

Pastor and People.

EDUCATION: NOT SECULAR NOR SECTARIAN BUT RELIGIOUS.

The following is from the able and thoughtful lecture on the above subject, by Principal King, at the opening of the Theological Department of Manitoba College:

The subject of common school education is one which is likely to engage in the near future the public mind in this province to an extent which it has not hitherto done. Important changes are foreshadowed as in contemplation. An attempt is to be made, it appears, to terminate a system which, however accordant with the views of a section of the inhabitants, can never, and especially as it has been wrought, be other than unacceptable to the great majority. The best thanks of the country are due, one need not hesitate to say, to any government which makes an honest endeavour to remedy the existing evils and place the matter of public school education on a more satisfactory basis.

The subject is confessedly one of more than ordinary difficulty, even as it is one of the very last importance. It has not indeed, any very close or obvious connection with the work with which, whether as arts or theological students, we are to be engaged. It is neither a question of philosophy nor of theology, strictly speaking; yet it has claims upon our attention at this moment as one of the colleges of this province, which only a few questions, whether of philosophy or theology, possess. It is at least a live question and may soon become a burning one. The present lecture is given, not as an adequate or exhaustive discussion of the subject, but as a humble aid to its better understanding by the people of this province, with whom, it is to be hoped, its ultimate settlement within the limits of Manitoba will be found to rest.

Numerous questions are raised when we direct our minds to the consideration of this subject. What form should public school education assume; education, that is, the details of which are determined and its cost met in part at least by the State? Should it be restricted to the elementary branches, or should it embrace the higher branches also? Should it be entirely free or only partially so? In particular, should it be purely secular? or should it be at the same time religious, and if religious, in what form is the religious element to find place? What I have to say this evening will have reference to the last only of these questions, which, however, is also by far the most important.

A purely secular system of education: one, that is, in which there should be no attempt to combine religious instruction or religious influence with the teaching of reading, grammar and other such branches, has some strong and obvious recommendations, especially in the present divided state of religious opinion. First, it is in strict accord with what appears to be the modern view of the function of the State. According to this view, it is no part of this function to teach religious truth. That lies wholly within the domain of conscience, a domain which a power wielding the sword may not enter. Civil government, it is claimed, has been instituted for quite other purposes than that of propagating religious opinions, however true and however important. To use its resources for this end is to misuse them, and in doing so even to render a doubtful service to the truth which it has espoused. Again the purely secular system of education escapes numberless difficulties which are apt to arise, when religious teaching is made to form an integral part of the system. There is no longer any question of what kind and amount of Christian instruction should be imparted. There is no more any room for the jealousies of rival denominations, so far as the school system is concerned. No branch of the Church, Protestant or Catholic, can feel that another is getting the advantage of it, when all are treated alike, the religious opinions of all being equally ignored. Within one domain, at least, there is absolute freedom from ecclesiastical quarrels, the bitterest of all quarrels, as our legislators are accustomed to say, with that happy blindness to the character of their own contentions which is so common. Now, even admitting that the statement proceeds on a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the danger to peace and good feeling arising from religious instruction finding a place in the public school, it is an obvious gain to have in its exclusion the door shut against one element of jealousy and discord. It may be added as another advantage, that with religious teaching relegated to the home and to the church, so much more time is left for those secular branches which all admit ought to form the staple of public school instruction, and which in our day have become numerous enough to tax the brain and the time both of teachers and pupils. In the light of such considerations as these, it is not, perhaps, astonishing that a purely secular system of public school instruction should present itself to many persons as the best, or if not the absolutely best, yet the best practicable in a community where such diversities of religious opinion exist as exist among ourselves. Is it the best, then, or even the best practicable? Is it good at all? I do not think so, and it will be my aim in the first part of this lecture to support this opinion in the calmest and most dispassionate manner in my power. First, then, I ask you to notice, that, when the purely secular system of education is supported on the plea that it is no part of the function of the State to teach religious truth, consistency demands the exclusion of all religious ideas from the authorized text books, even to that of the Divine existence, which is not only a religious truth, but the fundamental truth of religion. If there must not be religi-

