The Education Crisis: A Policy for the Church.

By the Rev. BARTON R. V. MILLS, M.A.

THE withdrawal of the Education Bill will be regretted by many moderate Churchmen. This is not because the Bill itself was one which we approved, but, as amended in the House of Lords, it afforded a possible basis for some sort of settlement of a controversy which threatens to do untold harm to religion and education. Its passage in this amended form would have been a truce which might have led to peace. To obtain this truce, both the authors and the opponents of the Bill were prepared to make great sacrifices. It is, therefore, much to be regretted that the extremists on both sides were able to prevent a compromise. The object of this paper is not to apportion the blame for this result—which is by no means all on one side—but to remind readers of the CHURCHMAN of the great responsibility which the new situation places on us. For it is quite certain that matters cannot remain where they are. The education of our children cannot be left in a state of chaos while theological and political disputants are choosing the ground for their next conflict. Somebody must suggest a definite policy. It is not very likely that the Government will do this—some of its members have practically said so—and it is this that gives the Church its opportunity, for the country will not be content to let things rest; and the victory will be with the side that first produces a reasonable solution of the problem. We as Churchmen shall have a far stronger position as supporters of a well-considered measure than as critics of the proposals of others. The purpose of this paper is to urge Churchmen to use the interval thus allowed to us to consider the lines on which such a measure should be drawn.

I.

The first thing to remember is that it is impossible to maintain the *status quo*. On this point the General Election was decisive. The country has condemned the Act of 1902,

though I by no means admit that it has expressed approval of the late Bill. Moreover, that Act is in itself open to some grave objections. Its great merit is the creation of public authorities, with control of education over large areas, and its putting all schools on a footing of financial equality. These features mark it as a great advance in educational efficiency, but its treatment of the religious difficulty is, to say the least, unfortunate, for it retains the substantial grievances to which both Churchmen and Nonconformists were subjected by the Act of 1870. The former were compelled to pay rates for a form of religious teaching in Board schools which many think unsatisfactory, and were denied the right of giving distinctive teaching to their own children in these schools. The latter were required in most country places to choose between withdrawing their children from all religious teaching and accepting teaching of which they disapproved; and a large number of the head-teacherships in the country were closed to Nonconformists. These grievances were retained by the Act of 1902, when they might have been removed. So this Act gave the minimum of satisfaction to Churchmen, and caused the maximum of irritation to Nonconformists. For these reasons it seems that any settlement of the education question must include substantial alterations in this Act.

II.

It is not nearly so easy to suggest what the settlement should be. The purely secular solution, by which any religious teaching is forbidden, as in France and some other countries, need hardly be considered. Its adoption would leave to Churchmen no alternative but a resistance which would not long be merely "passive." Happily, though secularism has some supporters, it is outside the range of practical politics in this country. The solution offered by the recent Bill—undenominational religious teaching provided by the State—is probably the most popular one at the present moment, and would, of course, be infinitely preferable to secularism. But it is open to the

serious objection of being unworkable. Real religious teaching cannot be given except on the lines of some denomination. The moment that "simple Bible teaching" ceases to be mere morality and history it becomes "denominational"; and if it is given by the regular teacher, we cannot escape from one of two alternatives—either we must question him as to his beliefs, which amounts to a "test," or we must run the risk of his ignoring the fundamental articles of the Christian faith.

A suggestion made by Mr. Chamberlain, and supported by some leading Churchmen, is at first sight attractive. This would restrict the State to the provision of secular instruction, but would allow facilities to all denominations to give their own teaching to those who ask for it. This is also unsatisfactory on two grounds: First, it would leave the very children who most need religious teaching—the children of indifferent parents—without any such teaching at all, because their parents would not demand it. Secondly, if these facilities were given in school hours, they would, in the opinion of many teachers, cause a great deal of confusion. If they were outside those hours they would be worthless. If we had to provide for a population all of whom were members of some religious body, this plan might work. As things are it would probably lead to secularism. It is mainly supported by two very different classes of persons—those who hope thereby to get rid of religious teaching altogether, and those who wish to get full Church teaching for their children, and do not see how to do so under any State system of education. The motives of the former are obvious. The mistake made by the latter is in failing to see that the population is not divided into secularists and denominationalists. Between these there is a large body of persons who will not demand religious teaching for their children, but will not deliberately refuse it at the cost of declaring themselves non-Christians. This is just the class for which the National Church is bound to try to provide.

