

PROGRESS OF OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

To all those who have the interests of our educational institutions at heart, the magnificent progress that has been made in our public schools during the past few years, must be a matter of great congratulation. To those only, however, who have had, from personal observation, a knowledge of the state of the school system in various parts of the Province some years since, as contrasted with their standing at the present time, can the magnitude of the change which has taken place be fully appreciated. Previous to the passing of what is still known as the New School Act by the Sandfield-Macdonald Administration, a very large percentage of the public school teachers, especially in the country, were disgracefully inefficient; and too often those placed in authority over them as local superintendents, were entirely unfitted for the position, both from their lack of education, and their entire ignorance of the principles of teaching. The cause of this inefficiency on the part of the teachers was, in great measure, the fault of the township and county boards of examiners. Very frequently certificates were granted more from favour than from any genuine merit or capability on the part of the candidates. The results of this were, in many cases, ruinous to the chances of country pupils obtaining anything like what it is sought to give them in our public schools—a fair English education. So palpable was this state of affairs, that it was a common remark that a young man or woman who could do nothing else could teach school for a living. As a natural consequence of this, and the great error which prevailed in many places of employing the cheapest teachers, the profession was crowded with incapables, hundreds of whom could be found in the Province who could not begin to pass the entrance examination to a High School, according to the present programme. The revolution which was brought about by the new school law came none too soon, and that the greatest benefits have resulted from it is now beyond doubt. Not only has the procurement of a sound practical education been placed within easy reach of the rising generation, but the profession itself has been placed on a more exalted footing than formerly. From the fact that adequate salaries are paid, there is a greater inducement given to ladies and gentlemen of first class ability to engage in it. The objection that the small salaries paid in rural sections effectually shut out good teachers from being employed in them no longer exists to any great extent, and those who now fit themselves for the work of teaching find that their efforts have not been in vain as regards the gaining of a means of livelihood. The standard of qualification was raised considerably, but that was highly necessary in order that the teachers should be properly educated. As matters are arranged now, although a high state of efficiency is required on their part, a very adequate return is made by the paying of fair remuneration, and the granting of Provincial life certificates without necessitating an attendance at the Normal School, and such a certificate any teacher of fair ability can obtain with a proper amount of exertion.

Another great improvement which was made was in the appointment of competent inspectors. In this a just compliment was paid to the profession. Instead of having placed over them men often their inferiors in point of education, and without any knowledge of school management, teachers now find those filling this important office well qualified to discharge the duties required of them. The members of the profession themselves who acquire the necessary qualifications are also eligible for the position. In view of all the advantages to be seen at the present day in connection with our public schools, Ontario is to be congratulated on having an educational system second to none in the world. —*Hamilton Spectator*.

PRIZE BOOKS IN OUR SCHOOLS.

It is a matter of good taste, and of fair dealing, and of morals, important that care should be taken to select suitable books for prizes to boys at school or students at college. In choosing such rewards for the intellectual athletes of the Grammar School, the field is by no means so wide as that which presents itself to one in search of volumes wherewith to recompense, and stimulate to exertion, while marking what has already been done, in the case of scholars more or less advanced. For the Grammar School a book must not be too abstruse or too ponderous. Butler's "Analogy," or Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," first-rate books for prizes for a college class, are not fit for a day school. What you want is a book which shall not only be a classic, but which, while inculcating lessons of purity and nobleness, shall be picturesque in style, and lit up with enthusiasm. To give a controversial book to a young boy—teaching either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism—would, under most circumstances, be ill-advised, but it would be especially so under our school system.

Those of our readers who may not have been acquainted with

the book referred to must therefore have felt a little indignation on reading a letter from Mr. Wilson, of Kingston, which appeared in our columns of a few days back, in which he complained in strong language because the Grammar School Trustees of Kingston gave as a prize Chateaubriand's "Genius of Christianity." Mr. Wilson says, that in this work, "Christianity is considered from a Papist point of view," and that "the leading errors" of the Church of Rome are "plainly and eloquently advocated." Having quoted a passage about the Virgin Mary—a passage which is shockingly translated, and which occurs in an early chapter on the Incarnation—he asks whether the Education Office was engaged in "propagating Popery throughout the fair Province of Ontario," and he considers that it is time this book concern should be overhauled, with a view of finding out whether any more such books as "The Genius of Christianity" are harboured there.