ous instruction in the public school, if the reading of the Bible even must form no part of the exercises, because the State, which sustains the school, transcends its legitimate and proper sphere, when it undertakes to teach religious truth, then, on the same ground, any literature which expresses religious opinions or appeals to religious sentiments or enforces religious obligations, must be excluded from the books used in the classroom, or these must be purged of the obtrusive if not the obnoxious element, prior to their admission. The principles of morality, if enforced at all by the teacher, must be enforced by considerations altogether distinct from the authority, the character or the will of the Creator. The Ten Commandments, giving the summary of the Divine will in relation to man and the basis for over three thousand years of human morals, cannot be taught. Such are the conclusions which we are compelled by a resistless logic to accept, if we adopt the fundamental principle of secularism, viz., that the State oversteps its proper sphere when it undertakes to teach religious truth, and on that principle argue for the exclusion of the reading of the Bible or any definite religious instruction from the exercises of the public school. And some have not hesitated to accept them in their entirety. France, logical, if anything, has done so. It has not, indeed, adopted the blasphemous atheistic catechisms which have been long current among a certain class of the population, but it has, if I am rightly informed, with an unhappy consistency, entirely removed the name of God and the whole group of ideas connected therewith from the text-books which it puts into the hands of its youth. An Australian colony, too, has not hesitated, in conformity with the secularistic principle, which it has adopted, to excise from a passage of Longfellow the lines expressive of religious sentiment, before giving it a place in the book of lesson. The people of Manitoba, I feel sure, are not prepared for any such a course in the matter of public school education. And in rejecting it—in regarding it with instinctive revulsion—they must be viewed as at the same time repudiating the purely secular view of the State and its functions on which it is based and of which it is the logical outcome.

So far, however, the conclusion is a purely negative one. Religious instruction in the public schools is not ruled out by the character of the State as a civil institution. But even if admissible, is it expedient? Is it requisite? The answer to this question, which is one of the very highest importance, can only come from a consideration of the end contemplated in public school education. What, then, is the aim of the State in instituting and maintaining public schools? There will probably be very general accord on this point. The aim surely is, or at least ought to be, to make good citizens, as far as education can be supposed to make such; citizens who, by their intelligence, their industry, their self-control, their respect for law, will tend to build up a strong and prosperous State; citizens whose instructed minds, whose trained powers, whose steadfast principles will serve to promote the public welfare. This, and neither more nor less, must be the aim of the public school in the view of the State, and as far as supported by it—not more, it overshoots the mark when it seeks to develop the purely spiritual qualities, the graces of a religious life, except as these are subservient to the origination and growth of civic virtues; and not less, it falls as far short of the mark when it is viewed as designed simply to give instruction in reading, arithmetic, and other such branches, and thereby to promote intelligence and to train intellect. The idea of the institution is most defective, so defective as to be virtually misleading, which makes the whole school simply a place for imparting knowledge, or in addition, an intellectual gymnasium. It should be beyond question, that the State, in undertaking the work of education, can only find an aim, at once adequate and consistent, in the preparation of the youth, so far as public education can prepare them, for the parts they have to play in civil life. In a single word, the aim of the public school is to make good citizens, or to train the youth of the State, that they shall become good citizens. But to make good citizens, the school must make good men. Character is at least as requisite as intelligence, virtuous habits as trained intellect, to the proper equipment for life. The prosperity, whether of the individual or of the State, rests on a treacherous basis, which does not rest on integrity and self-control. It is often the precursor of ruin. Against that ruin, learning, whether of the school or of the college, is but a feeble barrier. Nay, learning divorced from morals, disciplined intellect disengaged from the control of virtuous principle may only make that ruin more speedy and more complete, may have no other result than to give us more skilful swindlers, or more expert thieves. In this way, the school instructing the mind and cultivating the intellectual faculties, while disregarding the moral nature, constitutes a real danger and may become a positive injury both to the individual and to society. In any case it must be obvious that the good man is necessary to constitute the good citizen, and the education therefor, which is to promote the society and welfare of the state, must be capable of forming good men—it must at least aim at doing so.

But to make good men there must be moral teaching and moral training; that is, there must be both instruction in the principles of morality, and the effort to see that these principles are acted out by those in attendance on the school. The virtues of truthfulness, purity, gentleness, self-control—the virtues which go to make good men—if in any sense native to the soil of our fallen nature, find much in it to retard their growth. They need to be cultivated. The opposite vices, falsehood, selfishness, angry passion, will show themselves more or less in every school room, and every playground.

