

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON SECULAR EDUCATION.

The interest in the subject of education is one of unexhausted and inexhaustible interest. That view of it suggested by the heading of this communication possesses features worthy of special consideration. A few remarks upon it have been prompted by a paragraph in the Monthly Religious Record of the *Sunday at Home*, by a notice in your issue of Oct. 19th of an article in the *Canada Christian Monthly*, called forth by the above, by the essay of Prof. Wells at the late meeting of the Baptist convention in Toronto, upon the Relation of Religious Denominations to Secular Education, and by some action taken by our own Church anent education, but which appears to have been allowed to drop out of sight.

The points raised by the aspect of the Educational question we propose to notice are of such momentous importance to the individual and mankind at large that they claim and secure the most earnest attention of the divine, the statesman, the patriot, and philosopher. They can never cease to do so, because the education of the race at large is a progressive and never-ending work. It would be idle to suppose that as a nation we have not yet much to learn and much to do in connection with this great and vital subject. The question of most absorbing interest and the most difficult to settle is, the nature and extent of the connection of religion, or of religious teaching with what is commonly called secular education. The term secular education is confessedly very indefinite, but in its common and most popular acceptation it is understood to mean the imparting or acquiring an acquaintance with all the various branches of knowledge set before the mind and connected with the manifold pursuits of life, with the exception of those which are religious or theological strictly so called, and the mental discipline obtained in the making of these acquirements. It may well be doubted whether any education can be given which shall be purely secular, which shall ignore absolutely all religious principles and leave no impressions even upon the mind which are religious in their nature. If such a thing were possible, most certain is it that it is not desirable. Such education would be worse than heathenish, it would be atheistic. All good and truly wise men are agreed that religion should not be divorced from education, that in fact no education worthy of the name can be given of which religious principles and impressions do not form the most important part. It is, in fact, just as impossible to effect this divorce in any sense that will be complete as to eliminate the religious element from the human breast. All education, therefore, of necessity, partakes to a certain extent of a religious character, that is, impressions are made, principles instilled, intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, gradually formed, made the basis of conduct, the standard of judgment, which have reference to the existence of God, our relations to Him, to our fellowmen, our accountability, the possession in Christian countries of the Scriptures and their teaching, and which are therefore so far religious. Views of their nature, true views as I believe, have frequently of late found, as they are always finding expression.

The difficult questions to settle in connection with this subject are, by whom, when, how, and what amount of religious influence ought to be or may be infused into, or mixed up with secular education in the act of imparting it? This is a somewhat different subject from that of religious education in the usual sense of the word, that is the teaching of religion in some of its forms in the course of imparting secular knowledge. It is rather the question of how to make all education religious in this sense that it will tend to the regulation of the whole conduct by reference to religious principles, as laid down in the great statute book for all men, the Bible.

With reference to the question by whom this may and ought to be done, it cannot be questioned that the primary and most weighty responsibility rests upon parents. But that indirect, and yet most influential and all-important inculcation of religious principles of which we are speaking during the course of imparting secular knowledge is not and cannot be confined to the parents. Our youth in this country as yet with the rarest exceptions secure their education, their

characters and habits in religious matters are formed largely at school and college, and under the inspiration of their teachers. The question then by whom is a wholesome influence of a religious kind to be infused into secular education so as to promote the growth and increase the strength of religious principle and character among our children and youth up to young manhood and womanhood answers itself. It must be done largely and, of necessity, by the teachers of the land, from those in the humble log schoolhouse in the backwoods to the professors in our well-appointed, aspiring colleges, where our eager youth meet in their stately halls and measure arms in generous contest. In answer then to the question, *How* may religious influence be brought to bear upon secular education, so as to produce the highest and very best results, seeing that it is settled for us by ~~reason~~—this must be done, we answer, by every parent and office-bearer in every school and college possessing religious convictions and character, bringing these to bear upon the selection of teachers for these schools and colleges. Unfortunately vast multitudes of those who are entrusted with power in our educational institutions have the most unworthy ideas of the solemnity of their trust, and have never really risen to any adequate or serious estimate of the overwhelming importance and far-reaching consequences of the interests committed to their care. How few of those in charge of schools and colleges ever dream or would be willing to admit that the really important things our youth learn at our schools, the things which abide with them forever, and affect their destiny forever are not the reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, or history, the Greek, Latin, or German, the philosophies they acquire a knowledge of; but the habits they are forming, the principles instilled by, and which they see embodied and illustrated in, the living examples before them, the impressions they are hourly receiving from their teachers by the very atmosphere which they make around them. How often are boards of trustees and such like bodies satisfied if candidates for their suffrages possess merely the guinea stamp of some examining body, if there is no open immorality or if the services offered are cheap enough! How often is the investigation into these only made rigid, and that into the religious, not denominational, convictions and moral character of the applicant allowed to pass clouded with a dangerous uncertainty.