We cannot help doubting whether Mr. Wilson read the book through which he so strongly condemns, for the fact is that there could be no more incorrect description of Chateaubriand's "Genius of Christianity," than that it is a book which treats of Christianity from a "Papist point of view," or even to use language which conveys more exactly what Mr. Wilson means, from a Roman Catholic point of view. The word "Papist" can only be properly applied to Ultramontanes, and has more political than religious significance when intelligently used. As generally employed it is neither political nor religious, but rhetorical, and as it is known to be very offensive to Roman Catholics, when passions run high and Christian charity is not in the ascendant, it serves as a ready and effective weapon of insult. Mr. Wilson is evidently not aware that the book when it appeared was by no means pleasing to severely orthodox Roman Catholics, nor that Chateaubriand had to defend himself against attacks from very sacred quarters in his own Church, nor that he is as profuse in his use of the works and achievements of Protestants as of Catholics. It is really a work written on Christianity by a poet, and from a poetic point of view, the writer happening at the same time to be a Roman Catholic, without any deep faith, above all without any strong sectarian bias, and having as a special object to counteract the ridicule of Voltaire.

That there would be nothing in the book to object to on sectarian or controversial grounds is what one might expect from the manner in which Chateaubriand came to be a Roman Catholic. In his first work, the "Essai sur les Révolutions," he is an eighteenth century sceptic with the frivolity of the infidelity of the Parisian salon or the leer of Voltaire's diabolical mockery. His mind was a dolorous chaos of doubt, and from this he never wholly escaped; nor could we help smiling at the account of his conversion, were it not so beautiful in its filial piety, in its simplicity, and its chaste freedom from everything relating to controversy. Standing by his mother's death-bed, he hears her last prayers for his eternal safety. "J'ai pleuré," he says, "J'ai cru"—I wept, and I believed—and the base of his faith is the principle of his writings, nor is it by reasoning, but by sentiment, that he seeks to regenerate the world. He does not try to prove Christianity true, his only object is to show that it is beautiful, and the passage on the Virgin quoted by Mr. Wilson, taken especially in connection with the context, is conceived in the same spirit as Macaulay's eulogy on the organization and energy of the Church of Rome in his essay on Ranke, as Horace's grand canticle to the "Lord of Naiads, Lord of Moenads;" it is poetic and literary, not theological; and if the book is calculated to teach Roman Catholicism, Horace would make men worshippers of Lencæus. Nor would it be safe to visit the temples built by Michael Angelo and decorated by Raphael. Whole schools of painting would have to be driven into dark vaults or destroyed. "The Genius of Christianity" is a series of brilliant pictures, written in a style which has been, even by great masters, rarely approached. Christianity is ridiculous, said Voltaire; it is sublime, said Chateaubriand; and he points to its achievements in art, in sculpture, in painting, in architecture, in poetry, and in all the thousand energies busy for the comfort and elevation of man. In every great work—in Dante, in Milton, in Paul and Virginia—he sees the spirit of Christianity active. By means of his extraordinary literary genius—a genius kindled, like his forerunner's, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, at the burning altar of Rousseau—he re-opened the great living sources of poetry which had been sealed up by pseudo-classical imitation, and to him belongs the double glory of having given the signal of the literary revolution to which we owe that brilliant band of which Victor Hugo's is the greatest name, and of having inaugurated the moral and religious reaction of the nineteenth century among minds kindred to his own. As he boasts himself in his "defence," it was, in 1802, considered "good form" to be Atheistical, he made it a note of vulgarity; he found religion despised, he made it honoured.

In a word, the book is a standard French classic, and we cannot exclude it from our libraries except on grounds which would