

Religion in the Public Schools.

THE following posthumous paper by Alexander Johnston of Princeton, written several years ago, will be read with interest in view of the pending discussion on this subject. Professor Johnston said at the time, in referring to what he had written, "The fact is that the problem is so big and so complicated that I doubt the ability of any human intellect to work it out satisfactorily until facts work it out for us." He added that this was his "notion of the way in which the facts are most likely to work it out."—EDITOR.

IN THE CENTURY for October, 1886, Mr. Matthew Arnold, whether he knew it or not, touched as with the point of a needle the nerve-center of our American common-school system. The system has always been essentially political in its nature. Its reason for existence has been that it was a necessary bulwark for democratic institutions. The State which decides to make the right of suffrage universal is bound by every consideration of self-defense and common prudence to offer every facility for making the popular vote an intelligent vote. The benefits of the system, then, are not a largesse to the recipients, but a bulwark to the State which educates. The reason which is to rebut this must evidently be an uncommonly strong one. It is admitted, for example, that the system is not so good for the encouragement of man's reliance upon his own endeavor as the old system, under which each paid for what education he wished; but the old system would have gone on developing an increasingly numerous class of utterly ignorant voters, who in time would have come to swamp all the intelligent purposes of those whose self-reliance had brought them the educated power of perceiving the real needs of the country. The case is the same with all the other arguments against the system, against its communistic features, its tendency to develop a class whose desires are greater than their ability to gratify them, and all similar objections. Many of these are admitted, but the people are virtually unanimous in their decision that the political benefits far outweigh all the defects of the system, and that it must be continued.

Even among the warmest friends of the system there is an increasing number who are disposed to think that the American common-school system is mischievously one-sided in its neglect of the religious element in man's nature, and that a purely secularized education is really worse than no education at all. It is on this ground that the Roman Church has officially declared its uncompromising hostility to the whole system; but there are not a few Protestants who, while detesting this opposition to the system, begin to see more reason in the basis of it than they have hitherto seen. It is, in fact, of little use to deplore the growing alienation of the body of the people from all forms of religious effort, so long as a vast machine, supported at the public charge, is busily engaged in educating the children of the nation to ignore religion. As well might a father deplore the ultimate malformation of a son whom he had diligently taught to be left-handed, and whose right hand he had tied up as some Indians do the heads of their papooses.

And, further, the State sets itself an impossible task in thus undertaking to ignore religion and religious differences in its present system of common-school in-

struction. All sects will agree in the fundamentals of education: there is no dispute as to whether two and two make four, or whether a finite verb shall agree with its subject. As soon as education rises above fundamentals, trouble begins. The system may undertake to ignore religion; but it cannot make history ignore the facts of religious differences among men, or their consequences. It is almost painfully amusing to notice the methods by which a text-book intended for our common schools is compelled to handle the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the Thirty Years' War, or the English revolution of 1688. The author evidently writes under the sword of Damocles, as the teacher works under the eye of the school trustees, and the pupil gets an abortion, not history. There is hardly a branch of education in which the pupil, as he becomes more advanced, older, and more quick-witted, is not forced to notice some of the devices by which teacher or text-book attempts to evade this persistent question of religion in the common schools; and he is apt to acquire a disrespect for both religion and education, which has its reasons in the latter case, if not in the former.

There are five ways by which the State may approach this most difficult question.

(1) It may follow the French fashion, ignoring every phase of the religious idea, but doing so in a distinctly hostile spirit, which is equivalent to a declaration of war. In this country this may be dismissed at once as out of the question: however sects may be divided, they would be unanimous in their opposition to any such settlement.

(2) It may go on in the present lumbering fashion, ignoring religion, but doing so with every effort at courtesy, patching up sporadic cases of difficulty here and there, but postponing any decisive settlement until the very latest practicable moment. This is the way which has the brightest chances of adoption; but its wisdom is open to serious question. It allows all forms of dissatisfaction to increase in strength, with no counteracting influences. The time must come, in the nature of things, when the question will settle itself, and that too summarily to allow the State to have any intelligent control over it.

(3) Again, the State may attempt to combine the fundamentals of religion into a system which shall at least be acceptable to the mass of the discordant sects, and introduce instruction in this into the common-school system. This would evidently be the most difficult of all the proposals. There are not many authors who would pin their chances of future reputation to their probable success in codifying the essentials of religion so as to satisfy the Roman Catholic, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Baptist, and all the other sects into which Christendom is divided, not to speak of the possible consequences of Chinese and other heathen immigration. But it should be noted that, while a universal code might be impracticable, several codes for cognate groups of sects might be a factor in simplifying the execution of the next proposal.

(4) The State may follow the German system, so sympathetically described by Mr. Arnold in THE CENTURY article referred to above. It may insist upon religious instruction in the schools, dividing the religious instruction into as many groups as may be necessary, but supporting all. This would necessitate a division of taxation, in practice, if not in theory; and this is the fact which would go furthest to make it un-

popular in this country. Protestants settled the country, as a rule, while the Roman Catholics are mainly the later comers; and the former would find it hard to endure taxation a part of the proceeds of which was to go to the support of the schools of the intruding element. Whether the objection be reasonable or not, it is a natural one, and must be taken into consideration.

