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"THE DOWN GRADE TO DEISM."

The Rev. John Robertson, of the Free Church, Glasgow, who is known as a preacher of great power, charges the Free Kirk with rationalism in its teachings and subverting the authority of God's Word. He had on this account left the Church and established an independent Presbyterian congregation in the city, and a city temple. The Glasgow Presbytery felt the charge to be so serious that a deputy was sent to the church which Mr. Robertson had left to explain the position of the General Assembly in reference to the Scriptures, and the statement was made that "the Church steadfastly adheres to the doctrine of the Confession in regard to the inspiration, the infallible truth, and the divine authority of the whole Scriptures as proceeding from God, who is the Author thereof." The Rev. Dr. Howie, who made this announcement, said that he was a member of the committee which had made the declaratory act, and that "whatever doubts he had before entering that committee concerning the orthodoxy of the Free Church were dispelled by the deliberations in the committee."

It is surely somewhat remarkable that prominent clergy like Rev. Messrs. Robertson and Howie should have had doubts at all on this subject, and even convictions that the Free Church is Latitudinarian as regards belief in the inspiration of Scripture, if the position of the Church on this point were definitely so orthodox as the Rev. Dr. Howie maintains. Still more remarkable is it that when in the General Assembly the question arises to choose theological professors for the seminaries, the choice should fall, after due deliberation, upon those whose views on the authority of Scripture are quite as lax as those for which Dr. Briggs, of New York, Dr. Smith, of Cincinnati, and Dr. Campbell, of Montreal, have been condemned, the first named by the United States General Assembly, and the other two by their respective Presbyteries.

With such facts in view, even the assurance of Dr. Howie, that the Kirk is sound in doctrine, will scarcely carry conviction to the minds of the public at large. We must confess that we are prone to suspect that this declaration does not give a quite correct view of the belief prevalent in the Assembly.

A recent essay published in the New York Church Union throws some light upon the extent to which the clergy of the Presbyterian church feel themselves bound by such declarations as Dr. Howie has made. The essay is on "Creeds Divisive," and has for author the Rev. Robert Stuart McArthur, of Calvary Church, N. Y.; and in it we are told, seriously, what, indeed, most people are aware of, though the fact has been denied by some of the Presbyterian organs, that the Presbyterians no longer consider themselves bound by the Westminster Confession, or any other creed formula. He argues that the Westminster Confession ought not to be revised, but preserved "intact as a monument to the wisdom and theological learning of its age."

The reason for his advocacy of this view is certainly a curious one. Must the Presbyterians, then, continue to adhere to the old Confession while thus leaving it unchanged? Not at all. He says: "These great creeds do not conserve doctrines. The Westminster Confession does not secure unity now in the Presbyterian Church. Of what practical gain are these creeds to-day?"

Dr. McArthur's idea is that the old creed should be kept on hand as an antiquity merely, not indeed to be believed, but to be admired as a curiosity. He adds:

"The Baptist denomination, for instance, has no creed in the technical sense of the term; and yet with its more than three millions of members in America to-day, it is more nearly a unit in faith and practice than are the churches with their long and short creeds."

As far as the single doctrine of the necessity of immersion as the proper form of baptism is concerned, we have no doubt there is a unity of belief among Baptists, because this is the palmary doctrine of the denomination; but between Hard Shell and Soft Shell Baptists, or Close and Open, Calvinistic, American and Seventh-day Baptists, Campbellites and others among which these three million adherents in America are distributed, the Baptists are about as much split up as are the Presbyterians themselves. There is no doubt, also, that Latitudinarianism has made great progress among them, though not to the same extent as among Presbyterians. The single fact that Baptists have no general standard of belief, but permit every congregation to enjoy a creed of its own, is favorable to the spread of free thought, just as it has made free-thought very prevalent among Congregationalists. That it has had the same effect among Baptists there can be no doubt. It has done so in England to such an extent that the late Rev. Mr. Spurgeon publicly abandoned the Baptist Union because it had almost reached the verge of the precipice of unbelief on its down grade.

Like causes produce like effects, and the same effect has certainly followed in America.

We say it with regret, that among most of the Protestant sects of America, as well as of England and Scotland, Free-thought has made great ravages. We regret it, because we would be glad to be able to believe that the spark of Christianity is not totally extinguished in Protestantism, nor likely to become so. We would prefer to see our separated brethren retain some of the doctrines of Christianity, rather than that they should lapse into pure Deism, the final result of which will be a condition as bad as the Paganism of ancient Greece and Rome brought about.

