pathy whatever with these people. I think they are to be commiserated with because they cannot make up their minds, as the great body of Christian people do, that there is a personal God. But it appears to me that that is not the question before the House, and that it is not involved in the principle of this Bill. This Bill is not in the interest of agnostics, so called; it is in the interest of public justice. It is of the first important that every person who is charged with a crime should have the benefit of all the evidence that can be brought in his favor, while on the other hand the prosecution should have the same advantage. It is fortunate for the hon. member for Quebec Centre that he lives in a part of the country where, in the course of twenty five years experienee at the bar, he has not met with more than one or two cases of witnesses being disqualified because they could not take the oath. My experience, I regret to say, has not been of that character. My experience is that many men are disqualified from giving evidence because they have conscientious scruples against taking the oath, and are unable to say that they are satisfied of the existence of a Supreme Being. There are many men, too, who are not so unscrupulous that, whether they believe in the existence of a God or not, they will declare that they have doubts, in order to avoid giving evidence. But the conscientious, truthful man, who occupies a respectable position in society, who proves himself, in all his actions in life, to be an honest, straightforward man—and who goes into the box, and says that he has doubts or scruples, and cannot take the oath—I say that man acts as praiseworthy a part as any man can. It requires a good deal of moral courage for a man of such a character to go into the witness box, and openly in Court declare that he has doubts about the existence of a Supreme Being. The statement of such a man is as likely to be truthful as that of any other witness. Now we know in the course of civil and criminal cases that often a person happens to be the only witness to a transaction. The counsel opposed to the side on which that witness is called, may know he has doubts as to the existence of a Supreme Being, and for the purpose of getting rid of his evidence will make the objection. The evidence is ruled out under the law as it now stands. In the Province of Ontario, on the civil side, a man of that kind is competent to be a witness. He is also competent to be a witness in England, since 1869, when a law was passed to allow of his evidence being taken. Although the learned authority—Taylor on Evidence—from which my hon. friend from Quebec Centre has quoted, may, with scores of lawyers, and a few Judges, be opposed to the principle, yet we do not find there has been, on that account, any effort whatever on the part of the Parliament or people of England, to repeal or modify that law. On the contrary, it has been found to be a beneficial law. Now, this Act merely declares that:

"4. If any person called to give evidence in any criminal proceeding, or in any civil proceeding, in respect of which the Parliament of Canada has jurisdiction in this behalf, objects to take an oath or is objected to as incompetent to take an oath, such person shall, if the presiding Judge is satisfied that the taking of an oath would have no binding effect on his conscience, make the following solemn promise, affirmation and declaration:

"'I solemnly promise, affirm and declare that the evidence to be given by me shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'"

Mr. BOSSÉ. "So help me God."

Mr. ROBERTSON. My hon. friend on my left says: "So help me God." It is not necessary, to make a man tell the truth, to say that at all. Any man who is qualified to be a witness can tell the truth just as well by making that declaration as if he called God to witness at the end of every sentence. Therefore, while I sympathize with the sentiments uttered by my hon. friend from Quebec Centre, yet this law goes far in this way: that although a man may not believe, he can swear by God, yet he has the fact placed before him that if, under a solemn declaration to tell the truth, he tells what is not true, he is liable to the pains and penalties of perjury. And I believe that in many cases such considerrtions as those govern a man more than the consideration of a hereafter. That is my experience as a counsel of some thirty years standing. I do not see why persons qualified, as they must be, before they can take this oath or affirmation, should be excluded from giving evidence. This matter has not been brought before the House unadvisedly. In many cases in our courts in Ontario, the Judges themselves have regretted that there was not such a law upon the Statute-book—that persons were excluded from giving evidence because they had those doubts. I cannot understand why they should be excluded. It is not very long ago since the Mennonists, a Christian people, were not allowed to give evidence because they could not conscientiously take an oath; but in 1809 the law was amended so as to allow them to affirm. In 1829 the law was extended to the Moravians, who up to that time, were not qualified on the same ground to be witnesses. It is not very long ago since the parties in civil cases could not be witnesses if they had any interest in the result, but that has all been done away with. It was extended by degrees in this way: First the plaintiff had the right to call the defendant or the defendant the plaintiff, but neither could call himself. Now, however, either party can be a witness for or against himself, and is compelled to give evidence. Even then the law was not extended to all cases, because in some cases, which it is not necessary here to mention, a plaintiff or defendant could not be a witness on his or her own behalf. In the last year or two that law has been extended, and now all persons in civil proceedings are compelled to give evidence for or against himself. This being the case I came to the conclusion that this was a proper law to introduce. When I first introduced the Bill I had an idea that perhaps—as the Bill passed in England it did not apply to Scotland—it would be well not to apply this law to the Province of Quebec, but after consideration I proposed to extend the law to the whole Dominion as it was desirable we should have throughout one Code of Criminal Law. I am satisfied my hon. friend from Quebec Centre is wrong in the conclusion he has come to as to the impropriety of a law of this kind. However he has a right to his opinions which he has expressed so eloquently, but I see no reason whatever, so far as that part of the Bill is concerned, why it should not become law.

Motion agreed to; and the House resolved itself into Committee.

(In the Committee.)

On the first clause,

Mr. CURRAN moved that the Committee do now rise.

Motion agreed to, on a division.

SPEEDY TRIAL OF INDICTMENTS AGAINST CORPORATIONS.

Mr. WELDON, in moving the second reading of Bill (No. 83) to amend the Acts respecting procedure in criminal cases, and other matters relating to Criminal Law, said: The object of the Bill is to provide a speedy mode of trying indictments against corporations. At present the system is such that we have to proceed by *certiorari*, in the Court of Queen's Bench or the Supreme Court, and then call upon the accused to file their plea, when the case is sent back to be tried at subsequent Assizes. The result is that the delay frequently causes a failure of justice. By the mode suggested in this Bill, parties can be compelled to appear at the assizes, of course being subject to the same rule as other defendants, where in the interests of justice, or in order to enable them to make a proper defence, a postponement can be had The Bill has been suggested to me by one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of New