

Religion in Public Schools.

The discussion on secular education in its relation to morals and religion before the recent Educational Association at Truro was one of great interest. Instead of the one-sided treatment that this subject usually gets at synods and similar gatherings, there was the fullest measure of freedom in the discussion, which was participated in by leaders of different denominations and by at least one layman. There was no heated controversy; and the courtesy and breadth of view which marked the interchange of opinion might well serve as a model in the discussion of a subject which too often calls forth acrimony and ill-feeling. The brief extracts on another page recall but a few points in the addresses that were listened to with marked attention.

The statement made by Rev. Dr. Kierstead, that we need not be too much alarmed about religion in our schools, is one that will appeal strongly to those who believe that the state is doing the best possible for the education of the masses. Occasionally strong statements are made, showing that the students in our schools are unfamiliar with the literature of the Bible, with its quotations and allusions. But it does not follow that the term "Godless" should be applied to these schools. If religion were—what it is not—a matter of words and phrases, there might be some ground for the accusation. The vast majority of our teachers are Christian men and women, whose character and influence are a daily object-lesson, and whose teachings are for love, obedience, truth, honor, sobriety of life, with all that enters into the spirit of the teachings of the Great Teacher. Their work tells, as does that in the Christian home, in the pulpit, and in the Sabbath school.

The strongest religious teaching, and the most lasting, is that which is done at the mother's knee, without formality, and with a love and tenderness that passes understanding. And it will always be so.

The masterpieces of English literature are read in school with minute comment and textual criticism. Does this lead to an overmastering desire on the part of the student to read the best literature after leaving school? In nine cases out of ten, no. The study of phrases and textual criticism are not the chief things. There must be the willing contact on the part of the student with the thought and spirit of the author, a desire for good literature as well as

the ability to read it thoughtfully and with pleasure. And this ought to be true of the Bible if it were used as a text-book in schools.

A writer in the June REVIEW, in giving the impressions of a leading authority on religious teaching in German schools, says: "Religious teaching to be of any value must be taught by a man who believes what he is teaching, and it must carry conviction into the hearts and minds of his pupils. The great majority of teachers here do not believe as literally true the Old Testament stories, and as they inevitably show the pupils their own skepticism, an injustice is forced on the teachers, and a much deeper skepticism probably instilled into the child's mind." Our teachers are undoubtedly more orthodox than those in Germany; but the kind of teaching that the Bible requires in schools is that the one who teaches it shall have his mind made up on the vital points of religion. Without this there would be very poor teaching indeed; and if the teacher's mind is made up, it will certainly not be in agreement with the minds of all the parents of the children whom he teaches. Sectarian differences would be the result, and these should have no place in our schools.

The Bible may be taught at the mother's knee, in the family circle, from the pulpit by simple, clearly expressed truths fitted to impress children as well as adults, by the great army of Sabbath school teachers, and by the still greater army of public school teachers who practise its precepts.

Our present school system provides a Christian non-sectarian education, which is all we can reasonably hope for from a system framed and partially supported by the state. Is not this better than to have the Bible introduced shorn of its vitality by eliminating from it what will suit the denominational conscience?

"Even the reading of the Bible without comment is sectarian teaching," said Archbishop Magee (Anglican). "For I ask in the first place, what Bible is to be read in the schools? Is the Bible to be read from the authorized or Roman Catholic version? If from the former it is decidedly sectarian as regards the Roman Catholic, who will not accept that version; and if from the latter it is sectarian as regards the Protestant. Is it to be from the Old Testament and New Testament? Then it is sectarian as regards the Jew; and if from the Old Testament only, then it is sectarian as regards the Christian, who demands the New Testament also. You cannot read the Bible in the school without teaching certain opinions about the Bible as held by different sects, according to the nature of the Bible you use."