THE MAIL AND THE SCHOOL LAW.

The Toronto Mail of the 3rd inst. has a characteristic article on the school question, in which it professes to throw light upon the status of Separate schools before and since the passing of the Confederation Act.

It commences with the statement that the whole subject of Separate schools is to be brought up in the Ontario Legislature on one of the three school bills now before the House: the ballot bill of Mr. Meredith, the permissive ballot bill of Mr. Conmee, and Mr. McCallum's more extensive measure to amend the Separate School Act.

It is somewhat surprising that there should be so many Separate school bills before the Legislature at a moment when there is no demand on the part of the Catholic body for any change in the law. The Separate school law works fairly well as it stands at present, and though it might undoubtedly be bettered in some respects, the changes proposed by the three gentlemen named are certainly not intended to improve it. Mr. Conmee's bill is the least harmful, probably, and we presume that its intention is not to injure the Separate schools, but it is uncalled-for and unnecessary, and as Catholics we must look with suspicion upon any yielding to the hostile agitation which has been excited for the express purpose of injuring our Catholic schools. In this respect Mr. Conmee's bill is mischievous. If it is only a sop thrown to Cerberus, we still object to it on the ground that the Ontario Cerberus, whose object is the entire destruction of Catholic schools, is not to be propitiated by means of such sops, and in any case we are opposed to throwing them to it. It reminds us of a sleighing party pursued by wolves, saving itself from destruction by throwing out pieces of meat and other food, and even clothing, to distract the attention of the wolves for a moment from the real object of their pursuit. We object to being placed in the position of a hunted party, forced to make such concessions to the pack of wolves at our heels. We prefer to fight our battle courageously.

After the triumphant battle fought by Sir Oliver Mowat's party at two general elections, and gained through the assistance given by the fair-minded people of Ontario, Protestants and Catholics, is it a fair return to us, who bore the heat and turmoil of the fray, to say that the defeated foe is to be propitiated by interfering in a hostile spirit with the educational interests of Catholics without any demand on our part for the change?

On the ground solely that Mr. Conmee's bill is not demanded by Catholics, we are decidedly opposed to such tampering with the school law.

The Catholic body are the best

judges of what changes are needed to improve the Separate school law, and Mr. Conmee's bill, which is simply a tinkering measure which we do not need, does not propose one of the changes needed; and, if it were to pass to-morrow, it would not satisfy a single friend or foe to Catholic education.

If Mr. Mowat's Government adopt Mr. Conmee's bill we cannot but regard it as an evidence of great weakness. It is shameful if we are to be compelled to sacrifice shred after shred of our school system until there is nothing left, that the hungry wolves who are pursuing us with distended maws have their appetites satisfied.

It is not to be supposed that the bills proposed by Messrs. McCallum and Meredith will pass. Mr. McCallum's bill is avowedly hostile to the Catholic Separate school system, that gentleman having been elected by the influence of the P. P. A. Mr. Meredith's Bill is more covert in its hostility, but its aim is also to placate the P. P. A. element, which played so important a part in re-nominating him as their candidate for election in London at the next general election.

On this question of the ballot for Separate schools the Mail is wont to wax very eloquent, describing all the ills to which Separate school supporters are subjected. Its argument now is that "the statute of 1863 states definitely that the election of Separate school trustees shall be conducted in the same manner as the election of Common school trustees. Had this clause been left in the Act the permissive ballot would have been operative as regards Separate schools when it was applied to Public schools. It was, however, repealed when the Public school ballot was impending, and a distinct open voting provision was inserted in its place."

This is not a correct statement of the case. The clause in the statute of 1863 defining that the election of Separate school trustees should be conducted in the same manner as the election of Common school trustees was not repealed, but the manner of electing Public school trustees was changed, and it is a question whether the election for Separate school trustees would not have remained as before, subject to the old law, without special legislation in reference to Separate schools. At all events it was not deemed proper to leave the matter in doubt, and moreover it was deemed unfair to legislate a change in the operation of the Separate school law by a side wind, when the Separate school supporters had expressed no wish for a change of the law in their regard.

