

Religious Teaching in State-aided Schools.

scholar therein in religious knowledge, or in any religious subject or book:"¹ nor is any grant made in respect of religious subjects:² and ¹⁰

(3.) The control is vested in the respective Boards and managers; subject only, in the case of Boards, to the (a) approval of the by-laws by higher authorities, and (b) the restraining sections of the main Act.³

It therefore rests entirely with the Boards and managers to order and regulate, or prohibit, religious teaching.

The restraining sections are—

- (a) "The conscience clause,"⁴ applicable to all elementary schools receiving State aid;
- (b) The section prohibiting "any religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination,"⁵—which affects Board schools only;⁶ and
- (c) The proviso that no by-law can be made preventing the withdrawal of any child from any religious observance, or instruction in religious subjects, or requiring any child to attend school on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs⁷—which, of course, affects Board schools only.

The regulations on this subject must be conspicuously put up in every school.⁸ In some schools—although comparatively very few—no religious teaching is given.⁹ The object aimed at by the Legislature has been, apparently, to enact nothing affirmatively, except liberty. But (a) negatively, to permit, in Board schools, such religious teaching as "shall have nothing in it to which any one who professes any religion at all can make any definite objection;"¹⁰ and (b) in any voluntary State-aided schools, such religious teaching as the managers decide.¹¹

So that the statutory provisions have been a compromise—a concession strangely inconsistent with an established national church. Indeed, as was pointed out at the Church Congress, held in 1884 at Carlisle, the Act of 1870 effected the disestablishment of religion in State elementary schools.¹²

The results of the law, so far as I can ascertain, are now given.

(1.) By a return made to the House of Lords in 1884,¹³ it appears that—

- (a) In an overwhelming majority of Board schools in England and Wales religious exercises take place, in most instances, daily;¹⁴ and in the very large majority of cases, at the beginning of the morning, or at the close of the afternoon, meeting: whilst in some cases they are practised at the beginning and end of each meeting¹⁵—indeed, as was said at the Carlisle Congress—"the practices of the Boards are most diverse, ranging from the total exclusion of religion to the use of the full liberty which the Act allows;"¹⁶
- (b) The services generally consist of reading the Bible, with or without comments, prayers and hymns; and the majority of the Boards have framed their by-laws on the London ones (herewith):¹⁷ but in some cases the Bible is not read;¹⁸ and particularly so in Wales: where religious instruction is excluded altogether in far more instances, in proportion, than in England.¹⁹

¹ E. Act, 1870, sec. 7, ss. 3.

But on 24 June, 1886, the London Board resolved that a thorough and detailed examination in Scripture knowledge should be held in each school once in three years, and conducted by the Board's Inspectors. See "P.M. Budget," 1 July, 1886.

² E. Act, 1870, secs. 14 and 74.

³ E. Act, 1870, secs. 7, 14, and 74.

⁴ Sec. 7.

⁵ Mr. Cumin's evidence, however, before Royal Commission (1886) should be noted. He holds that there is nothing to prevent a teacher giving the most definite doctrinal teaching—for instance, note his reply to Mr. Molloy.

⁶ Sec. 14, ss. 2.

⁷ Sec. 74, ss. 2.

⁸ E. Act, 1870, s. 7, and note also s. 74, ss. 2.

⁹ See Parl. Return of 15 Jan., 1884.

¹⁰ See "Times," 3 Oct., 1884, report of Church Congress at Carlisle—"The Religious Side of Elementary Education."

In Scotland the Established Church makes small grants towards religious instruction, subject to examination.

¹¹ See "N.C.," Nov., 1882, p. 788.

The religious instruction for the blind at the Normal College, Upper Norwood, is also unsectarian.

¹² See "Times," 3 Oct., 1884.

¹³ 15 Jan.

¹⁴ But for instances of exceptions, see Return, pp. 16, 100, and 181.

¹⁵ See, for instance, pp. 13, 17, and 178; see also p. 7, and also 17 for further exceptions.

¹⁶ See "Times," 3 Oct., 1884.

¹⁷ According to a recent return, the London Board Schools provide accommodation for 390,753 children, supplied at a cost, including land, of £6,003,781.

For details of last half-yearly report see "P.M. Budget," 5 Aug., 1886, p. 24.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Return, pp. 34 and 119, 120.

¹⁹ See Return, pp. 193, 195, 197, and 199; and for unusual regulations see pp. 7, 117, 134, 192, and 198.

For English instances of exclusion, note Birmingham, Middleston River, Atwood Bank, and perhaps a few others.

Boards and managers regulate religious instruction, subject (in case of Boards) to approval of by-laws by superior authorities, and (in all cases) to restraining sections of Acts.

Regulations must be posted. Some schools give no religious instruction. Object aimed at by legislation.

Practical working out of the law.