

STATE SCHOOLS A MISTAKE.

LETTER FROM THE REV. JOHN MILLER.

A REVIEW OF MR. BLAINE'S LETTER—NO EDUCATION BY THE STATE—THE TRUE SOLUTION OF THE SCHOOL QUESTION.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

SIR: I have long held a belief which I have looked upon with great suspicion, and which I have been half ashamed to publish. It is that State schools are a mistake, and that Government is a police, and has nothing to do with education. Prudence often keeps such things from being avowed. The star of a certain faith may be so unmistakably not risen that men who have caught a glimpse of its truth will rarely say so, and will prefer to husband their influence rather than throw it away in offending the belief of ninety-nine hundredths of their countrymen.

Ex-Speaker Blaine's letter, however, which your publish in this morning's paper, tempts me more than I can well resist. With the ability that we have learned to expect from that particular quarter, he tells us of "that bitterest and most deplorable" of all national difficulties, and then says very reasonably, "It seems to me that this question ought to be settled in some definite and comprehensive way." And then, as the result which he is "sure will be demanded by the American people," he states the great remedy: "The only settlement that can be final is, the complete victory for non-sectarian schools."

Now, the vice in all this solution of the great national difficulty lies in a mistake as to what constitutes a proper non-sectarian school. The Catholics are right when they labor to show us that the Bible destroys such a school. Undoubtedly it does. It is not their Bible, and, moreover, it is not their plan to teach the Bible at all; and when we cry out against their heresy, our recoil from it may be all very well as a conviction of truth, but is none the less, on that very account, sectarian. We oppress the Catholic, and so to a higher degree the Jew, and so to a still higher degree the Infidel, when we coerce him with a tax, and force him to earn it with his labor, that we may introduce among pupils of the most undefended age what he counts doctrines of imposture. The Bible in public schools, therefore, is a tyranny; and we have but to substitute for it the Koran, or, what is far more probable under our Cis-Atlantic democracy, the "Lives of the Saints," to learn how we would feel, and how our reason would be brightened under a like taxation.

But then, on the other hand, no Bible! Ex-Speaker Blaine may imagine that he would exclude all that is religious. He may argue just as we do that the Bible is a creed, and like the Vedas and the Shasters we have no right in free America to impose it upon the children of the people. And this may be his very hope, that, advancing to the logic of the case, we will cast off all faiths, and reach the entireness of his "settlement" in a "complete victory for non-sectarian schools." But, alas! though this looks so peaceful, no Bible is just as fully sectarian as the Bible itself. Religion is a thing where what is negative is positive, and may become so to the most emphatic degree. I will not suffer my child where there is no Bible. It is a tyranny, as much so as my catechism to a Turk or to a Jew. There is no negative in these things, but a great hieroglyphic teaching that is writing itself upon these children; and no labor in my house, or in the church, can altogether rid the child of the infidel taint that is derived where there is no religion.

Speaker Blaine, therefore, has not disposed of the difficulty. The Catholic is unquestionably right that the Bible is a coercion of conscience when the State enforces it and gives it by law to his child, but I am equally right when I complain of the opposite. There is no middle ground. The State touches religion when it says nothing about religion. Building a system out of the taxes of the people, and driving out of it the religion of the people, is itself a religious tyranny. The solution is—no education by the State. If the State educates, it decrees an eternal quarrel. The Catholic will oppose the Bible. The Protestant will oppose its absence. Both are logical and fair. No compromise is possible. And conscience, as in many a religious war, is really right on either side. That is, granting our freedom in our creed, we cannot consistently assert it without the Bible for me and no Bible for my neighbor—an indulgence of both, of course, impossible under a government system.

With ex-Speaker Blaine, therefore, we hold that the question ought to be settled in "some definite and comprehensive way;" but instead of that settlement being "the complete victory for non-sectarian schools," we hold that it should be the abandonment of schools altogether; the disestablishing of the system as of the Irish Church; the abandonment of all interference, whether Federal or State; the return within the lines of law-making and police; the confession that to educate is necessarily to impart a creed; that to say nothing is to say something, and that, in the matter of religion, of the most effective kind; and that books, like bread and meat, should be brought and served up, not by Congress and the States, but each man for himself, uniting with his neighborhood or his church in the way most to his mind, and in a way that will entirely extract all venom from the conscientious difficulty.

If you will allow me in another letter I would like to show that this is but one of a dozen reasons against Government education; that it is an ephemera in the history of republics; that it carries its destruction in its very germ; that it might do under Erastianism, as in Prussia or the British Isles, or in old colonial Plymouth, but that it will not do under the blaze of liberty; and that though it pleads necessity as a means of intelligence at the polls, yet that very same argument was used in England (and is still used) as a means of upholding the unfairness of the Church, and enforcing the tithes against a majority of the people.

It may not be in our day; but, after immense outlays; after interminable broils; after skepticisms that will ruin the conscience of the State; after political interventions in the schools that will deaden their work and destroy their efficiency for the very object of their creation; after religio-political schemes; and after precedents while the Bible is being introduced that will justify hereafter Mariolatry or the catechism of Trent—we predict one of two results—either the gloomy reign again of a church enforced by the State, or the abandonment, under the very bitterest defeat, of the whole government scheme for a late and discouraging return to the more voluntary system.

JOHN MILLER.

Princeton, Dec. 1, 1875.

THE SCHOOLS PROTESTANT IN SPIRIT

To the Editor of The Tribune.

SIR: Mr. Beecher in his sermon on Thanksgiving day, says: "It is not right that our substantial Catholic citizens should be compelled to send their children to schools where the Bible is read, when they do not believe that the Protestant version is the faithful version of God's will." But does not the same objection hold against nearly all that is said and done in our common schools? Our school system is eminently Protestant; in fact it is the outgrowth of the deep religious sentiment of our Puritan fathers. Its teachers, its textbooks, and, in short, its very atmosphere is Protestant. And this accounts for the deep-seated hatred of the Catholic Church. It does not come primarily from the reading of the Bible; it is a hatred directed against the system itself. The question to be settled is, whether our common school system shall be maintained after its primal form, or whether it shall be changed to meet the views of each new shipload of immigrants.

Again, Mr. Beecher says: "It is not just and fair that I should be taxed for the education of my boy, when I cannot send him to the common school for fear his conscience will be perverted, and where he will be taught the things I abhor." But the same objection holds against all taxes, for the very genius of our Government is anti-Catholic. Many of our laws are in direct antagonism to the doctrines of the Catholic Church. And yet Catholics and Protestants are alike taxed for their support. And as for the consciences of Catholic children being perverted by attending our common schools, it may be said that they are in greater danger from mingling in our society, and breathing the atmosphere of our free institutions. The fact is there is an "irrepressible conflict" between Catholicism and Protestantism, and there can be no settlement until the former renounces some of her haughty pretensions.

Fair Haven, Vt., Dec. 1, 1875.

MAUNEYA.

A fond father wrote: "It generally takes twenty years of training to eradicate the word 'nice' from a woman's vocabulary. The falls of Niagara, the Psalms of David, and the progress of the human race were all nice to my eldest daughter till she got married."