

## ART. VI.—THE MONTH.

THE practical working of the Education Act is a matter of increasing difficulty and importance, and during the past month the discussion respecting it has been brought to a somewhat critical point. The so-called "Passive Resistance" to the payment of the Education Rate has spread in various parts of the country, and the restraints which have followed upon the goods of the recusants have presented scenes which are at least very unpleasant. The practical problem which arises in these circumstances is a difficult one. It is obviously impossible for the authorities to make terms with open resistance to the law; while on the other hand, if the resistance continues, the law will be brought into discredit. It is necessary to say that, as a principle, this passive resistance is perfectly intolerable. It is a flagrant example of a spirit which is tending to undermine all constitutional action. It is another example of the spirit which animates, for instance, the Romanizing clergy in the Church. They have been for some time openly saying that if certain interpretations were put upon the Law of the Church they would refuse to obey, and would take the consequences. They have their consciences, like the Nonconformists, and act, in fact, as Nonconformists within the Church. All legislation, or at least all administration, may be brought to a standstill if the rights of conscience are pressed to this extent. Resistance to an autocratic power is quite a different matter. The very basis of constitutional government is obedience to the law as long as it exists, the remedy for any alleged injustice being found in agitation for alteration of the law. But if the practice be recognised of anyone resisting a law which he may think offends his conscience, the old question recurs, "How is the King's government to be carried on?" As Sir William Anson observed in the House of Commons, the objectors avow their intention of endeavouring to alter the law as soon as they have an opportunity, and they thus recognise that a remedy is open to them, provided they can command the sympathy of their countrymen. If so, why can they not, as good citizens, wait for the opportunity of applying this remedy?

But meanwhile the spectacle of such resistance forces the

matter back upon our consideration, and the heads of the Church, even more than the heads of the State, have been endeavouring to appease the opposition. It seems doubtful whether they have been taking a wise course. Both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London have been urging that, in point of fact, the contributions still incumbent on Churchmen for the maintenance of the fabric of their Elementary Schools more than cover, in practice, the cost of the religious instruction given in them, so that no real charge for denominational teaching is thrown upon the rates. But this, which may be true, does not touch the real grievance which is alleged. That grievance is not merely that a portion of the rate, more or less, goes to pay for Church teaching, but that it goes to support schools which are definitely and entirely Church schools, and which are, in fact, an integral part of the Church system. It is nothing more nor less than the old Church rate difficulty in another form. The Dissenters then refused to pay rates for purely Church purposes. The result was that the rate was abolished, and the expenses it defrayed had to be provided for by voluntary contributions. In this case, the new Act has substituted rates for voluntary contributions in respect of the greater part of the expenses of Church schools, and the contention of the Nonconformists is that, in such circumstances, the schools ought not to remain in the hands of the Church, but should be under the entire control of the public. The Kenyon-Slaney clause has, indeed, much restricted the power of the Church in respect to the actual religious teaching in such schools. But it cannot be denied that, by the predominance given to foundation managers, they remain substantially Church schools, and the gist of the grievance thus subsists. Churchmen may, indeed, well consider that the action of the Nonconformists is very ungenerous in view of the vast contributions which Churchmen have made in the past, and which they will have to make still, in the provision and maintenance of the Church schools. But generosity is not an element to be taken into account in political controversy, particularly where ecclesiastical interests are concerned. The Nonconformists will certainly assert their claim to the utmost under present circumstances; and that claim is, as it was in the case of the Church rates, that public money shall not be applied in the present day to distinctively Church purposes.

All this is intelligible and plausible until we ask what is the alternative which the Nonconformists would adopt. Is there to be any religious teaching in the schools; and if so, what? Is it to be the so-called undenominational teaching of the Board schools? But if that were the teaching

universally enforced by the law, Churchmen would be subjected, as they have been in the past, to precisely the same grievance of which Nonconformists are now complaining. They conscientiously object to undenominational teaching as much as Nonconformists do to Church teaching; and the grievance in their case would be peculiarly aggravated, as the schools in which such teaching would be enforced would have been mainly provided by their contributions in the past, and they would be the largest ratepayers in the present. In fact, if there is to be any religious education in the schools at all, it must be unsatisfactory to one class of ratepayers or another, and on the principles of passive resisters it must be unjust to some class or other. In this dilemma it is thought, in some quarters, that we are forced to the alternative of purely secular education in State-aided schools, leaving all religious instruction to the Church and the various denominations. But it would soon be found that this lands us inevitably in the same difficulty. A purely secular education is impossible. The mere exclusion of religion has its positive as well as its negative side. To bring children up in an atmosphere of thought from which religion is excluded is, in the view of many persons, to exert a disastrously irreligious influence upon their minds. Unless, moreover, teaching is rigidly restricted, which is now impossible, to reading, writing, and arithmetic, subjects like history must be introduced, in which religion must needs enter with full sails; and a Roman Catholic teacher of English history would be exerting mischievous political as well as religious influences. It may safely be said that, in the end, it is impossible to devise any form of instruction in elementary schools which will not offend the religious views or consciences of one class or other of ratepayers; and consequently, if the contention of the Nonconformists is to be admitted, there can never be any system of elementary education which may not justly be met by passive resistance.

