

THE CONMER BILL.

To the Editor of the Catholic Register.

Sir—A prominent member of the Liberal Party having requested me to state my opinion of the Conmee Bill, I sent him the following summary of reasons for opposition to it:

1. The same arguments and facts adduced in 1890 by the Hon. Messrs. Mowat and Ross against this interference with the organic operation of the Separate School Law remain in undiminished force to-day. The entire Liberal party accepted them then; why not now?

2. Whatever pretext existed in 1890 for saying that Catholics were asking for the Ballot, exists no longer. The eight noisy Trustees in Toronto, who called for the Ballot, to please Mr. Meredith and the Mail party, were ignominiously and overwhelmingly defeated at the polls when they offered themselves for re-election; and not a voice is now heard in Toronto in favor of the Ballot. The party that has been violently striving for it in Ottawa received the people's reply at the polls in Rideau Ward last Monday. They were defeated by 27 against 20 votes. Moreover, the Hon. Mr. Scott did not succeed in procuring the signatures of more than a score of persons to his petition in favor of the Ballot in that city. As Father Whelan said, the voice of the other six thousand Catholic rate-payers has not been heard.

3. Since the Catholics of the Province do not ask for this change, but rather have opposed the project wherever it has been mooted, no reason exists for tampering with our method of election. The Ballot was given to the option of the Public School supporters in compliance with their request, not otherwise; and a large proportion of them have not availed themselves of it. Why should Catholics be discriminated against, and an option forced on them which they do not wish for? There is too much of "option" in the recent legislation of this Province, whereby the laws of society are made to depend upon the caprices and prejudices and private interests of individuals and factions rather than upon the wisdom and probity and divinely sanctioned authority of the duly elected legislators. Surely our Separate School system is burdened sufficiently with the "option" incidentally given to Catholics to transfer their taxes from Catholic to Protestant schools, from the poorer to the wealthier class.

4. Unmistakably the Conmee Bill is meant to be a sop to Cerberus, a partial submission to the clamors of the P. P. A. and the Mail-Meredith party. If this principle be acknowledged, all security for Catholic rights in the Province will be undermined. Bigotry is rampant here, and injustice to Catholics will ever be a plank in the platform of No-Popery agitators. We have a right to demand the protection of the Government. If, however, the Government should yield on the present question in the hope of placating their enemies and ours, the same reason will hold good for acquiescing in further unjust demands. Where is it to stop?

5. The P. P. A. and the Mail-Meredith party have failed to show any honest reason for this warfare against our schools. They do not disguise their purpose to injure the Separate Schools, to render their operation more difficult, and by degrees to bring about their destruction. They hate Christian education of youth more intensely than they hate the devil. Acceptance of the first part of their programme implies approval, or at least co-operation in their evil design. In order to hide, if possible, their main purpose, they pretend to aim solely at the emancipation of the laity from the tyranny of episcopal supervision; and to sustain this impudent theory, they pretend that the Bishops of the Church are the Catholic faithful, i.e., the parents of the children, are engaged in deadly war against each other, as opposing forces claiming opposite rights. Will any Catholic, or any honest man of any party, subscribe to this audacious calumny against God's Church by complying with a hostile demand based upon these slanderous assumptions?

Truly has THE CATHOLIC REGISTER of the 22nd ulto. expressed the sentiment of the Archbishop of Toronto and all the Bishops and all the faithful Catholic laymen when it stated that "the Conmee Bill is a slap in the face of the hierarchy and clergy—at those whom our people hold dearest." Rightly also has the same paper in the same article said: "We do not hesitate to tell the Mowat Government that, in allowing one of its supporters to introduce a Bill to this effect, it has committed the greatest political mistake of its existence."

