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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ONTARIO

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inducing children to entertain the conception of God discussed above. With regard to that conception, one through which the race has passed, we may say with confidence. "Better for our children no idea of God, than such an idea."

There remains the question whether any other conception of God should be taught to children before they have reached, let us say, the age of fourteen. The traditional answer to this query is in the affirmative. But, in this instance as in many others, the traditional opinion has never been submitted to an adequately serious and systematic criticism.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ONTARIO

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Public education in Canada is entirely under the control of the provinces except that the Dominion Government has the right to interfere for the protection of the rights held by the religious minority of any province previous to Confederation. In Ontario the Roman Catholics have the right to their proportion of school taxes for the maintenance of separate schools wherever the number of Catholic families is sufficient. Such schools exist in most of the towns and cities and in many rural districts. They are not included under the title "public schools."

Throughout its history, there has been in the public school system of Ontario a clear recognition of the importance of religion in the life of the individual and of society. The schools have represented a religious ideal of life. In the early days most of them were either the creation of the church or were at least inspired by religious interests. In the formative period, when the transition was being made from a series of isolated efforts to an organized educational system representing the spirit of the province and adequate to the needs of all, the man who was the guiding spirit of it was himself one of the religious leaders of the day. Egerton Ryerson believed and openly declared that education not based on

religion and permeated by it was a hopeless failure. Every parliamentary debate, every school law passed, every declaration of the churches, every council of the teachers, bears witness to the presence of this attitude.

Coupled with this point of view we find a strict maintenance of the principle of separation of church and state. There is a serious determination that the religious scruples of every individual and denomination shall be absolutely safeguarded. Sectarianism in the schools is definitely forbidden. From an early time provision has been made that "no pupil in a public school shall be required to read or study, in or from, any religious book objected to by his parent or guardian." The schools are under the control of neither church nor creed, and no religious requirement is exacted of any pupil, teacher, or administrator. The schools are the people's schools and adherents of any denomination, or of none, are entitled to the benefits of the system.

The present law is as follows:

"(1) (a) Every Public School shall be opened with the reading of the Scriptures and the repeating of the Lord's Prayer, and shall be closed with the Lord's Prayer or the prayer authorized by the Department of Education; but no pupil shall be required to take part in any religious exercises objected to by his parent or guardian.

"(b) (i) In schools without suitable waiting-rooms or other suitable accommodation, if the parent or guardian demands the withdrawal of a pupil while the religious exercises are being held, such demand shall be complied with, and the reading of the Scriptures shall be deferred in inclement weather until the closing.

"(ii) To secure the observance of this regulation, the teacher, before commencing a religious exercise, shall allow the necessary interval to elapse, during which the children or wards of those who have signified their objection thereto may retire.

"(c) If the parent or guardian objects to his child or ward taking part in the religious exercises, but directs that he shall remain in the school-room during these religious exercises, the teacher shall permit him to do so, provided that he maintains decorous behaviour during the exercises.

"(d) If, in virtue of his right to be absent from the religious exercises, any pupil does not enter the schoolroom in the morning till the close of the time allowed for religious exercises, such absence shall not be treated as an offence against the rules of the school.

"(e) When a teacher claims to have conscientious scruples in regard to opening or closing school as herein prescribed, he shall notify the Board to that effect in writing; and it shall then be the duty of the Board to make such provision as it may deem expedient for the carrying out of the requirements of (1) (a) above.

"(2) (a) The Scriptures shall be read daily and systematically. The parts to be read may be taken from the book of selections adopted by the Department for that purpose, or from the Bible, or from the list of the Selected Scripture Readings of the International Bible Reading Association, as the Board by resolution may direct.

"(b) The Board may also order the reading of such parts by both pupils and teachers daily at the closing of the schools, and, in addition, the repeating of the Ten Commandments at least once a week, and the memorization of passages selected by the Principal from the Bible.

"(c) If the Board does not pass the resolution provided for in (a) above, the teacher shall make the selection himself after duly notifying the Board of his intention, but such selection shall be subject to revision by the Board at any time."

The Department of Education assists in the carrying out of this plan by distributing, through the inspectors, to the teachers a list of the selected Scripture readings mentioned above. The Department itself supplies a book of selections for those who care to use it. Finally, the teachers are required to state in the annual report whether or not the school has been opened and closed with prayer, and whether the Bible or the Scripture selections were used.

The last report issued by the Minister of Education furnishes the school statistics for the year 1913. From this report we learn that 45.87% of the schools used the authorized Scripture selections, 70.94% used the Bible and 94.61% were opened and closed with prayer.

