

NATIONAL EDUCATION IN CANADA.—No. III.

From what has been said in preceding papers, on this subject, it seems obvious that we must either give up the idea of imparting special religious instruction in the common school, or abandon a national system of Education. Altogether, there appears to be no other alternative. If, therefore, a general system of schools be requisite—and few will be found to question it—then that which is strictly religious must be distinguished from what is purely literary. There are insuperable difficulties in the way of uniting them as subjects of instruction in the same school, and by the same teacher. Nor do we fear that either will be less efficiently imparted, because thus kept distinct. I cannot better close my remarks on this topic than by quoting a paragraph from the last Report of the Chief Superintendent of Schools, for Upper Canada. He says, “All theories which transfer to the day-schoolmaster, between the hours of nine o’clock in the morning and four in the afternoon, during five days of the week, the obligations and duties which the Holy Scriptures, the primitive ages of the christian church, and the constitutions of all religious persuasions, enjoin upon parents and clergy, must be unsound and vicious in principle, and immoral in tendency. All theories which make the State the servant and creature of the Church is, as all history demonstrates, degrading to the former and corrupting to the latter. All theories which leave any portion of the population without a public provision, for instruction in the elements of a practical education, are at variance with the principles and ends of good government, and hostile to the rights and interests of men. All theories which compel, by human enactment, States, or communities of men, in respect to forms and exercise of religion, infringe the prerogative of Jehovah himself; trample upon the individual responsibility of man to his Maker, and involve the assumptions on which have been based the most grinding politico-ecclesiastical despotism and cruel persecutions, that have cursed mankind and crimsoned the church of God.”

There is no feature in the history of Canada, more gratifying or more hopeful, than the rapid progress and successful working of her educational institutions, and especially the common schools—that progress in every respect—in the character of the schools, and the mode of their support,—in the qualification of the teachers and the amount of their remuneration,—in the size and style of the school-houses, and the extent of their accommodations,—are alike cheering and instructive. It is highly creditable to the first settlers in the country, that so soon as two or three had erected, within a distance of a few miles of each other, dwellings for their families, they immediately joined together in putting up, in some central spot, a log cabin to serve the double purpose of a school-house during the week, and a meeting-house on the Sabbath. Many of these places were small, uncomfortable and ill-furnished, but they were suited to the exigencies of the times—and in