

—“The Bible is a literature of itself; the rarest and richest in all departments of thought or imagination which exists.” And Prof. Huxley believes that “the maintenance of religious feeling is the most desirable of all things, and that it cannot be maintained without the Bible.” What connection, if any, actual knowledge has with religion and morals is a question with which very few people trouble themselves. Most seem to take for granted that if a child only knows how to read, write, and cipher, he is in the sure way, not only of becoming wise, but virtuous. No doubt, by reading he may improve himself, for he may read good books; but, on the other hand, he may do himself much harm, for he may read bad books. Arithmetic and writing have really no necessary connection with morals, nor facts of any kind, except the historic facts which show how the “power which maketh for righteousness” worketh in the affairs of men. You will not understand me as overlooking the fact that the learning of these things may have its moral aspect; for in learning them curiosity and research may be awakened. I am not forgetful of the objections urged against the cause I am advocating—denominational differences and lack of the right teachers. My answer will be very brief. I believe it to be a device of the enemy of human well-being and human progress, this continual holding up of the bugbear of our denominational differences. Are they not the merest trifles in comparison with our essential agreement in religious belief? In regard to the second—lack of the right teachers—I hold that anyone who cannot reverently, humbly, and lovingly read the Word of God with his class is not fit to have the teaching of a class. A callous, hard, sneering man should not have the honour or privilege of being the teacher of a school anywhere, least of all in Her Majesty’s

dominions. It seems as if special care were taken that the children in our Public Schools should not be required to show their knowledge of the contents of the Bible. Of all the selections for the entrance examination to the High Schools and Collegiate Institutes in this Province, made from the Fourth Reader, not one is immediately connected with a Bible theme. Would it not be as well to know who Joshua was, as to know who Hermann was? The Bible was read in many of our schools, both common and grammar, not many years since. What pushed it out of both classes of schools? I answer: school programmes of studies, inspections, and examinations. I know of a grammar school wherein the Bible was regularly read for an hour each week, and difficulties, other than theological, explained, till within a score of years. But this Scripture reading was discontinued because of the cry raised respecting the low standard of learning in the grammar schools. I never heard of any difficulty then on account of either religious differences or lack of right teachers; why should there be now?

I beg to recommend that the Education Department announce to all the schools that direct moral or religious instruction is to be given, except where a vote of the people indicates the will of the ratepayers to be that such instruction is not desirable. Or if this cannot be done, that this Association appoint a standing committee to prepare a series of Bible-readings, similar to those prepared by the London School Board, and in every proper and legitimate way seek to induce school authorities to make use of them in their schools.

“Yet sage instructions to refine the soul,  
And raise the genius, wondrous aid impart,  
Conveying inward, as they purely roll,  
Strength to the mind, and vigour to the heart;  
When morals fail, the stains of vice disgrace  
The fairest honours of the noblest race.”