

oath has been duly prescribed, and every person who administers an oath is bound to know it, and to use it whenever it is asked for, and every person has a right to be so sworn if he wishes "without further question."

But a form of oath established by the State rests necessarily upon something less tangible, it may be, but not less powerful in its operation, than an Act of Parliament. If it has no root in the national sentiment, it fails to appeal to the imagination of the person to whom the oath is administered, and gradually sinks into an empty form of words. That, to my thinking, is precisely what has happened to our English method of swearing by kissing the Bible. It was originally founded on the national feeling of reverence for the Bible, which feeling the State desired to utilize so that it might bind people's consciences to act honestly in public positions and speak the truth in aid of justice. It has lost its power and degenerated into a mere form, partly because the words of the oath are not clear or precise, and partly I believe, because the indiscriminate use of the Bible for the purpose has removed all sense of solemnity from the act of kissing it. In my judgment the Bible is desecrated by the use it is put to in our Courts. Some time ago, having to wait in a South London Police Court on a Monday morning, I witnessed the Saturday night's charges being disposed of. Upwards of a hundred witnesses were sworn, and the Court copy of the Bible was handled and kissed by people of the lowest type—by prostitutes and street ruffians of dissipated and filthy appearance and by persons bearing evident marks of advanced consumption or other diseases. I cannot see in such a practice any evidence of reverence for the Bible.

On several occasions when a witness has desired to be sworn in the solemn Scotch form the presiding judge or magistrate has made the same sort of disparaging remark as the one I have quoted above, suggesting that in the objection to "kiss the Book" for fear of infection there lurked a lack of reverence for the Bible. I have reason to believe that the fear of having such a charge made against them from the Bench deters many witnesses from asking to be sworn in Scotch form, which they would greatly prefer. This is not as it ought to be. Medical men refuse to be sworn by 'kissing the Book,' because they believe the practice is dangerous to health. If their view is right, ought the State to retain such a form of oath? Would it