The introduction of the ballot principle would have made the operation of the Separate school law more complex, without any corresponding benefit, and we are convinced that if a vote of the Separate school supporters throughout the Province had been taken, they would have approved of leaving the Separate school elections to be conducted simply as they are at present. In all fairness it would be an absurdity to leave the Separate school trustees at the mercy of every whim of the Public School Board to decide whether or not at each successive election the vote should be by ballot or an open poll.

Mr. Conmee's bill which would leave the matter of the ballot optional with school boards might not do much harm, in itself, it is true, but we object to the principle of tinkering with the Separate school laws without any request from Separate school supporters that such changes be made, and it is for this reason that we object both to Mr. Conmee's and Mr. Meredith's proposals. Mr. Meredith proposes to make the ballot compulsory on both Separate and Public schools. At present the Public schools may use the ballot at their elections if they think proper, and very few Boards avail themselves of this method of avoiding the tyranny of those who might interfere with their liberty of voting. We presume they do not feel the oppressiveness of open voting, though the advocates of the ballot try to impress it upon them. But we very strongly suspect that the chief reason for Mr. Meredith's bill is some vague notion which that gentleman has that his measure will in some undefined way annoy the friends of Separate schools, and bring discord into the ranks of Separate school supporters. We cannot in any other way account for his officiousness in wishing to change the Separate school law, and even the Public school law, as a means to effect the object he has in view. He knows well that it would be invidious to change the Separate school law alone to bring into it the compulsory ballot clause; but we imagine that the Public school supporters will not be thankful to him for making them the catspaw to satisfy his anxiety to interfere in some way with the Separate schools.

That we are doing Mr. Meredith no injustice in taking this view of his proposal will be evident from the fact that all his attempts during the last six years to interfere with the Separate school laws have been, not efforts to improve the schools, but to make the working of the law more difficult, and to conjure the taxes of Separate school supporters into the Public school treasury. We do not altogether think that it is any inherent bigotry on Mr. Meredith's part that induces him to follow such a course; but he is led to it with the hope of securing the fanatical anti-Catholic vote for himself and his supporters at the coming general election.

With another assertion of the Mail we may deal here in a few words.

Over and over again we have been told by it that the Separate school law of 1863, which became part of our constitution under Confederation, was a "final settlement" of the Separate school question, and that, therefore, Mr. Mowat's Government was guilty of a breach of faith with the public in making certain changes in it.

If this is a breach of faith, why does the Mail with its following persist in demanding changes in the law? Why constantly harp on the necessity of the ballot?

Of course the Separate school law is final to this extent that it is beyond the reach of the Local Legislature, so far, that none of the privileges conferred upon "any class of Her Majesty's subjects" can be taken away by that body; but the Local Legislature can, with this limitation, regulate the working of the schools. The amendments introduced by Mr. Mowat did no more than assimilate the Separate to the Public school law in some respects wherein the operation of the law needed to be made more satisfactory. But of these there should be no complaint; for if these provisions are necessary for the efficiency of the Public school system, it may be reasonably supposed that they are generally necessary also for that of the Separate schools. The only plausible ground on which improvements in the law can be denied to Catholic schools is that Catholics should be persecuted on account of their religion; but we may as well say at once that we shall have something to say if legislation is to be attempted on such lines. The Catholics of Canada are not here on tolerance. We have the same rights as British subjects with our Protestant fellow-citizens, and we are quite resolved to maintain them.

Human laws are not generally so perfect as to be accepted as finalities, and there is no reason to assert, as the Mail does, that the Separate school law was "a satisfactory and final settlement." It was a "satisfactory" law when passed, because it placed the Separate schools on a satisfactory footing, but there is no foundation for the Mail's statement that "this law was received by the representatives of the Church . . . as a satisfactory and final settlement of the Separate school question."

It is true that where we have placed the hiatus the Mail has it, "according to Dr. Ryerson." We do not remember that Dr. Ryerson made this statement; but, whether he did or not, we know that he neither was himself a representative of the Church, nor was he authorized by representatives of the Church to make such a statement.

Further, the Mail complains that though Dr. Ryerson, who was Superintendent of Education when the Separate school bill became law, opposed the utilization of the municipal machinery for the collection of Separate school taxes, on the ground that this would establish the Roman Catholic Church as a State Church, yet on the retirement of Dr. Ryerson the municipal machinery was made use of for the purpose indicated.

