

The Legal News.

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THE AFFIRMATION BILL.

The *Bystander* has taken up a somewhat pretentious position. He seeks to convey the idea that he is writing of those amongst whom he lives, but not as one of them. He seems to criticize from an imaginary elevation. Without great reputation, some unusual talent, striking originality, or all three combined, such an affectation must become instantly ridiculous. Unfortunately the editor of the *Bystander* has none of these protections. People who have thought it worth while to note the operations of our self-constituted mentor's mind, remark that he has learned and unlearned not a little by his American and colonial experiences. His argumentative powers are not overwhelming, and his efforts at persuasion are generally rather repulsive than the reverse.

Among the illustrations of his least captivating peculiarities is his article, in the July number, on the rejection of the English Affirmation Bill. What purports to be argument amounts to this: There are many unbelievers in the world, those who are not unbelievers worship different gods, therefore to a Christian the oath must be regarded with a feeling of abhorrence. In order to avoid the accusation of having misrepresented the reasoning of this apostle of toleration, we give the argument as it appears twice, in different forms, in one short article. "Tens, and perhaps hundreds, of thousands are now wavering between belief and unbelief. To all of these it is proclaimed that religion cannot afford to dispense with a political test, and a political test so utterly tainted and discredited by the lips which have taken it in avowed mockery, or in thinly veiled hypocrisy, that it is difficult to see how any genuine Christian can regard it with any feeling but abhorrence. * * * But the absurdity of the oath stands confessed when we consider that the God to whom the Jews appeal is not the God of the Christian, the Christian God being the universal Father of all, while the Jewish God is the Deity of a race; so that the pious formula on which the religious character of

"the nation and its title to Divine favour are supposed to depend, is in fact a miserable equivocate, and might be taken conscientiously by a believer in Allah, in Vishnu, or in the most degraded divinity of the Pantheon." It would not be easy to compress more errors, nonsense and "equivokes" into a few lines. If it were established that hundreds of thousands were unbelievers, (by that, of course, must be understood, unbelievers in the moral government of the world) it would not in the least affect the question. It is not religion which cannot dispense with a political (?) test, but society which cannot afford to assume that there is no God. Therefore we establish a *legal* test, which is probably what is really meant by the artful use of the word "political." In the repetition of the argument it is again assumed that the religious character of the nation and its title to Divine favour, are supposed to depend on the use of a pious formula. This is in fact more than a *miserable equivocate*, it is unfair clap-trap. It is not the argument of any one. The use of the oath, as now administered, is to exclude those from the material government of the nation who do not believe in the moral government of the universe, and hence it is, the form of the oath has been changed to admit of its being taken by Roman Catholics and by the Jew, much-dreaded by the *Bystander*.

The attempt to persuade his readers into the idea that the oath should be abolished, (with a view to the next session at Ottawa) is a little more prolix. They are assured that all good men are in favour of the abolition of the test, all bad and unspiritual people, except Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, (who are flung overboard with pitiless severity, as too much for even radical susceptibilities) and perhaps Mr. Morley, and those who are intolerant, are against it. The chief of Christian statesmen, and the "truest followers of Jesus," and Cardinal Newman are in favour of the Affirmation Bill. Lord Randolph Churchill, "who," as we are elegantly told, "displays his appetite for place with as little shame as a dog its hunger for a bone;" the unspiritual Cardinal Manning; the Irish, who are to have no conscience but that which inspires gratitude to Mr. Gladstone for his legislative robberies; Ritualists and Jews, and above all Baron de Worms, who "has not degenerated from the partisans of Caiaphas,"