

SCHOOLS NOT RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS.

Our national schools and colleges are not religious institutions, but they are institutions of a religious people. We do not write God in our legal enactments, but we inscribe His name on the tablets of our hearts. Canada is not behind the neighbouring country in its recognition of religion. He who would remove the Bible, the grandest code of ethics, from the teacher's desk, little understands what has made our system of education so popular. "Christianity is the basis of our system of education," is the language the venerated Dr. Ryerson uttered some 30 or 40 years ago. The Minister of Education gives confirmation to the same view. "To say that the State," remarks the Rev. Dr. F. L. Patton, "cannot recognize religion because it cannot confer exclusive privileges on a particular form of religion, is absurd. To say that we may not be a Christian nation because no single denomination of Christians can lay claim to precedence, is also absurd. Because we cannot Presbyterianise the State it does not follow that we must atheise it. Our law on this question does little more than assert that Christian morality shall be taught in our schools. The nature and extent of the moral training are left to be decided by each locality. We should hesitate before changing the optional principle in the matter. Of the 5,235 schools in operation in 1881 we find 4,501 of them had the daily exercises opened and closed with prayer. The regulations onjoin that "no person shall require any pupil in any Public School to read or study from any religious book or to join in any exercise of devotion or religion objected to by his or her parents." We have, nevertheless, regulations of a recommendatory nature on the subject, with forms of prayer, etc. As the regulations are not compulsory, does it not speak well for public sentiment to find 85 per cent. of the schools of Ontario doing even so much under the voluntary plan? The ministers of the deputations who brought up the question of using the Bible school were not definite or agreed as to the amendments proposed. The present law, it is held, practically removes the Bible from the schools. The trustees have the remedy in their own hands; no change in the law would give them any advantage. The voluntary principle is in harmony with our entire system of self-government, and the strongest argument in its favor is that it has worked well. Training in Bible lessons should go on with geography, history, and every other subject on the time-table. If a series of Bible readings were prepared by a competent committee, it would, I think, come into general use.

ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH.

Suggestions from the clergy are always in order; the Church should rule the State. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics are opposed to a non-religious system of ethical instruction, but they have antagonistic views regarding the means by which moral instruction should be conveyed. Have the religious bodies interested made any request to the trustees of any school section which did not receive respectful consideration? Have they urged the reading of the Bible in any locality where it is entirely neglected? Where it is only read by the teacher, have the clergy urged that it should also be read by the pupils? In how many places have the ministers of different bodies taken advantage of the present law for the purpose of giving religious instruction to the children of their own denominations? If the clergy have not taken any steps in their own localities to remedy what they regard as a defect, I fail to see any necessity for any general movement for securing a change in the law. Our institutions will never be "Godless" if the Churches do their duty. Those who are friendly to our system of education will do well to consider carefully the injurious effect of all efforts to establish Separate Schools. If I were to give advice to any religious body it would be to support, from the Public School to the University, the religious but undenominational character of our school system. Let us not, however, forget the essential features which have characterized our system; and while steadfastly maintaining the ground that morality should be taught on a religious basis, let us not render that basis denominational.

THE BIBLE IN SCHOOLS.

A discussion followed the reading of this paper, in which many of the teachers present participated. It was finally decided to leave the report to the consideration of a committee appointed by the Chairman. The committee appointed by Mr. MacMurchy was: Messrs. Maxwell, McKinnon, Alexander, Strang, McHenry, and McAllister.

SPELLING REFORM.

The next subject taken up was "Spelling Reform," which was introduced by William Houston, M. A., in a conversational form. After dwelling briefly on the general interest which all classes of the community should feel in the simplification of English spelling, and the special interest which the subject ought to have for those who are compelled to waste a great part of their time in teaching children how to spell and read, he traced the defective spelling of English words to the defective character of the English alphabet as its primary cause. The elementary sounds used in the spoken language are variously estimated at from 40 to 42, while the effective letters to represent these sounds number only 23. One way of supplying the deficiency is to make one letter represent two or more sounds, another is to use such orthographical expedients as doubled letters, digraphs, and other combinations. If these devices were used consistently the irregularities in spelling would be much fewer than they are, but the fact that some sounds are represented each in several different ways makes the confusion worse confounded. Several methods of spelling reform have been proposed, which may be thus classified:—(1) *The invention of a perfectly new alphabet*, each character in which shall have a constant, individual value, and which should be phonographic in its nature; (2) *the addition of from seventeen to twenty new letters to our present alphabet*, and the consistent use of this enlarged system of characters; and (3) *the elimination of such irregularities and redundancies as can be got rid of without any alteration of the alphabet*. The last method was the only one discussed on this occasion. In reply to the taunt sometimes levelled at spelling reforms,—Why do you not set about reforming your own modes of spelling if you believe in them? Mr. Houston drew a broad distinction between a moral principle and mere matter of convenience. Those who advocate a principle on moral or conscientious grounds should be prepared to act on them from the outset. It is different with spelling reform. It is more convenient that the written words in which thoughts are clothed for purposes of inter-communication should keep as generally as possible the same form, no matter who uses them. If each reformer were to follow a line of his own the confusion would be increased; if by discussion a certain line of change can be definitely agreed to by the majority of educated men, they can by adopting the new spelling force its use on the minority, and thus lessen the confusion instead of increasing it. The endeavor to secure concerted action has led to the formation of Spelling Reform Associations in England and the United States, and a similar Association has recently been organized in Toronto, under the title of the "Canadian Spelling Reform Association." The English and American societies have so far acted in perfect accord, and the Canadian society proposes to act with them. Mr. Houston read over a partial list of the changes proposed to be made, such as dropping the silent letter in the digraph "ea" in such words as head, heart, spelling them hed, hart; dropping the "o" out of the digraph "eo" in such words as jeopardy, leopard; dropping the silent "e" when it is phonetically useless, as in live, vineyard, bronze, engine; writing "u" for "o" in such words as above, dozen, some, tongue; dropping "ue" in catalog, dialog, demagog, leagues, &c.; dropping silent "b" in such words as bomb, crumb, limb, dumb; dropping "g" in feign, foreign, sovereign, &c., &c. He urged teachers to join heartily in the movement, partly because it is sure to go on whether they do so or not, and it ought to be controlled by educated men, and partly because they have in their local association meetings a means of discussing the question which other spelling reformers have not. While he would not advise them to practise the reformed spelling in private on account of the danger from impending examinations, he protested against the capacity to spell well according to a complicated and arbitrary system being prescribed as a fair test of a man's educational attainments in English, and also against the prevalent mode of applying spelling tests in examination papers. Instead of giving a list of words, some of them correctly and others incorrectly spelt, and asking the candidate to make the necessary corrections according to the received standard, the examiner might give a list of words correctly spelt, and ask the candidate how the spelling might be improved etymologically or phonetically, or both. Such a question would be a far better test of a candidate's knowledge of English than a question of the usual stock kind. In the course of his remarks Mr. Houston gave numerous illustrations of the application of two general principles, which he laid down as follows:—(1) *Simplify spelling whenever it can be done by following more closely the etymology of the word*, and (2) *simplify spelling phonetically whenever this can be done without*