The method of conducting the exercises varies somewhat with different schools. Many of the teachers encourage the pupils to bring their own Bibles to school. In such cases the reading is usually either in concert or alternately. Some teachers wish to select the readings rather freely and for this reason prefer that the pupils should merely listen to the reading. To avoid sectarian differences the teachers are expected to read without comment.

Most of the teachers seem to value these exercises rather highly. Some are rather indefinite as to the basis of this judgment but others feel that they have tangible evidence for it.* The attitude developed by this opinion is important. If they regarded it as a mere formality they would probably conduct it in a perfunctory and lifeless manner that would be valueless or even harmful. On the contrary we usually find the teachers conducting the exercises in harmony with their conception of its importance. The pupils seem to respond to this attitude. Some teachers add singing to the opening exercises, and for this purpose use is often made of a hymn. In the kindergarten this is required.

A fair average of the amount of time given to the religious exercises would probably be not less than ten minutes each day. When it is remembered that there are 9,894 teachers and 416,434 pupils in the public schools of Ontario the importance of this item becomes very evident.

In response to a rather definite expression of feeling by both the teachers and the religious leaders of the province that the pupils were in need of better knowledge of the Bible, advantage was taken

*Space does not here permit a discussion of this evidence. The writer proposes to publish later a more detailed examination of the whole topic.

of the preparation, a few years ago, of a new series of readers, to include in them many selections from the Bible. These are studied for their literary merit and also for their religious and ethical value.

In the lower grades of the school large use is made of Biblical stories in the study of history also. In Form I* the list includes: Moses in the Bulrushes, his Childhood, the Burning Bush, the Crossing of the Red Sea, the Tables of Stone; Joseph's Boyhood Dreams, Joseph sold into Egypt, the Famine, the Visits of the Brethren; David and Goliath; Samson.

In Form II:

Abraham and Lot, Joshua, David and Jonathan, David and Saul, Ruth and Naomi, Daniel.

The school is expected to definitely provide for the moral education of the pupils. "The teacher shall give instruction in moral principles and practices and good manners, incidentally from current incidents, from the lessons in literature, history, etc., by anecdotes and didactic talks, by his selection of supplementary literature, and by his own example as well as by precept."

In addition to this the curriculum itself is expected to yield results in the development of moral character. This is particularly true of the readers. It is obvious that many of the selections included in them have been chosen for their ethical value.

Recently provision has been made for more definite moral instruction. A series of readers has been prepared known as "The Golden Rule Books." These contain stories of moral interest and value and many patriotic selections. They are to be read in the class as Supplementary Reading.

Finally, provision is made to correlate the work of the school with that of the church. There was mentioned above the method whereby the daily readings in many schools are those that parallel the International Uniform Sunday School Lessons. There is also a provision for making every clergyman an official visitor to the schools of his community. The number of these visits in the last report was 2823. Of the visits of the clergymen only 721 are reported from the towns and cities while the villages and rural districts report 2102. Another clause allows the clergyman to give religious instruction in the school building after school hours to the pupils of his own denomination. This privilege is not used at all in the cities and only slightly in the rural districts.

Thus we see that the Department of Education of the province not only allows for religious exercises in the schools but definitely

*The public school course is divided into four divisions called Forms.

provides for and actually encourages them. The matter is not allowed to go by default. The people of the province have made it evident that they wish that the spirit of the schools should be religious, and the government has made provision for the full expression of the will of the people. The teacher is held responsible for worship unless he definitely declines to conduct it. In such cases the responsibility is placed on the local school board whose members are the representatives of the people.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING CHILD CHARACTER*

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We can note definitely the effect of "social hindrances" upon the personalities of children; dwellers in congested centers, housed in dark and insufficient quarters, denied pure air and playgrounds, and many of them forced into wage-earning toil almost as soon as they are released from the swaddling clothes of babyhood.

Let us realize that poverty, while the chief contributing cause, is but one element in the depravity and distress found in tenement life. The tenants of the slums are poor, but poverty does not necessarily create insanitation nor breed immorality. Virtue abides as constantly in homes of poverty as in homes of wealth. The poverty that sends a family into cheap rooms for a shelter does not radically injure their personalities, until we reach the plane where the house is unfit for habitation from insanitary conditions, or the human associations are to minds and spirits what darkness and sewer-gas are to physical life.

Environment is one of the greatest of the factors which determine the welfare of any family. If bad, environment is a terrible handicap in the race of life; if good, it is a tonic to the home and to each individual. Environment often disintegrates family life and ruins all its members. Homes close to saloons, gambling dens, and disorderly houses, are like the villages on the side of a volcano—liable to be destroyed at any time.

Every social hindrance in the congested centers trains its heaviest batteries on the mother and the children. In a sense, the

*The first part of Dr. Slingerland's paper, presented in full at the Buffalo convention, surveyed the actual conditions of city life in congested districts.