

THE WEEK.

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THE SCRIPTURE READINGS.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the discussion of the volume of Scripture Readings, prepared for the use of our public schools, should have come up at this particular moment. Undoubtedly, a good many of those who are taking a prominent part in the controversy feel a real and deep interest in the subject, apart from all political or personal considerations. They brought the matter before the public, in the newspapers, and they kept it there, when there was no prospect of a dissolution and a fresh election; and only the most unscrupulous partisan feeling could lead their antagonists to charge them with unworthy or hidden motives. Having brought their charges against the Provincial Government quite openly, and on grounds which they clearly explained, they can hardly be blamed for repeating these charges on the eve of an election, or for using them to influence the result.

It can hardly be denied, however, that another class, probably a large class, have simply taken up the question as an election cry; and this need not surprise us. Nor, in fact, need it occasion any great amount of indignation. It is what both political parties are continually doing. It is the curse of party government and party spirit that men come to think almost any means to be lawful, if they can only gain their ends. The howl which is raised by the organs of one party when the organs and friends of the other party make capital out of Scripture Extracts, Prohibition, No Popery, or any other cry, is not hypocritical only because party spirit blinds the eyes of the critic, and makes him forget that he is ready to do the same thing himself.

As the Provincial election will be over before these lines appear in print, it is clear that they can be suspected of no partisan motive; and a few calm and temperate words may perhaps not altogether uselessly be spoken, even before the storm has quite subsided.

A good many different questions have got mixed up in this dispute—apart from the gross and bitter personalities which have been very uselessly imported into it. These we may pass over in silence, simply remarking that the good or bad faith, the pure or corrupt motives, of this man or of that, have really nothing at all to do with the questions at issue:—(1) whether it is desirable to have a book of selections published; (2) whether the selection actually made is a good one; and (3) whether it was made in the proper manner. We believe that few men, in their hearts, have any doubts whatever of the sincerity of Inspector Hughes or Canon Dumoulin. But no amount of mud-throwing at these gentlemen will dispose of their arguments, if they are valid.

As regards the propriety of making such a volume of selections, a great deal may be said on both sides, and much unnecessary heat has been imported into the discussion of this point. On the one hand, it would certainly seem sufficient to draw up a calendar of lessons. Such a method would be respectful to this collection of books which holds a unique position in the estimation of every Christian Church. It would also sufficiently meet the quite reasonable view that all parts of the sacred volume are not equally adapted for the use of children.

A good deal of nonsense has been uttered on this subject. Controversialists have spoken as though one passage in the Bible, whencesoever taken, was as good and as useful and as necessary as another. We are reminded of the good man who diligently read his Bible through, from the first verse of Genesis to the last of the Apocalypse; and then began at the beginning again, steadfastly plodding through every page and every line, as though the list of names in the Book of Nehemiah were as edifying as the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, or the consolations in the 1st Epistle of St. Peter. Very few people nowadays really hold this theory, and still fewer act upon it. Most—perhaps we may say all—reasonable teachers will set children to read, or else read to them, those passages which are best suited to their intelligence, and which will be the most instructive. All this, however, might be regulated by a mere calendar.

On the other hand, we are not able to understand the strong feelings entertained by some against the publication of extracts. Every Christian communion has done this to some extent. To say nothing of the Roman Breviary, or the English Book of Common Prayer, we have had "Scripture Promises," the "Words of Jesus," collections of texts suitable for use in free prayer, and the like, and most people have agreed to consider such publications as helpful and edifying. Whether, therefore, a selection was necessary or not, we cannot agree with those who make the mere compilation of passages a serious offence.

Whether the actual compilation made is the best possible, or is as good as might be expected in the circumstances, is a more difficult question. Indeed the extreme difficulty of doing the work, in the actual circumstances of the religious condition of this country, is perhaps the strongest argument against the attempt and in favour of the adoption of a calendar. It would be easy to find fault, to follow the course of the book from page to page, and criticise and carp at every turn. For this we have no mind. The historical portion of the book seems very well done. Except that intolerable vulgarism of "Our Father *who*," instead of "*which*," which sets every English scholar's teeth on edge, there does not seem to be much fault to be found with this part of the work.

When, however, we turn to the part of the volume which represents the Epistles, we stand aghast at the result. We could understand certain epistles being omitted, or even parts of a certain epistle; but here we have nothing but shreds and patches. Moreover, we could understand something being made of these fragments if they were arranged in any kind of order. Surely something might have been done, upon which the learned clergymen employed in the revision could have agreed, to mould these parts into something like an ethical system. If no other method was possible than the one adopted, we are inclined to think it would have been better to keep to the historical portion alone, and leave out the epistles altogether.

As regards the manner of doing the work, a very few words may suffice. We think some of the Protestant advocates have gone too far. The Roman Catholics, if they are willing that their children should read or hear the extracts, have a distinct interest in their selection. There are parts of the country in which there are no Separate Schools. But it is said, with what truth we cannot now pretend to decide, that practically no Roman Catholic children are allowed to take part in this religious instruction. If that be so, there seems reason in the objection that a Roman Catholic Bishop is hardly the man to decide what parts of the Scriptures shall be read by Protestant children; and we quite admit that this is a matter which Mr. Ross's critics have a perfect right, and are strictly bound, to look into.

There is another point. If Roman Catholics are willing that their children should take part in the religious instruction of the Public Schools in places where there are no Separate Schools, then undoubtedly Roman Catholic divines have a right to be consulted in the selection of the passages. But they ought to be consulted precisely in the same way as the pastors of other churches. Either some of them should be placed upon the committee, or they should send their recommendation to the committee or to the Minister of Education; and this should be done openly, and without any disguise or mystification.

It is impossible for the inhabitants of any country to regard the interference of the Roman Catholic Church in the Government with the feelings that would be reasonable in the case of other Churches. The Roman