

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

MR. EDITOR, - I do not know anything about the editor of the *Christian at Work* personally, but yet it does not at all astonish me that he, as an otherwise able and orthodox writer, should have something to say against religious instruction in public schools. We do not need to look far from our own doors to see that there are very, very few men, however able and orthodox, who are not led to hold and advocate views peculiar and various, on other questions than those of pure theology, and any student of human nature may be often able to account for these idiosyncrasies in the influences of early training or of the school of thought with which the individual was identified. At least, I think that such things as these account for a good deal of opposition to Bible instruction in the public schools, where that opposition is made by thoughtful men.

At all events I am glad you have reproduced in your issue of the 23rd inst. some of the leading points used by the *Christian at Work*. because, as you say, it lets us see what can be said on the other side. I value the quotations you give because they also let us see how little can be said by an able and orthodox writer against Bible instruction in the schools of the United States, and how much less can be said, therefore, in the schools of Ontario. It is because of its practical bearing on this latter aspect of the cause, that I ask permission to refer to the points mentioned in your editorial.

I assume that every orthodox person should be willing and indeed anxious that the children of the public schools should receive Bible instruction, if it can be done consistently with our circumstances. If the editor is opposed to public school religious instruction on principle, then he should pursue the discussion on that line. Still, he may favour the principle and oppose the practice because of difficulties in the way. I think that where the principle is once earnestly accepted many of these supposed difficulties will become considerably diminished, or altogether disappear.

His first difficulty is the non-qualification of the public school teacher to give religious instruction; and his meaning is explained by a reference to the qualifications of the Sabbath school teacher. This objection has been made to do duty in Canada as well. Does it not arise from a failure on the part of the objector to distinguish between religion and religious knowledge between spiritual instruction and instruction in the word. The aim of the Sabbath school teacher is avowedly to bring his pupil to a spiritual apprehension of the truth as it is in Jesus; to aim at his conversion; to prepare him for the communion table. His sphere is pre-eminently a spiritual one. I am not aware that any advocate of public school Bible instruction has anything like this in view. We believe, however, that to instruct in the letter of the divine word, to acquaint himself and his pupils with the leading facts of the sacred narrative, and with the precepts pertaining to the moral aspects of a Christian life is perfectly within the qualifications of any ordinary public school teacher. He is not required to be a preacher in even the modified sense that the Sabbath school teacher is, and consequently it is quite irrelevant to compare the qualifications of the two in this discussion.

The next objection is the one we hear the changes rung on here from time to time, namely, that "many of the teachers are agnostics pure and simple." So far as Canada is concerned, I believe the objection is not one that spontaneously presents itself to the mind of a man who is otherwise desirous of seeing the Bible read and taught in the schools. It is an objection that has the appearance of having been sought after by one who wished to make out a case. How many Christian men are there to-day honestly anxious to have Bible instruction, but who are held back from countenancing it on the sole ground of fear of the agnostic? My answer to the objection is this. (1) It is not desirable that an infidel should stand *in loco parentis* and especially of a Christian parent, during six or seven hours of the day for five days of the week—religious instruction or no religious instruction being the rule. Therefore I am in duty bound to use my influence against the hiring of an agnostic for public school work, and to the removing of such a one when he is hired as soon as possible. (2) The free use of the Bible will have the

tendency to diminish infidelity in the profession, and to discover the agnostic where he already may be. But '3' every man who may have cherished a doubt is not necessarily a sceptic to the extent of treating the Bible with disrespect. This difficulty is absurdly overestimated.

His next objection "that religion is not a catechism but a matter of life and love," I think I have sufficiently answered above in referring to the distinction between the aims of Sabbath school and the day school teacher. I repeat that religion is not exclusively a thing of the heart. It is also of the head. But he says "Teach the Bible as you teach arithmetic, and the result would rather be hatred than love of the Bible." Again I say that is not the objection of a man who is otherwise honestly anxious for public school religious instruction if it can be had. It is the objection of a man who is anxious to make out a case. If by the expression—"as you teach arithmetic" he means as you teach any other school subject, I would prefer to take history rather than arithmetic as the parallel. However, let us test his hypothesis and conclusion. Scotland has for generations been pre-eminent among the nations for religious instruction in her schools; teaching the Bible as she taught arithmetic; therefore the Scottish people have been and are the most Bible loving people on the globe which is absurd.

I shall not take up your space with any reference to the last difficulty, namely, that from the Roman Catholic aim to obtain separate schools, (1) because I hold with Dr Hodge that the Protestant character of the American nation should give the privilege of religious instruction in her public schools without laying her under obligation to support Roman Catholic schools; but (2) because the objection has no bearing upon the case in Ontario except in that it points out that Roman Catholic schools receiving public funds for the purpose of teaching Romish catechisms and legends, much more should the Bible a non-sectarian book—be read and taught in the public schools.