III.

The question is whether we can do this in any better way than that proposed by the recent Bill. The present writer is of opinion that the best solution would be a modification of the system now in use in Germany and some other European countries. In Germany, religion has always formed part of elementary education, and four or five hours a week are required to be given to its teaching. The object of this is declared to be "to lead the children to a right understanding of Holy Scripture, and of the doctrines of the Church to which they belong, in order to enable them to read the Bible for themselves and to take an active part in congregational work, as well as an intelligent interest in public worship." The introductory chapter of the useful little book from which this extract is taken[1] gives the following information: "Religious instruction in the public schools is given by officers appointed by the various ecclesiastical authorities, viz., in the Evangelical Church by the highest court of the Church . . . in the Roman Catholic Church by the ecclesiastics entrusted by the Church with authority to make such appointments." This was the state of things in 1879, during the anti-clerical administration of Dr. Falk, one of whose orders in the same Code was that "formal religious instruction should be carefully avoided," an order which seems scarcely consistent with the one quoted above. Since 1887, the system has been made more denominational, and now every child in a German school has to be classified according to his religious "confession," and must receive instruction from the authorities of that confession throughout his scholastic career. In one Swiss canton (Zurich) a somewhat similar rule prevails, but there the "denominational" teaching is only given during the last two school years, *i.e.*, from twelve to fourteen years of age. It is worth noticing in this connexion that both Holland and Belgium have, during recent years, made their religious educa-

[1] "Educational Code of Prussian Nation," translated by A. M. Goldsmid (1879).

tion more denominational. In fact—except in England—the whole tendency of the last forty years has been either to denominational teaching or to secularism.

IV.

Now why should not some system like that of Germany be adopted in this country—with the addition of a conscience clause? The effect of this would be that all parents would have to state in what religious denomination they wished their children to be brought up, or that they were secularists. It is to be hoped that few would choose the latter alternative, though in a free country they must be allowed to do so.

Such a system would have several advantages over any other that has yet been proposed.

1. It would secure public control and the freedom of the teacher from "tests." This is a point on which there is a strong feeling in the country, which must be recognised in any settlement that can hope for permanence. If the duty of the Education Authority were confined to making arrangements with the denominations to give religious instruction, and requiring children to attend it, the question of tests would not arise.

2. The religious teaching so given would be definite in its character. The teacher would not have to consider whether what he taught would give offence, because he would be appointed to teach only those who belonged to the denomination which he represented, and to the authorities of which he would be responsible. Such an arrangement would be perfectly fair both to the parents and to the teacher, whereas the present law and the recent Bill are alike in being fair to neither.

3. Such a system should remove any reasonable objection to the provision of denominational teaching by the State. Many of the objections now made are *un*reasonable, and are put forward for partisan purposes. The only course that is really unfair is for the State to favour one denomination at the expense of others—as the late Bill would have done in the case of the

Roman Catholics. And under the system here suggested the duty of the State would not be, as it is in Germany, to control the religious teaching, but simply to give a capitation grant to each denomination to meet the expenses incurred.

If the suggestions here thrown out meet the approval of any large number of Churchmen, is it too much to hope that a Bill embodying them might be introduced into the House of Lords during this year, and that the Church might thus be first in the field with a proposal of its own, designed to settle this great question on Christian and national rather than on sectarian and partisan lines?

Cowper.

By the Right Rev. the LORD BISHOP of DURHAM.

II.

SUCH was the cloud. Did it ever break? Yes, I am able to say that it did. Decisively at last, but only at the very last, it was removed. I possess a precious tradition of Cowper's *closing half-hour* on his death-bed at Dereham. His nephew, John Johnson, told the story some eighty years ago to William Marsh, afterwards Dr. Marsh, of Beckenham, a name of blessed memory. Marsh told it to his daughter, my saintly and venerated friend, Miss Catherine Marsh, still spared, in the goodness of God, at the age of eighty-eight, in her Norfolk home to be a blessing to numberless souls; and Miss Marsh told it a few years ago to me. Cowper lay dying, in extremest weakness; there had not come to him one gleam of hope, and now he was without power to speak. Johnson, "Johnny of Norfolk," his dearly-loved nephew, was watching by him, with thoughts strongly tempted towards a blank infidelity by the sight of such goodness left seemingly so awfully deserted. But now upon a sudden there came a change; the dying face was irradiated as with a surprise and joy "unspeakable and full of glory"; William Cowper