They will need to be wisely but firmly repressed. The school, if its aim be to make not simply expert arithmeticians, correct grammarians, but truthful and upright men, pure-minded and gentle women, cannot disregard the workings of the moral nature, as these come out from day to day within it, now on their better side, now on their worse. The better must be fostered and encouraged, the worse checked, and in some cases punished. The conscience must be appealed to. The sense of duty must be cultivated. The habit of obedience must be taught. It is true that the public school is not primarily a school of morality any more than it is primarily a school of religion, but a teacher charged with the oversight of children for five or six hours a day during the most formative period of life may not ignore the moral nature, as it reveals itself every hour in his presence. He must rebuke or punish indolence, falsehood, rudeness, malice, even as he must encourage diligence, truthfulness, purity and gentleness. For him to be indifferent or neutral in the conflict between good and evil, which goes on in the school room and the play-ground as really as in the business mart or in the legislative hall, of which the heart of the youngest child is the seat, as undeniably as that of the busiest adult, is virtually to betray the cause of right; and in mercy at once to the child and society, he must make his sympathy with goodness, with right character and right conduct, clearly and decisively felt. At any rate, if the public school is to be the seed-plot of noble character, of generous virtues, and not simply of scholastic attainments, if it is to furnish society with good citizens, and not simply with smart arithmeticians or possibly with apt criminals, there must be found in it not only methodical instruction and careful intellectual drill, but amid all else, as the occasion offers or requires, moral teaching and moral influence. The presiding genius in every school, a genius which may be often silent, but which should never sleep, ought to be a lofty and generous morality.

But (and this forms the last link in the argument against a purely secular system of education) moral teaching, to be effective in the highest degree, or in any degree near to the highest, must lean on religion and be enforced by its considerations. It is this position especially that the apologist for a purely secular system refuses to accept. It is claimed that it is possible to teach morality, and morality of a high kind, without introducing the religious element in any form. Everything turns here on what is meant by the teaching of morality. If by this is meant simply pointing out in words what is proper and dutiful in human conduct, defining the duties which men owe to each other, then it is possible. The summaries of morals which are found in the agnostic literature of the period, not the less excellent that they are, in good part, borrowed without acknowledgment from the Bible, demonstrate its possibility. But to how little purpose are duties pointed out in the school room, or anywhere else, if there are no considerations presented enforcing their performance, no sanctions of a high and sacred kind to secure them against neglect or violation. The whole end contemplated in the teaching of moral-morality is to bring the teaching into practice, to have the precept translated into action. And the main difficulty in the attainment of this end, as every one knows, has always been in connection, not with the rule, but with the motive; it has always been, not to point out the direction in which the life should move, but to cause it to take this direction, in spite of the deflecting force at work. The failure of pagan systems of morality was far more due to defective sanctions than to wrong rules of conduct, and the vice and crime which are found in every Christian country to-day are in only a small degree the result of ignorance of what is right. They are mainly due to sinful dispositions, some of them inherited, to unbridled appetites, and to force of bad example. Now the problem is to find out and to bring into play a motive or a cluster of motives powerful enough, to overcome these forces of evil, and to carry the life in spite of them towards what is good. In the absence of religion, with that sphere closed, where is the public school to find such a motive? Denied access to those which religion supplies, by what considerations is it to enforce obedience to the moral rules which it lays down? There are, of course, considerations of expediency, of self-respect, of the authority of the teacher, and the fear in extreme cases of the rod he wields, to which appeal can be made, but who would expect noble and generous character or action as the result? It is undeniable that the highest and most powerful motives of right conduct lie within the religious sphere. Even if it does not require the idea of God to render the conception of duty intelligible—to ground it—as many think it does, it is certain that the being and character and moral government of God give to the word duty a new force, and invest the whole details of duty with a new sacredness, presenting them as the embodiment of the Creator's will. It is not less certain that added hatefulness and terror gather round falsehood, selfishness, injustice, all that is undutiful and wrong, when it is viewed as the object of his displeasure "in whom we live and move and have our being;" while a whole circle of moral excellencies, patience, meekness, gentleness, considerate regard for others, self-denial, do not so much gain added charms, as they almost come first into distinct sight when they are enjoined in the words and displayed in the life of the Saviour of mankind. There may be a select few—persons of philosophical thought, who can dispense with these sanctions of morality or who think they can; whose observance of duty rests on some other grounds, but to the great bulk of mankind, and very specially to children, they furnish the strongest and most appreciable motives to virtuous action—they are the indispensable supports of