

Making Men Moral by Law.

BY THE LATE REV. HUGH PRICE HUGHES.

HOW constantly we hear men say, "You cannot make men moral by Act of Parliament." I never heard anybody say that, except when he was trying, in some way, to hinder the kingdom of God. When men try to prevent the advance of the temperance movement, and other great moral enterprises, they are very fond of rattling off that sentence. It is supposed to be a reply to moral fanatics; but when men glibly tell us that we cannot make men moral by Act of Parliament I should like to know what they mean. They probably do not know themselves. Do they mean that force in itself is no remedy? If so, let them live up to their convictions. But let us not forget that a law is a good deal more than force. An Act of Parliament is not mere force: it is educational. It teaches the conscience; strengthens the conscience, and even the most degraded usually realize that what is illegal is wrong.

At any rate, whether you can make men moral by Act of Parliament or not, it is quite certain you can make them immoral. Behold the liquor traffic as it now exists, created and stimulated by many Acts of Parliament—the supreme curse of our country! Think of the Contagious Diseases Act, which for so many years dragged some of our military centres to the very verge of hell. And on the other hand, as providing that men may, in another sense, be made moral by Act of Parliament, or by law, look at the Jews, who, when the law of Moses was given to them, were, in many respects, amongst the most degraded people in the world; but they gradually rose, through the influence of this law, to what was comparatively in ancient times a high condition of morality. After all, what is law but public opinion, made definite and enforced! The statute book, be it ever remembered, is the national conscience, just as the executive Government is the national will; and how extremely important it is to purify the national conscience.

If any further evidence is needed that the favourite expression that "you cannot make men moral by Act of Parliament" is a falsehood, I need only refer you to that ever-memorable monument of the beneficent life of the late Lord Shaftesbury—the Factory Acts. The Factory Acts! Why, they have created a moral revolution in the "Black Country." In many parts of England women and children were degraded beyond all expression, and because the national conscience embodies these protective Acts in the Statute Book of this country the whole moral condition of vast masses of the people has been entirely changed. Let us, then, for ever dismiss from our minds the delusion that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament.

Our Sunday School.

(May be sung to "God save the King.")

God bless our Sunday School
And make thy golden rule
A thing of joy.
Then we shall take delight
In all that's good and right,
And with divinest might
Our strength employ.

Bless thou our boys and girls,
More worth than gold or pearls;
Bless all our youth—
Young men and maidens fair;
Children in mothers' care;
Age, too, with silver hair,
Lovers of truth;

Babes on our cradle rolls,
Now with unsinning souls,
Tender and dear;
Parents whose guiding star
Led them to see afar,
On through the gates ajar;
Every one here.

Blest Sunday School, to thee,
Hope of the high-born free,
To thee, we cling,
Here we with pleasure meet,
Here we each other greet,
And here at Jesus' feet
Our offerings bring.