7. It will probably be alleged that the Conmee Bill does not force the Ballot upon Catholics, but only gives them the option to use it if they like. But the option is meant to do injury to our schools; and the attempt to force the option upon us without our asking for it, is an unjust discrimination against us, which is made immeasurably more offensive by the fact that it involves compliance with the wicked demands and foul imputations of our declared enemies. But this is not all. The Conmee Bill gives no option, nor any liberty to the Separate School supporters, that is, to the parents of the school children, to decide how Trustees

who shall have charge of the children's education and the supremely important and delicate duty of appointment of teachers, shall be elected. The Bill gives the whole power of enforcing the compulsory Ballot to the "Board of Separate School Trustees," that is to the majority of the Board. Thus what is called the "option of Ballot" is absolutely withdrawn from the parents of children, and vested in any three, five, or seven Trustees of the Separate School Board in towns and cities, who may, for any reason of their own or under whatsoever hostile influence, take it into their heads "to pass a resolution requiring the election to be held by ballot." Where, then, is the option given to the supporters of Separate Schools?

The existing Trustees have not been elected by the parents of the children for the purpose of making organic changes in the working of School Law, on which the welfare, spiritual and temporal, of our little ones depends. They have been elected solely for the administration of the Separate Schools in accordance with the existing law. They are not in any case the proper persons to determine the maintenance or relinquishment of a highly-prized right of the entire Catholic congregation in each city or town. Trustees are elected to represent and guarantee the parents' educational rights in the schools and no more. Why should they, rather than any other three or six men, get the power to barter away the rights of the many hundreds of parents who compose the Catholic congregations? If, in these days of Provincial plebiscites, the proposal were made to have the parents themselves, as a body, deliver a plebiscite vote in each city or town, there would be less objection to Mr. Conmee's Bill, which, however, would be still gravely objectionable. The right of selecting the guardians of their children's education, and of doing this freely and judiciously, with a sense of religious duty, and without subjection to secret intrigues of individuals or parties, is an inherent and indefeasible parental right under the Law of Nature and the Christian covenant.

7. We regard this as a question of our Constitutional rights.

Mr. Mowat in 1890 would not venture, he said, to dispute this proposition. Nothing has been done since then to our weaken Constitutional claim to protection against secret voting and the hostile influences that work in the dark against the Catholic minority in this Province of unparalleled bigotry. If Mr. Mowat doubts the Constitutional right of the legislature to take from us the protection of open and responsible voting in the election of School Trustees, how on earth can he delegate the power to three, five or seven men to peremptorily deprive us of it by a simple resolution?

I remain, dear sir,

Yours faithfully,

CHRISTIAN PHILMATH.

The Men's League.

Sunday last was a great day at St. Michael's. Such a large gathering of men has rarely been seen at communion even in the Cathedral, where the number of communicants is always great. But on last Sunday the men seemed to have the church all to themselves at the 9 o'clock Mass, and almost every one present approached the Holy Table. The members of the Men's League and the members of the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union, who are nearly all members of the League of the Sacred Heart, quite filled the centre aisles of the church, while the Boys' Company, the cadets of the League, took their places in St. Joseph's aisle, and St. Agnes' Society, the Ladies' Branch of the I. C. B. U., assembled before the altar of the Blessed Virgin. The men of the I. C. B. U., led by their excellent band and wearing their regalia and badges, marched from their hall to the Cathedral, and presented a splendid appearance.

When all had taken their places in Church the sight was most edifying and impressive. Mass was said by the Very Rev. Vicar-General McCann. His Grace the Archbishop, who always manifests such a deep interest in Catholic Societies, and to whom, under God, the League of the Sacred Heart owes its wonderful success in the city and diocese, was present at the Mass to encourage and bless the great gathering of men. His Grace made a brief but most eloquent and fervent address before Communion, and then spoke again after communion, exhorting all in burning words to be loyal to our Lord and Leader they had just received, to be true to their convictions and their consciences, to God and their country. It seems the Catholic societies are to parade on St. Patrick's Day; but the parade that must ever please St. Patrick best is the grand march that men make to the altar rails—such a magnificent Catholic parade as was seen in St. Michael's last Sunday.

Father Ryan the Spiritual Director of the Men's League, and Chaplain of the I. C. B. U., has reason to feel proud of his men and boys, and most hopeful of his very promising society of St. Agnes. May each and all have the success they so well deserve.