(5) Finally, the State may voluntarily restrict its sphere of instruction, and teach only the fundamentals of education, with manual or technical training, abandoning all forms of higher education, or of education for culture, to private competition, or to the eleemosynary or religious institutions. This would put an end to State universities, high schools, and all forms of gratuitous education except that which is purely elementary.

Of these five propositions, the first is distinctly offensive, and the second a mere makeshift; the final solution, unless some new and better is devised, must be one of the last three, or a combination of two or more of them. The third and the fourth, or their combination, have already an able defender in Mr. Arnold. And his statement of their results, drawn from personal observation, entitles them to a respectful hearing from every friend of popular education. His argument would bear hardly, however, against the fifth proposition in a point apart from that of religion; and something may fairly be said for it in that respect.

Cardinal Antonelli, according to Mr. Arnold, congratulated his country on the fact that if Italian children were not taught much arithmetic, or grammar, or history, they were taught to distinguish the ugly from the beautiful. And Mr. Arnold evidently thinks that the Italian government here fulfils an important function quite neglected by England and the United States. Both these eminent authorities here betray a curious lack of perception of the basis of and excuse for a common-school system. Says Mr. Herbert Spencer: "Conceding for a moment that the government is bound to educate a man's children, what kind of logic will demonstrate that it is not bound to feed and clothe them?" The answer to all this is easy to him who keeps in mind the purely political basis of the system, who remembers that the State educates for its own preservation, not out of kindness to the pupils or their parents; but Mr. Arnold and Cardinal Antonelli, with their notions of a gratuitous educational system, have no answer. If the State is to educate children to distinguish the beautiful and the ugly, how can it, in common humanity, leave them to live thereafter in ugly clothes, ugly homes, and ugly surroundings? If it should leave them to such a fate, its educational work would be really maleficent so long as it stopped at any point short of pure communism.

Here is, perhaps, the point which, if conceded by Mr. Arnold, would make the fifth proposition viable. The underlying difficulty now is that government education keeps the children so long, in its desire to educate for culture, that private competition, eleemosynary institutions, and particularly religious institutions, have no chance in the race. In our Western States, where common-school education is most carefully and liberally provided for, private schools cannot compete, except in the large cities, and there only with difficulty. If the State were to surrender its pupils at,

say, twelve years' of age, its political functions as an educator would then have been fulfilled, and the religious institutions would have a fair chance to do the religious work which they cannot do now, but which Mr. Arnold and so many others wish to see done. It is above that point that education for culture and the sectarian difficulties of religious education begin together; and the State, if it assumes the duty of the one, must face the problem of the other. Below that point, the difficulty might be met by accepting a percentage of attendance weekly at a denominational school in lieu of part of the common-school course.

Such a policy, enforced at once, would leave a vast body of children without any higher education for many years to come, until the religious bodies should grow up to their new duties. But the adoption of a policy of reduction is entirely feasible; and by carefully graduating its enforcement voluntary religious education might be introduced, in time, as successfully as our voluntary religious organizations have supplanted State-aided religious organizations.

The Moving of the Boston Public Library.

SINCE my article on the Boston Public Library went to press, the whole process of moving, until the last load was delivered safely, consumed five weeks to a day. No loss or breakage is known to have occurred, while the work of nearly all departments went on almost without a break. In March, when the library, with the exception of the special collections, was opened to the public, there stood upon the shelves about 630,000 volumes, of which 479,000 were housed in the new structure. It seems probable in the future that a generous policy will be adopted in regard to the admission of students, in certain worthy cases, to larger privileges, even to the granting of that coveted opportunity, consultation of books upon the shelves. The rush of visitors has been, and for some time will continue to be, enormous, doubtless to the disturbance of wonted quiet in the main reading-hall, where the solid English oak tables are fully occupied by readers thirsty after long abstinence. Messengers now take books from the room of delivery direct to the applicant, who waits at a table numbered to correspond with his slip of application. At the southern side of the hall, in stately oak cabinets, is placed the card catalogue, to which the public, as of old, has the freest access. The book-stacks, I should have said, run around the southern and western sides, and from these stacks issue forth books by means of carriages on the electric railway, veritable "little quicknesses," so charmingly and smoothly do they perform their intelligent work.

The functions of the librarian seem likely to be more definite than heretofore, and hence what has been previously said in regard to his work is subject to essential modification.

It would have taken a gift of prophecy to foretell the new life already beginning to animate this institution, and I must make haste to recall my fears that it was perhaps to recede from its strong position as a library for the people to the cold remoteness of a scholars' retreat. More than ever it promises to be frequented by all classes of citizens, and to keep its old prestige in the sisterhood of American libraries.

Lindsay Swift.