The municipal machinery was made use of for the purpose of collecting the Public school taxes, and the only apparent reason for denying the same to the Catholic Separate schools was that this would impose an unnecessary and unjust tax of about 10 per cent. on them to prepare the assessment lists and collect the taxes. This was very pleasing to those who wished to harass the Separate schools, but it was not justice, and it is to the credit of Sir Oliver Mowat and his Government that the injustice was redressed by them.

The Mail also asserts once more that there are coercive features in the Separate school law, whereby Catholics are obliged to become Separate school supporters. On this subject we had something to say not long since. We shall only say here that the coercion is altogether in the Mail's imagination.

THE CHURCH AND DIVORCE.

The statement has been widely circulated by the press that the Holy Father has granted a divorce to the Countess Fleury, separating her from her husband and annulling her marriage, and much surprise has been expressed that such should have been the case, as it is well known that the Catholic Church holds that a Christian marriage cannot be dissolved except by death. It should be scarcely necessary for us to inform our readers that the statement is entirely incorrect. A decree of divorce annulling a marriage is never granted by the Church, though it is the right of the Church to pronounce whether a marriage has been validly contracted or not. It is well understood that the laws of God and of nature prohibit marriage with certain degrees of kindred, and marriages contracted within those degrees are null from the beginning. The laws of the Church also prohibit marriages under certain other circumstances, under penalty of nullity, and when these conditions exist there cannot be a Christian marriage; and it is within the province of the Church to judge whether or not these conditions exist in any particular case. Thus it was with the Fleury marriage, which was pronounced by the proper ecclesiastical court to be null from the beginning. A decree of divorce could

not be obtained even by kings who had contracted a valid marriage, and it was for this reason that Henry VIII., who could not either cajole or frighten the Pope into granting him a decree of divorce, established a more accommodating religion which would do just what he desired. The refusal to grant a similar decree to Napoleon I. was also the cause of most of the persecution which that Emperor inflicted upon successive Popes. A decree of divorce would not be granted even for the sake of preserving a nation to the faith, nor to avoid relentless persecution. The reason for this is that God's law, which makes marriage indissoluble, cannot be changed by any human authority.

MR. IGNATIUS DONNELLY vs. A BOGUS PROFESSOR.

The A. P. A. lecturer, "Professor" Sims, had recently a public discussion with Mr. Ignatius Donnelly, the well-known writer of the entertaining and learned work "Atlantis," and also the advocate of the theory that Lord Bacon was the real author of Shakespeare's works. The subject of discussion was the intolerance of the A. P. A., which Mr. Donnelly declared to be subversive of the fundamental principles of the American constitution, Sims maintaining the contrary, as a matter of course.

The discussion took place in a public hall in Milwaukee, and a very large audience was present, composed of Catholics and Protestants, the former being somewhat the more numerous.

As might be expected, Mr. Donnelly's wit was too much for the notorious slanderer Sims, who was made the laughing-stock of the audience owing to the absurd blunders, or rather deliberate falsehoods against the Catholic Church which were ably exposed by Mr. Donnelly. We are surprised, however, that from the short report of the discussion which appears in the papers, it would seem that Mr. Donnelly did not contradict the assertion of the bogus professor and major, that Lafayette had foretold that "if ever the American Republic were to be overthrown, it would be by the hands of the Roman Catholic priesthood."

These words have been many times repeated by anti-Catholic papers as having been uttered by Lafayette, but they are a clumsy forgery. The speech of Lafayette in which words having some resemblance to the words quoted, was delivered for the express purpose of moderating the ill-will which many of the Protestants of America regarded Catholics a century ago. What Lafayette actually said was that "if the American Republic is ever to be overthrown, it will not be at the hands of the Roman Catholic priesthood;" and as Lafayette was himself a Catholic, this is just what he might have been expected to say after having fought side by side with the American patriots in the War of Independence, in which also Catholics took their part, in proportion to their number in the country at the time, which was but small. The quotation of the words of Lafayette with the word not left out is simply a Know-Nothing or A. P. A. forgery.

Sims met with an unexpected rebuke during the discussion when he appealed to the Catholics present to answer the following question:

"I want to ask you, my Catholic fellow-citizens who claim to be loyal to your country, if the Pope to-day should direct you to act in a certain way politically would you rebel against his authority?"

Every Catholic present answered without hesitation, "Yes, certainly we would rebel every time."