These considerations seem to reduce the Nonconformist position, as an abstract principle, to an absurdity, and to show that, if we are ever to have a national system of education, people must be prepared to pay rates for some religious teaching or other which they would not themselves adopt or approve. The practical question, accordingly, must be how to render this unwelcome necessity as bearable as possible. It must, unhappily, be admitted that a considerable section of the clergy at the present time are doing what they can to make the existing arrangement as unbearable as possible. By assimilating their teaching and their ritual as nearly as possible to that of Rome, they are investing Church education

and Church schools with a character which rouses the natural suspicion and apprehension of the Protestant feeling in the country. Purely secular education or a narrow undenominational system would be similarly offensive in their turn. In these circumstances, a suggestion which has been made in a letter by the Archbishop of Canterbury seems to bring the matter to a practical test. He had been invited by a correspondent to adopt the plan of "trusting the people," and he replied that he has personally no objection to doing so, provided the trust be real and absolute—"provided, that is, that the local authorities be left at liberty to exercise unfettered discretion by appointing, as in Scotland, denominational teachers whose qualifications to give religious teaching may be inquired into or tested, and by supporting, as in Scotland, what are virtually denominational schools, where such schools are locally desired, the whole cost of such teachers and such schools, including the buildings, being in Scotland defrayed out of the rates and taxes." In other words, would it be possible to leave each body of managers perfectly free to give such religious teaching as they chose in the schools under their care? And if this were done, and the Church and the Nonconformists were left to decide their differences in each parish or district, would the minority consent to the maintenance by public rates of the system which might thus be determined? It would seem there would be much to be said for such a system, as it would enable each district to have the system of religious education which was most in conformity with the religious views predominant in it, and men might defer more readily to the decision of the majority if they had had a direct voice in its settlement. There is no sign that the Nonconformists will accept the suggestion. But it seems the only alternative to an arrangement under which the grievance now resented by the passive resisters must be borne by some one or other. Under any system that is conceivable, somebody must pay rates for teaching of which he disapproves. It is the turn of the Nonconformists to-day. If they had their way, it would be the turn of the Churchmen to-morrow. The only practical question is, What is the most reasonable or bearable form under which the hardship can be imposed?

When the matter is brought to this point, a consideration must be borne in mind which is, of course, kept out of view by Nonconformists, but which we think those who speak for the Church would be wiser to urge more boldly than at present. That consideration arises out of the position of the Church as established throughout the country, and out of the responsibility which that establishment involves. Every clergyman is solemnly charged at his ordination with the spiritual cure

of all the souls in his parish, and it is a responsibility which is recognised by the State as well as by the Church. But the children of his parish form a momentous part of his charge; and it is in pursuance of the obligation thus imposed that the clergy and Churchmen have been content to make such pecuniary sacrifices in the cause of the schools. Mr. Balfour pointed out, indeed, that it is a responsibility which is restricted by the admitted right of every parent to remove his children from the clergyman's care, just as parents in the wealthy classes place their children under the spiritual charge of the masters of the schools to which they are sent. But there remains, as it were, a permanent balance of responsibility on the part of the clergyman of the parish; and so long as establishment exists, the clergy may fairly expect that this balance will be taken into account in legislation. If, in other words, preference must, from the nature of the case, be given to some form of religious teaching in the parish schools—if that inequality cannot be avoided—it is surely reasonable that the teaching of that communion which, by virtue of establishment, has the main responsibility for the moral and spiritual welfare of the children, should be given the advantage. It is a mistake to argue as if, under present circumstances, Non-conformists could be given entire equality in the matter with the Church. The Church at present holds a position in every parish of prior authority and prior responsibility in regard to the religious welfare of the people; and consequently, if it is given an advantage in the schools, that is no more than it has in other respects, and no more than naturally attaches to its position. The truth is, there are indications that the Nonconformists know perfectly well that what they are really attacking, under cover of the Education Act, is the establishment of the Church. In a direct attack upon that system they are, of course, fully justified. But if, as Churchmen believe, that system is a good one, it has a right to some recognition in the parish schools as well as in the parish churches.

