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CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER.

	PAGE
I. The Origin and Growth of the Present School System of England and Wales	113
II. State of Education in Newfoundland	117
III. PAPERS ON CANADIAN SUBJECTS.—(1) Celebration of the Second Centenary of Bishop Laval's Landing at Quebec. (2) Universities of Laval and McGill Colleges. (3) Toronto University Library. (4) Early Canadian Newspapers. (5) Completion of Brock's Monument	118
IV. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.—No. 16. The Hon. George Crookshank. No. 17. Denison Olmsted, LL.D. No. 18. Oscar I. King of Sweden and Norway	111
V. PAPERS ON THE WAR IN ITALY.—(1) Statistical Account of the Italian States. (2) The Kingdom of Sardinia. (3) The Course of the War in Italy. (4) Celebrated Armistices. (5) The Five Great Powers of Europe	122
VI. PAPERS ON PRACTICAL EDUCATION.—(1) The Government of Children in Public Schools. (2) Notes of a Lesson on Tobacco	123
VII. MISCELLANEOUS.—(1) Our Country and our Queen. (2) The Queen, as Daughter, Mother, and Grandmother	125
VIII. EDUCATIONAL INTELLIGENCE.—Canada: (1) U. C. College, Toronto. (2) St. Michael's College, Toronto. (3) Model Grammar School for Upper Canada. (4) Toronto City Schools. (5) Queen's College Grammar School, Kingston. (6) School Pic-Nic at Kingston. (7) Levying County School Assessments on Townships. (8) Endowment of Colleges. United States: (1) School Taxes in New York. (2) What Ohio is doing for School Libraries. British: (1) Commemoration Day at Oxford	125
IX. LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INTELLIGENCE.—(1) One who has Whistled at the Plough. (2) Monument to the late George Stephenson	128
X. ADVERTISEMENTS	128

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE PRESENT SCHOOL SYSTEM OF ENGLAND & WALES.

A RECENT ADDRESS BY SIR JAMES SHUTTLEWORTH, BART.,
(Late Secretary to the Privy Council Committee on Education.)

In the commencement of his remarks, Sir James thus pointed out the different positions occupied by the Government and the religious denominations. The Governmental authority, he said, was purely secular—the other was strictly spiritual. The civil power desired to avoid all interference in religious teaching, but sought to protect the rights of conscience by securing perfect liberty to the parent to select the school, and to regulate the religious instruction of his child; whereas every religious communion watched with jealousy every interference of the State which might, even indirectly, limit its power over the school. Each communion regarded the school as the nursery of the congregation, in which its children and youth were to be trained, not simply in the rudiments of Biblical and catechetical knowledge, but in those sentiments, without which mental cultivation does not develop into a Christian life.

FIRST EXPERIMENT OF A GOVERNMENT NORMAL SCHOOL IN ENGLAND.

When, therefore, in 1839, the government announced to Parliament an experiment in a Normal School to be founded by the Committee of Council, the instruction in religion was to be distinguished as consisting of what was general,—or what was accepted throughout Christendom as the foundation of

Christian morality and doctrine,—and secondly, of what was special, or of those matters of instruction which were the characteristic distinctions of separate communions. This Minute disclosed the mode in which the Government desired to promote general religious instruction; and to protect the rights of parents and of religious communions in bringing up their children and youth in their own forms of faith and worship. The Executive thus sought to give proof of its intention to carry into execution the declaration made by Lord John Russell, in his letter to Lord Lansdowne, that it was her Majesty's wish that the youth of this kingdom should be religiously brought up, and that the rights of conscience should be respected. But, viewed from the position occupied by the heads of the religious communions, the mode by which the government sought to accomplish these objects excited the most lively alarm.

OPPOSITION OF THE FIRST GOVERNMENT PROPOSITION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

That the State should charge itself with the training of teachers was apparently to declare that teachers should no longer occupy a position in the religious organisation near to that of the pastor. The teacher might train his scholars in all the common rudiments of faith and duty, unexceptionally, under the guidance of local managers, representing our common Christianity; but he became a part of the civil organisation of the country. The managers might exercise the utmost vigilance against everything which could sap the foundations of our ancestral faith. This might be done universally with success and without reproach. But the doubt remained, whether such a training would as effectually prepare the scholars for those acts of worship which are, in the great mass of the people, not simply significant external signs, but the means by which a religious life is fostered. This doubt was genuine and legitimate. I am not speaking my own opinion, but this was the genuine conviction of the communions of Great Britain. In order to give the fullest effect to teaching of religion in schools, they claimed the liberty to present truth with that earnestness and sentiment which faith gives to practical instruction in the duties of life. The proposal of the government, therefore, met so general an opposition from the religious communions that, notwithstanding the desire which probably existed in the House of Commons to take the first step towards founding a common school, it was felt that this plan could not be carried into execution. The Ministry itself staggered under the blow which