

## ISMS IN THE SCHOOLS.

BY JOHN S. EWART, Q. C.

"WHAT a melancholy notion is that which has to represent all men, in all countries and times, except our own, as having spent their life in blind condemnable error—mere lost Pagans, Scandinavians, Mahometans--only that we might have the true ultimate knowledge! All generations of men were lost and wrong, only that this present little section of a generation might be saved and right. They all marched forward there, all generations since the beginning of the world, like the Russian soldiers into the ditch of Schweidnitz fort, only to fill up the ditch with their dead bodies, that we might march over and take the place. It is an incredible hypothesis. Such incredible hypothesis we have seen maintained with fierce emphasis, and this or the other poor individual man, with his sect of individual men, marching as over the dead bodies of all men, towards sure victory; but when he, too, with his hypothesis and ultimate infallible *credo*, sank into the ditch and became a dead body, what was to be said? Withal, it is an important fact in the nature of man, that he tends to reckon his own insight as final, and goes upon it as such." So said Thomas Carlyle (the hero as priest), and mournfully added: "He will always do it, I suppose, in one or the other way."

And yet one would think that by this time Cromwell's adjuration addressed to the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it *possible* you may be mistaken," would in some small measure be commencing to take effect even upon Scotchmen. Surely the scantiest information as to the intellectual and moral development of the human race would teach any one that not the blockheads only among

our ancestors, but the wise-heads as well, have been hopelessly—I had almost said stupidly—wrong upon countless matters that appear to us to be as simple as the addition of a couple of units. But no; so far, Carlyle's prophecy, "He will *always* do it," bids fair to realize itself.

And the reason is not far to seek. Toleration is based upon culture (of which there is but scant crop), and especially upon those parts of it included under (1) wide-reading, that you may know that the road to your own opinion has been over many a nobler thinker now stark in the Schweidnitz ditch; (2) experience, that you may have seen your own most cherished opinions go to the ditch ahead of you. ("The latter part of a wise man's life is taken up in curing the follies, prejudices, and false opinions he had contracted in the former," said Swift); and (3), a certain sympathetic and imaginative power, that you may patiently investigate the foundations and strength of opposing opinion, and be able to appreciate its arguments, not from your own point of view, but from that of your opponents. You must come to the question as an enquirer—not with heady confidence, arrogantly asserting infallibility and completed investigation; but, on the contrary, with open mind ready and willing to re-examine your best beloved beliefs in the light of that which may be urged against them—a very rare frame of mind. If the question be one upon which you have no very fixed ideas, the possibilities are that your mind will receive its first (and last) impression from the first person you meet, be it nurse or philosopher. But if it be a question of politics or religion, and you have arrived at the age of—say