The question was an absurd one; but it was answered just as Catholics would answer the same question in any country in the world. It might as reasonably have been asked would they hang themselves or cut their own throats if the Pope commanded them to do so. It is not the office of the Pope to issue commands of such a nature, though it does belong to him to pronounce upon the morality or immorality of human acts. But his decision is to be made according to the principles of Christian ethics, and not according to his political proclivities.

Treason against one's country is a sin according to Catholic theology, and it is absurd to put the hypothesis that the Pope will order Catholics to be guilty of that sin, or to lay down for ourselves a course of conduct to be pursued if ever such a command should be given.

We cannot suppose that the Milwaukee discussion will produce much good fruit. Sims is known to be a fraud and an unscrupulous liar, and his meeting with a gentleman for a

discussion on a public platform gives him a prominence which he does not deserve. We might add that the book-keepers in the offices of the daily papers of this city would be pleased were the Professor to call and give them an opportunity to balance their books.

THE IRISH IN AMERICA.

Mr. John Paul Bocoek has an article in the Forum for April, under the title "The Irish Conquest of our Cities," in which a number of facts is stated as showing that in a remarkably large number of the American cities, Irishmen and the sons of Irishmen occupy leading positions in the municipal government, and in this way practically control or "boss" the United States Government, but especially the government of the large cities. In fact, concerning one Irishman, Mr. Richard Croker, of New York, he quotes several of the New York newspapers which concede to him a practical dictatorship of the city's affairs. One of these papers says:

"He is the dispenser of place in our municipal government. He decides what laws shall be enacted by the State Legislature. He determines who shall be our judges, magistrates, and commissioners. His permission is a necessary first step toward the entrance of men into Congress. In conjunction with Mr. McLaughlin, of Brooklyn, Mr. Murphy, of Troy, Mr. Hill, of Albany, and Mr. Sheehan, of Buffalo, he selects the senators to represent in Congress the greatest State in the Union."

Another paper is quoted, which says: "No President ever had such power in Congress. Richard Croker is virtually the law-making power."

Unfortunately, Mr. Bocoek does not tell us which papers have made these statements, so we cannot well judge from their mere reproduction the value which ought to be attached to them. It is nevertheless certain that Mr. Croker's influence is very great, though it is an exaggeration to attribute to him quite so much power as do the passages quoted. It is, in fact, a common practice with those who have made up their minds to sustain some given thesis to quote such authorities as seem to favor the particular point they wish to establish, and then to infer that their thesis is proved, though it frequently happens, as in the present case, that the authorities quoted had no intention to have their words accepted in their strict and literal sense. At least it is fair to suppose that such is the case; for a paper which values its reputation would not make such sweeping assertions with the intention that they should be accepted for more than they are worth.

It is not a very wonderful matter that the Irish should exercise great influence in such cities as New York, Boston, Chicago, etc., where they number very nearly half the population, and have among them men of the highest intelligence and ability as well as wealth; and as these cities are the important centres of population, that influence must also extend through the States or districts of which they are centres.

The popular will is made up of its units, and in a country where the popular will is the law, as is the case in the United States, that section of the people must come to the front which, being sufficiently numerous, best concentrates its strength; and when the motives which dominate in such a community are honest and good, it is an advantage to all that this should be the case. To a certain extent it is true that in many localities the Irish strength is somewhat concentrated, and thus it is made great. But it is not abnormally so, and to the extent to which it is habitually exercised it is as a rule for the good of the whole people. The Irish influence in New York is great, but it has been shown that New York City is and has been especially well and economically governed, at least since the overthrow of Boss Tweed, who was not an Irishman, and neither were his most guilty colleagues Irishmen, though it was an Irishman who exposed the injustices of the Tweed ring and brought it to strict account for its misdeeds. Municipal government in New York at the present time is conducted more cheaply than in any large city in the nation.

Neither is it true that the Irish influence in New York is exerted to the detriment of other nationalities. It is true that Mr. Croker is an Irishman by birth, but he came to America a child, and his associations and reminiscences are entirely American. He is a Protestant, and we believe so were his parents before him; and thus, even if he had been old enough on his arrival in America to hold political views, his Protestantism would have been enough to separate him from the vast majority of Irishmen in his sympathies, as we all know that the generality of Irish Protestants have no sympathy with the politics of their Catholic fellow-countrymen. Thus the prominence given to Mr. Croker in swaying the political destinies of New