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## The Educational Weekly,

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With this number of our journal commences a new volume; and it being also the first number issued in the year 1887, we take the opportunity of expressing our wishes that our friends and readers may enjoy a prosperous and HAPPY NEW YEAR.

It is not perhaps strange, though it certainly is deplorable, that in this vast Dominion where there are innumerable matters of vital national importance for the Government to consider, the whole sphere of politics is at the present moment taken up with emotions of a wholly ephemeral and altogether trivial character. With millions of acres waiting for cultivation, with enormous areas practically uninhabited, with non-computed square miles of forest, with inestimable mineral wealth, with numerous insufficiently-recognized channels for foreign trade, and with fresh channels springing into existence, with new industries just beginning to attract notice—industries such as fruit-growing, stock-raising, meat, fruit and fish-exporting,—with, in short, national wealth in abundance of every conceivable kind lying not only latent but dormant, what a lamentable fact it is that what chiefly divides Conservatives and Liberals in Canada are questions concerning matters which, compared with the true interests of the country, appear trifling and childish to a degree. Whether a rebel who was executed a year ago was justifiably or unjustifiably executed; whether the community shall be made to drink tea, coffee, and water only, or shall be permitted to choose its own beverages; whether one section of the people, divided off from the others by re-

ligious opinions, have or have not encroached upon the due rights of those who think differently from them in matters theological; whether or not the Warden of a certain jail was persecuted by such sect; these and such like subordinate matters constitute what goes by the name of "politics." Some of these could doubtless by specious reasoning be raised to the rank of great state problems demanding speedy solution: the Riel question probably some think the nucleus of that greater question of ethnical differences, the Roman Catholic versus Protestant questions the nucleus of religious differences; prohibition the nucleus of public morality. But very few, I venture to think will thus regard these. The greater part of the public will surely see in them only party cries. Neither side will agree to sink its peculiar views for the sake of the country the welfare of which is the pretended object of both. It may be just within the extreme limits of possibility that each party thinks it is in reality doing its utmost for the benefit of that country, but the facts are very strongly against such a supposition. Both appear blind to the fact that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Of all these trivial points of dispute perhaps the most trivial are those concerning Separate Schools, Scripture Selections, Text-books. As we have before said, they are little more than party cries.

THE Christmas is not properly a Christian tree at all according to a writer in the *Cornhill*, but a heathen one. It does not belong, by right, to any other European families than those of Germanic and Scandinavian origin. Kelts and Slavs and Latins knew nothing of it, and if it has found its way into France and Italy, even into England, it is an importation. The Christmas tree was certainly unknown to our forefathers. The writer remembers when his parents, who had spent many winters in Germany, first introduced it, some forty-five years ago, into England, what astonishment it created, what sur-

prised delight it afforded. The relic of the Christmas tree with us is the ash fagot. The Germans when they accepted Christianity brought the yule tree into their new religion, and gave it a new significance. The missionaries to the Anglo-Saxons denounced it, and made every good Catholic hack the idolatrous symbol in pieces, and burn it at Christmas, in token that the Holy Child had destroyed heathenism. Among the Scandinavians, and probably among the Angle Saxons, the ash was the sacred tree. Yggdrasil, the world tree, was, according to the Edda, an ash with three roots, one in heaven, one in hell, and one on earth. On the tree branches sat an eagle, along them ran a squirrel, and about its roots, gnawing into them, was coiled a great serpent. The serpent and the eagle are ever in strife, says the younger Edda, and the squirrel runs between them trying to make peace. But probably the sacred tree among the Germans was a pine. Tacitus speaks in his annals of a temple that the Marsii, a mid German race, called Tafana, *i. e. fanum tauc*, made to resemble the earth. Tanne is pine tree, and the words of Tacitus have been supposed to refer to a sacred inclosure about a monstrous pine dedicated to the earth goddess. In one of the Wartburg Minnesinger's lay we have lines about the world tree long after its real meaning was lost:

"A gallant tree is growing high,  
A garden gay adorning,  
Its roots run down to hell below,  
Its crown to heaven above doth throw,  
Where God doth sit in golden glow;  
Its branches take morning;  
Its branches spread the whole world through,  
Distilling manna, dropping dew,  
And birds thereon are singing."

Otfried, in the ninth century, sings of the cross in similar strains, deriving his ideas from Yggdrasil, which he translates into the tree of life in the garden of the church—the cross. So also Alcuin, writing among the Franks, says of the cross, "Its position is such that the upper portion reaches the skies, the lower portion touches the earth, the roots reaches to hell. Its branches extend to all parts of the earth."