Here then is one way in which religious influences may be brought to bear upon secular education, by every man and woman of religious convictions and character, especially by all entrusted with power and authority in appointments to educational positions, seeing to it, that in addition to the legal and technical qualifications, all who ask their suffrages, shall, so far as they can make sure of it, have a character of such a stamp in its broad outlines, at least, as they would wish to see in those who are as dear to them as their own life. It is impossible to over-estimate the good effect of such conduct on all concerned. How many fears and anxieties would be lifted from the minds of parents, how many teachers of dangerous principles and of unworthy character would be weeded out of a noble profession with the best results to the profession itself, what a happy effect would be produced upon our rising youth, and what a noble race of men and women would be raised up to bless our land! As a minister, feeling the deepest interest in and caring for the young, the most hopeful part by far of the material we work upon, without seeing the teachers and parents, without knowing them, it is easy to tell by the conduct of the young the principles of those under whose care they are for so large a part, and at so impressible a period, of their life.

As this is the season at which so many new arrangements are made for the year, perhaps these considerations may be practically helpful to some who may take the trouble to read them. In this hope, and from a deep sense of the importance of all teachers having, and of trustees insisting upon, those of all grades furnishing the most satisfactory evidence of characters good and true, because of the immense influence they hourly wield for good or for evil on the young and in determining the character of future generations, they are here submitted. Other points still remain to be noticed, but these for the present will suffice.

Nov. 2nd., 1877.

B.

THE Woman's Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for the Synod of Albany, with its Troy branch, collected nearly \$6,000 for Foreign Missions last year.

REMINISCENCE OF HUGH MILLER.

While in Callhness, Scotland, in the year 1848, the writer found a large fossil embedded in a flagstone of the old red sandstone of the country, and not long after sent Mr. Miller a letter to Edinburgh giving some description of it, and asking his opinion regarding it, concluding with these words: "There is one point on a very different subject respecting which had I five minutes fight in front, I would have a regular battle with you, the distance at present being too great to get a good blow at you."

To the communication so far as the stoney organisa was concerned, Mr. Miller sent an immediate answer in the following words:—"It is, I am afraid, scarce possible to determine a fossil from a mere verbal description unless it resemble some familiar object so closely that the illustration has all the effect of a drawing; I am, however inclined to think that the large fossil to which you refer will turn out to be the frontal buckler extending from the nape to near the snout of a gigantic *Asterolepis*."

Months thereafter, in one of his periodical geological tours to the north, Mr. Miller called to see the fossil at the writer's home at Keis, and at once pronounced it to be the frontal buckler of a gigantic *Asterolepis* according to the conjecture in his letter, with this difference, that it was the front part of the buckler, inclusive of the snout. Expressing himself highly gratified with the sight, he added, that until just at present that one has been received in the British Museum, there had been none hitherto seen out of Russia, so large and complete as this. At his suggestion it was presented along with other fossils to the Free Church College Museum, Edinburgh, where they were welcomed as a very interesting and valuable acquisition, which the letter of acknowledgment from Principal Cunningham amply attests.

Accompanying Mr. Miller on his way to his destination for the night in Wick, the writer alluded to the point referred to in the end of his letter. "Let us hear it," said Miller; "differences of opinion are very common." "In your public writings" it was answered, "you speak rather slightly or not favourably of the attainments of the Reformers in some aspects, particularly at what is called the second Reformation in the United Kingdom." At this, in an instant without any warning, notwithstanding the pile of geological stones and implements on his back, up went his arms, which with clenched fists, he swung around, and plied on the vacant air no doubt in regular pugilistic fashion; all the muscles of his powerful frame being called into action and his eyes aglow with unmistakable indications of a rare power of mind and spirit within, while firmly and energetically he declared, "I am a friend to the attainments of the Reformers, yet think they were premature in entering into covenant at the time. The nation was not ready for it." He was met calmly and not at all in the pugilistic attitude, in words to this effect: "There was much in the Jewish nation,—whom God had designed to be an example to other nations in duties of a moral kind, and among whom he first instituted the moral-natural ordinance of covenanting,—that was unsuitable and even hostile to the performance of so solemn a duty as entering into covenant at the times it was gone about, yet the Reforming Kings with the advice or concurrence of prominent public servants of God, called the people to the discharge of the duty, and it was done. In like manner, in the United Kingdom, —which was bound to serve the author of all its mercies in the performance of national and social duties of his moral law, and when visited by the light of his word, and when the representatives of the nation, and large numbers of the people were turned to the Lord, as then took place, was bound to perform the moral-natural duty of engaging in the divine strength, or covenanting to so serve Him, as much as ever the Jewish nation was,—although there had been at the time of entering into covenant much existing that was unsuitable and hostile, the reforming civil rulers, the estates of parliament, and a vast number of all ranks and classes of the nation and Church, entered into the very solemn and important engagement. Remember too that the covenants were entered into not merely as a protection to reformation already attained, but also as a means of further reformation and reviving. So the result was, more and more reformation for a time, in the still more evident measure of the divine presence realized as ever of old, on like occasions. The covenants were not a failure, though the great work of God, on which they had so much influence;