

Religious Teaching in State-aided Schools.

- (2.) Religious instruction takes place in all voluntary State-aided schools¹ during school hours: and it is said that in them “undoubtedly and of necessity the religious teaching . . . is more distinctive, thorough, and valuable, beside being given to a greater proportion of the children in attendance.”²
- (3.) Virtually few—indeed, the official authorities say no—children are restrained by parents from attending the religious instruction.³
- (4.) The Department is never now pressed with any substantial objection to the present régime.⁴

The opinion of the Secretary to the Department is that “to enforce secularity in State education in Great Britain is neither practicable nor desirable. Religious instruction is now regularly given in school hours, and the objection to any children attending such instruction is one of theory, not of practice. Few are withheld from such instruction—a percentage certainly not worth recording.”

The Rev. Canon Cromwell, Principal of St. Mark's Training College, Chelsea, agrees with the Secretary: and the other officials, with whom I conversed on the subject, spoke similarly. The view of Mr. Matthew Arnold also is to the effect that “the conscience clause” practically disposes in England of the question, and that the course pursued is a fair and advantageous one.⁵ On the other hand, Professor Huxley gives me leave to state his opinion to be “that the principle of strict secularity in State education is sound, and must eventually prevail.”⁶

Thus the situation is that—

- (1.) *De lege*, the English system is — although not compulsorily so yet — essentially secular, notwithstanding, the State recognizes religion as an indispensable element in national life by having an established church; Summary of situation.
- (2.) *De facto*, the system is religious, but so far only as the majority of the burgesses, or ratepayers of districts,⁷ or the managers of State-aided voluntary schools, determine;
- (3.) Where religious exercises are carried out, the feelings of the minority of parents or guardians, in the the case of Board schools, and of the majority or minority, in respect of voluntary schools, are protected,⁸ although where religious exercises are not carried out there is no school provision for the wishes of the minority being regarded;
- (4.) And that—in view of the existing state of thought in England on religious subjects—the law is extensively considered to have proved to be, at all events, a step towards a satisfactory reply in England to the question: “How should religious instruction be treated in a State educational system?”⁹

The main features therefore are—

- (a) Local control in respect of religious teaching, with considerable protection of minorities; and
- (b) Denominational subsidies.

¹ See also *re* religious instruction—

(a) G.R., 1883-84, p. 454; and

(b) Offic. Catalogue as above, pp. 26, 27.

² “N.C.,” p. 788. 7 Nov., 1882, but see next paragraph.

³ See (a) Secretary's opinion below;

(b) Mr. Mundella's speech on “Religious Teaching in Board schools,” “Times,” 16 July, 1883;

(c) Dr. Dale's testimony in N.C.;

(d) The late Mr. Forster's speech in Parl., “Times,” 28 July, 1883, stating Roman Catholic average attendance had risen from 90,000 in 1873 to 163,000 in 1883;

(e) Dr. L. Wiese's book, pp. 255, 256, 203-220, and 253.

But *contra*, see—

(a) “Times,” 14 Sept., 1883, statement by Vicar of Croydon; and

(b) “N.C.,” Nov., 1882, p. 788.

⁴ Note Mr. Mundella's evidence, S.C., pp. 74, 75.

⁵ But Mr. Arnold's comments in his (May, 1886) report on the Continental systems should be carefully perused, especially pp. 8, 12, 14.

⁶ See also Dr. Dale's opinion, “N.C.” as above.

⁷ See E. Act, 1870, s. 29.

⁸ See E. Act, 1870, secs. 7, 14, and 74.

⁹ But see Art. on “The Radical Programme,” in “Contemp. Review,” Feb., 1886, by F. Harrison, p. 277.