Forms had to be placed in the aisles of St. Michael's Cathedral at vespers in the evening, the special occasion of the large gathering being the usual annual lecture in

aid of St. Nicholas' Institute. The choir was reinforced by some of the best local singers and musicians, and the musical part of the service comprised a violin solo, played with much feeling, and several beautiful vocal renderings. The "Quia est Homo," by the two Mrs. McEann, was exquisitely sung, as was Mrs. Julliett Smith's singing of "Rejoice, O Israel," and also Miss Elliott's rendering of an "Ave Maria." It was seen when the great altar was illuminated that decoration had been added in honour of the approaching festival of St. Patrick. High above it, traced in palpitating flame, was a cross, and on either side of it the shamrock of Ireland.

St. Patrick's Day.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians passed a resolution at the meeting of their County Board, held on Monday evening last, to forego the usual procession on the feast of their patron saint, and devote the money that would have been spent on the parade to the Home Rule Fund. The amount will be handed over to his Grace the Archbishop and by him forwarded to the Hon. Edward Blake. In the evening a concert will be given under the auspices of this Society in the Auditorium. The following galaxy of talent will take part: Mrs. Julliett D'Erville Smith, Mrs. W. J. Morrow, Miss Florence M. Glover, Messrs. D. E. Cameron, Owen A. Smiley, A. Carnahan. The musical part of the programme is under the direction of Mrs. W. J. Morrow, late of the New England Conservatory of Music, Boston. At the opening of the second part of the programme an oration will be given by Mr. M. J. Slattery, National Secretary, A. O. H., Albany, N. Y.

The Societies participating in the St. Patrick's Day celebration will assemble at the I. C. B. U. Hall, King and Jarvis streets, at 9 o'clock Saturday morning. The following line of March has been adopted. From King to Power, along Queen; to Bond, to St. Michael's Cathedral, where Mass will be celebrated in honor of the day. After Mass the procession will re-form on Shuter street, and return by way of Yonge, Queen, Spadina and King streets to the I. C. B. U. Hall, where speeches will be made. The committee of arrangements extend a cordial invitation to all Catholics and Catholic societies to take part in the parade.

In the evening a grand Concert and Lecture will be given under the auspices of this Society in Association Hall, corner of Yonge and McGill streets. A very fine programme has been arranged, in which the following ladies and gentlemen will take part: Misses Marguerite Dunn, Norma Reynolds, Lili Kleiser, Ettie Tighe and F. Sullivan; Messrs. J. H. Cameron, F. X. Mercier, F. Wright and W. Welshman. Rev. Father Ryan will deliver an address, his subject being "Ireland Amongst the Nations," a subject to which full justice will be done by the Rev. Father, who we venture to say, has no superior in Canada as an orator, whether in the pulpit or on the platform.

Pontifical High Mass will be sung in St. Michael's Cathedral at ten o'clock, at which all the Irish Catholic Societies will attend. The sermon will be preached by the Rev. J. Tracey, D.D.

League of the Cross.

St. Paul's Sodality of the above named League held its regular weekly meeting on Sunday afternoon in their hall on Power street.

There was the usual large attendance of members and the utmost enthusiasm prevailed. President Duffy occupied the chair. The principal feature of the meeting was the address by the Rev. Director Father Hand who took for his subject "Perseverance." The address was full of many instances of what might be accomplished by having a firm will, and persevering to the end in any good work that we may have undertaken. The address was much appreciated and no doubt the members of the Sodality left the hall with a firm resolve to push forward the work of the Sodality until every family in the parish becomes interested in it.

Peterborough.

At the last regular meeting of the Peterborough Separate School Board, Mr. L. M. Hayes, barrister, of the firm of Hall & Hayes, was unanimously chosen to represent that body on the Collegiate Institute Board.

The Separate School Board is to be congratulated for selecting such a competent and worthy representative, and we have no hesitation in saying that in Mr. Hayes' hands the interests of the Separate School will be well looked after.

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