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Editorials.

RELIGIOUS TEACHING IN THE SCHOOLS.

THE question of religious instruction in the Public Schools is just now, and is likely to be for many days to come, one of the most difficult of all the public problems which the Government and Parliament of Great Britain have to solve. There are also just now many indications that the problem has not yet been conclusively solved in Canada. We do not now have in mind specially the Manitoba difficulty, which is of a somewhat peculiar nature, and requires special treatment. The promise of the new Government, and the hope of its supporters, is that a way out of the difficulty, fairly satisfactory to all moderate and reasonable men, may be found, without coercive action on the part of the Dominion, or resistance, passive or active, on the part of the province more immediately concerned. Whether that hope is, or is not, to be realized, time will tell.

No serious-minded or thoughtful parent can doubt that it is most desirable that training in the fundamental principles of

religion should, as far as possible, go hand in hand with what we call secular training, in the education of the child. The difficulties are mainly practical. They are the outgrowth of the connection of our schools with the State, and are due partly to the fact that the religious population of the State is broken up into a large number of churches or denominations, differing more or less widely in creed and practice, and partly to the fact that not all the population of the State, in other words, not all of those who rightly enjoy the full privileges of citizenship in a free state, are religious at all, in the sense in which Christians understand the word, while many of those who are not religious would object strenuously, as they would have a perfect right to do—as many are now doing in England—to having any of the dogmas which constitute the creeds of the churches instilled into the minds of their children during their years of immaturity. There is also another considerable and influential class composed of persons who are strictly and zealously religious, who no less strenuously object to religious instruction in State schools, on the ground that true and healthful religious instruction can be given only by those who are themselves individually and sincerely religious; that the State, *i.e.*, the Government of the day, is not necessarily composed of such individuals; and that, if it were, it has no adequate means, without trenching upon the domain of conscience which is outside its sphere, of ascertaining that those whom it admits by certificate to the ranks of the teaching profession are thus fitted by personal religious experience to impart religious instruction.

The objections to religious teaching in the Public or State school are so clearly and forcibly summarized in a letter which recently appeared in the London (Eng.) *Chronicle*, that we cannot do better than print it for the information of those who may be studying the question, as a brief but fair presentation of the argument on one side of the question. The writer is Mr. George Russell, who avows himself a member of the Established Church:

"Everyone who believes in religion must, I imagine, wish children to be religiously brought up. The ideal condition of things would be where the whole State consisted of Christian men, and, professing the same religion, brought up all its children therein. But this is Utopia. As a matter of fact, we have in England today upwards of a hundred forms of religion, and this makes any national system of religious education, in my judgment, impossible. For example, I am a firm believer in the spiritual claims and the doctrinal system of the Church of Eng-

land; but I think it unjust, and therefore I do not wish, to teach Baptismal Regeneration with money taken from Baptists and Independents; nor, on the other hand, do I wish the infallibility of the Pope to be taught with money taken from me. But many of our Nonconformist friends say that although we are split up into a hundred sects we can all unite in teaching children 'Undenominational' or 'Unsectarian,' or 'Undogmatic' religion. But is this possible? If, laying aside all questions of Church government, sacraments, ministry, and the like, we teach children that Jesus Christ is their Saviour, we touch at once the most vital and also the most controversial of dogmas. If we teach them that there is a God, we touch the foundation of all dogmas. If we go on to teach that God is our Father, that He sees what we do, and will treat us accordingly, we plunge at every step deeper and deeper into dogma. For myself, the Christian religion, with its fundamental dogma that Christ is God, is as vital air, and I am more certain that I believe in it and trust it than that I have hands and feet. But I do not think it just, and therefore I do not wish, to teach the Godhead of Christ with money taken from the Jews. I do not wish to teach the doctrine of the Holy Trinity with money taken from Unitarians. I do not wish to teach the existence of God and a future life with money taken from Atheists and Agnostics. And if, in order to be 'Unsectarian,' 'Undenominational,' and 'Undogmatic,' we abstain from teaching any of these things, what is left? What has become of that 'Unsectarian religion' which we were all to agree in teaching, and which the State was to offer to its children as their guide in life and death? All that is left is a bare system of morality; and morality, deprived of its authority in the revealed will of God, may be many things, but is assuredly not religion."

The arguments in favor of religious instruction in the schools, provided such instruction can be given without violating any sound principle of government, or interfering with any right of conscience, are so familiar and so obvious that it seems unnecessary to take space for a formal summary of them here.

To many who may be struggling with these conflicting views, and finding it hard to reach a clear opinion on either the one side or the other, another question is pretty sure to present itself. Do not these formidable difficulties arise chiefly from the assumption that the education of the young is primarily a function of the State? Is not this a mistaken assumption? Most persons will, we think, admit on reflection that education in all its forms is primarily and naturally the function of the parent. The interest of the State in this matter is merely secondary and derived. It grows out of its natural right of self-protection. The pros-