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RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION
IN
SECONDARY FOUNDATION SCHOOLS.
HOW TO DEAL WITH IT.

THE writer of the following brief remarks has been impelled to commit them to print by the reflection that whilst the propriety of allowing the Masters of Primary Schools to give instruction in religion has for the last two years formed a prominent subject of national discussion, the objections which lie against allowing or requiring the Head Masters of Secondary Endowed Schools "to make provision, in conjunction with the Governing Body," for similar instruction, have not, as far as he is aware, received adequate attention.

Under the system which at present obtains in the Secondary Endowed Schools of England, a Head Master of honesty and intelligence is evidently liable to find himself in a dilemma of the following kind; either he must teach the scholars (and whether he does so by explicit inculcation or by the implication of reticence, makes but little difference to the result), at a peculiarly impassionable age, that every detail of the Biblical narrative is truth unquestioned and unquestionable on pain of offending God, and the maxims of conduct therein commended of perfect morality; or he must acquaint them with some at least of the conclusions to the contrary established or advanced by modern criticism. The first alternative, it will be admitted, is not only very unfavourable to the teacher's growth in accuracy of thought on religious topics, and sensitiveness to the responsibilities of his position, but involves the risk of drawing the children of parents of broad and enlightened religious opinions back into the terrifying misapprehensions, to use no stronger word, which it cost themselves possibly years of mental agony and painful study to outgrow. The second alternative would most assuredly involve him in contentions with the Governors of the School and with parents of a narrow, uncultivated, and, by consequence, intolerant type of orthodoxy, whereby would be caused very probably the immediate decadence of the School, and, finally, the ruin of the Head Master by dismissal where possible.

Two courses are open by which the evils indicated may be avoided. Either the curriculum of instruction in these schools may be restricted to secular knowledge, as is the case in the nascent Public Schools and Colleges in New Zealand, among our colonies; or the treatment of the text of the Bible may be conformed in practice to that of the histories of Livy and Herodotus, and the ethical treatises of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, the established conclusions and critical methods of modern science and historical proof being no more ignored, discredited, or suppressed in the case of the one department of study than in that of the other.

It is to be feared that some time must yet elapse before either of these two courses is introduced by legislative enactment into Secondary Endowed Schools. He desires, therefore, to advocate the immediate establishment of a College of Secondary Education, on the Proprietary system, after the model of Cheltenham College, in which the second of the courses defined above, which is also the one which appears to him abstractedly the best, may form the distinguishing feature.

He entertains the conviction that the number of persons has enormously increased of late years, and is daily increasing still more rapidly, who, so far from desiring to see promoted in their children, by the instruction given them in school, a retrogression in religious conceptions from the standard of enlightenment they have themselves attained, desire to see them aided and encouraged in achieving and maintaining a like moral enfranchisement. He is also of opinion that in the foundation of a school of this kind is to be found the remedy for the fact that whereas many of the most able and the most ardent friends of religious enlightenment only achieve late in life the mental development necessary to qualify them for a position in the ranks of its adherents (perhaps but a few years before they are removed from active service by death or the infirmities of advancing years), the champions of obscurantism, obstruction, and intolerance are recruited, owing to the present system of Public School education, by the enlistment of each successive generation in its childhood.