their own sect should be engaged. Is there any danger impending or is the moral tone of our people any

lower than that of the counties where religious instruction, according to creeds, is part of the system of education? Do we not fix limitations enough in regard to all our public duties, without imperilling the great work of national education by any sectarian bias? The late Dr. Ryerson in one of his reports truly remarks that "The demand to make the teacher do the canonical work of the clergyman is as impolitic as it is selfish. Economy as well as patriotism, requires that the schools established for all should be open to all upon equal terms, and upon principles common to all, leaving to each religious persuasion the performance of its own recognized and appropriate duties in the teaching of its own catechism to its own children. The common day school and its teacher ought not to be bothered with duties which belong to the pastor, the parent, and the Church. And if the religious part of the education of youth is in any instance neglected or defective, the blame rests with the pastors and parents concerned, who by such neglect have violated their own religious canons or rules, as well as the express commands of the Holy Scriptures. In all such cases pastors and parents are the responsible, as well as guilty, parties, and not the teacher of the common school nor the common school system."

In conclusion, I think there is only one true system for the education of the masses in a free country like this where the people have sprung from different nationalities and hold different creeds, and that is to abolish all separate schools, both Protestant and Catholic, and establish a national system of education under which our schools shall be purely secular in their teaching, from the Public School to the University, and leave the religious instruction of the youth of our country entirely with the parent, the church, and the Sabbath School. If these do their duty faithfully I have no fear of the result.

Educational Notes and News.

THE great colleges of the country are degenerating. Dartmouth has restricted football, Harvard confines athletics to very narrow limits, and Cornell has instituted strict rules against hazing. If this thing goes much further we may hear that students are required to put in most of their time studying at colleges.—*St. Paul Pioneer Press.*

AT the close of Friday's afternoon session of the South Hastings Teachers' Institute, Mr. S. A. Gardner, the faithful and untiring secretary, was taken completely by surprise by being presented by the Institute with a very handsome watch. Accompanying the watch was an address, expressing warm appreciation of the faithful and valuable services Mr. Gardner has rendered the Institute during a long term of years.

AMONG the Yale men who will receive degrees at the coming commencement, says the *Sun*, are four Japanese students. One of them who is a resident graduate will be made a doctor of philosophy. Another, the son of a Japanese nobleman, now a minister of finance, will graduate from the law school. A third, who graduates from the same school, is one of the brightest men in his class, and a contestant for the John A. Porter prize. The most interesting of them is Shinkichi Shigimi of the scientific school. He is a typical Japanese, four feet tall and weighs ninety pounds. He came to this country without money or friends, drifted to Yale, was taken in charge by President Dwight and members of the faculty, and now graduates with honors.

THE central thought of education is to give the pupil self-reliance. Anything which does not tend to do this is superfluous or harmful.—*Indiana Sch. Journal.*

IT is an exceedingly bad habit to get into to be continually threatening. The teacher is liable to threaten something he can not perform. But once having given an order let nothing short of its causing physical ill health prevent its being carried out. The teacher is bound to see that a command is obeyed just as much as the pupil is bound to obey it.—*Indiana School Journal.*