Your own remark about the instruction at home I heartily endorse. But then it is no more to be argued that because home is the place to receive religious instruction primarily, therefore it would be wrong to give it in school, than it should be urged that when young men are exhorted to "learn piety at home" therefore they shouldn't go to church.

ALEXANDER HENDERSON.

Hyde Park, Nov. 20, 1887

THE NEW BOOK ON "THE CONSTITUTION AND PROCEDURE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH."

MR. EDITOR,—As our new Book of Forms is now before the Church for consideration, it is desirable that no effort be spared to make it as free from defect as possible. It is gratifying to find that even at its present stage it is marked by so many features of excellence. I propose to call attention to a few points in respect of which the book might probably be improved and in illustration I cite:

1. The definition given of the permanent officers of the Church as "elders, teaching and ruling, and deacons."

1. This definition is to my mind defective and confused, for this reason, that the teaching elder or minister is also a ruling elder. He both rules and teaches, and he presides in all courts of the Church as an accepted interpreter of the Scriptures, because the ruling is to be done according to Scripture. This double function of the minister of the Word places him in both classes of elders; and hence "teaching and ruling elders" is a defective definition.

2. The definition is faulty also on Scripture grounds, because "teaching elder" is not a Scriptural definition of the minister of the Word. True, he is an elder, because the greater office includes the less. But his office should be defined, not from the inferior and incidental function of rule, but from that which is the very essence of his office as a minister of the Word. The elders of the Jewish Church never were the spiritual teachers of the people. The function of teaching belonged to the prophets, priests and Levites. The elders bore rule simply.

3. This definition further raises the whole question as to whether there is in the Christian Church a twofold order of office, ministers, elders and deacons. I am inclined to take the latter view in opposition to

that of two classes in the one order of elders. A threefold order of office is more in line with certain analogies running through the Scriptures. There is a trinity of persons in the covenant God of the Church, a trinity of office in Christ, prophet, priest and king, and a trinity of body, soul and spirit in each of the church's members, and by a trinity of office in the Church she conforms to these analogies.

Dr. Cunningham, in his "Historical Theology," vol. 1, page 240, says: "We too have a threefold order . . . the general class of presbyters is divided by good scriptural warrant into two ranks or orders, commonly called teaching and ruling presbyters thus making a threefold order among ecclesiastical officer-hearers."

4. It is also a matter of history that the Westminster Assembly, after lengthened debate, adopted the words "pastors" and "other Church governors," and in the "Form of Church Government" appended to the Confession of Faith a separate chapter is devoted to each office. Is it to be wondered at that good pious men shrink from accepting the office of the eldership in our Church, when that office is so confused with that of the ministry as to be made to appear identical with it, except in respect of a mere circumstance, the possession of teaching gift? And do not the elders discern inconsistency again in our practice when we ordain them without "the laying on of hands" and exclude them from taking part in the laying on of hands in the ordination of ministers? Nay, the theory and practice are more inconsistent still in this additional particular that they find themselves not eligible to preside at a meeting of Session, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly. In practice, we act as if there were two orders of office in our Church courts; and if there are not what becomes of "the lay element" in Presbyterianism? If the elders, as these are known amongst us, are presbyters, then there is no "lay element" left. The presbyters of the New Testament are solemnly warned against taking the oversight of the flock "for filthy lucre." We can easily see how this applies to ministers; but what temptation is any man under amongst us to accept the office of the eldership for filthy lucre? He gets no salary, and in many cases has to pay his own expenses to the Church Court. Let us, in framing definitions, bring our theory and our practice into closer harmony with each other. By doing so, we shall place ourselves in more obvious accord with Scripture also, for obviously God has set pastors and teachers in the Church for the work of the ministry, as He has also set "governments" or "elders of the people" whose distinctive function is that of bearing rule.

For these and other reasons, I am in favour of such a definition of the permanent officers of the Church as shall give to the ministry of the Word its appropriate and scriptural prominence, similar to what is set forth in the Confession of Faith by the Westminster Assembly. There are some other points to which I may refer in another letter.

Woodstock, December, 1887. W. T. McMULLEN.

YOUNG CONVERTS.

MR. EDITOR,—In THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN of December 7, I find a letter signed "William Shearer" which he introduces with "A word for the young," in which he says: "I fail to see why a young convert should not have the same liberty to tell out what the Lord hath done for his soul as an old convert." Now, I fail to know that this privilege is denied the young convert. Where is there a minister, Church official, or guardian of the young in the Presbyterian Church, as well as in other Churches, who would not be only too glad to hear the youngest convert tell what the Lord had done for his soul? Again, he says: "And is it not another fact that many young converts enjoy an experience that is too often forgotten when they grow older?" "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." "The path of the just is as the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day." Of course, if a young convert could tell what the Lord has done for his soul he must assuredly be able to tell it all the better when he has been in the school of Christ several years.

FIFTY YEARS IN CHRIST'S SCHOOL.

If one be a believer the very best thing he can do is to put his hand to something practical, and do it with his might.