

BISHOP OF NEW ZEALAND ON EDUCATION.

During the last week of April the Bishop of New Zealand held a meeting at which the following resolutions were adopted:

I. A sound civilization depends upon a sound popular education, and a sound education consists essentially in the harmonious development of the physical, the intellectual, and the moral faculties of children. For this purpose secular and religious instruction must ever go hand in hand, forming the minds of children to useful knowledge and their hearts and wills to the civil, social and domestic virtues, so that each shall contribute the unit of his goodness to form the sum of righteousness that "exalteth a nation."

II. The indispensable feature of true education is the formation of high character in children by the knowledge of Divine things, and by the acquisition of the virtues that perfect their being. Any system of education is, therefore, defective, which relegates the religious or moral training of children to a secondary or unimportant place. Much more so is the system of public instruction prevailing in New Zealand, which divorces religion from education, training the intellect to natural knowledge without inculcating those eternal truths and principles or action which are the only real incentives to the individual to keep his life in order. Such a system tends (1) to engender ignorance of religion and moral duty; (2) to generate in the minds of the young the false impression that religion is only for the home and the church, and not for the practical affairs of daily life; (3) to weaken or destroy religious and moral sentiment by teaching the children to pass a notable portion of the tenderest and most impressionable periods of life without reference to God and without the sense of responsibility to Him as the Supreme legislator, whose will alone can give to every law its binding force upon the hidden conscience; (4) it offers no compensating principles to strengthen the rising generation in the hour of temptation, and (5) it is in the highest degree calculated to pave the way for the decay which overtakes every civilization that allowed religion to die out of the hearts of its people.

III. With a profound conviction of the sacredness of their duty in regard to the education of youth, Catholics in New Zealand have been for more than a generation building, equipping and maintaining their own schools, wherein some 12,000 children of their faith are trained in the higher things of life to come as well as in the full State curriculum of secular knowledge. We endeavor to surround them with an atmosphere of religion to mould them to virtue, and, by making them good Christians, to make them good citizens also for our young country. The least of the services which we have been rendering to the State is that of relieving the general taxpayer of the burden of having to provide some £60,000 a year which but for our labors and sacrifices, they would have to pay for the instruction of those children in the public schools of the colony. We have never asked, nor desired, a grant for the religious education which we impart in our schools. We are compelled to contribute our quota of taxation to the maintenance of a system of public instruction of which, from motives of both conscience and of the highest patriotism, we cannot avail ourselves until justice is done us, we shall continue to urge our claim to a fair proportion of that taxation for the purely secular instruction which, in accordance with the Government programme, is given in our schools.

IV. Valuing as we do the written Word of God, and teaching it in our schools, we would gladly see it brought home to the mind of every child, Catholic and Protestant, in New Zealand, we would willingly use the sacred volume in use in the denominational schools of other creeds. We are in sympathy with every effort made to impart religious instruction to non-Catholic children in the State schools after working hours so long as those of our faith are first permitted to retire without taunt or interference, but we strenuously object to the introduction of Scriptural or other religious lessons or exercises in public schools as part and parcel of the programme of education. For this reason we wholly disapprove of the following proposals, which have been for some time before the public of New Zealand, namely: (1) to introduce into the State school a programme of Scripture lessons, hymns and prayers which, except for "slight modifications," are identical with the Scripture lesson books drawn up four years ago by the Victoria Royal Commission on religious instruction in State schools; (2) to accompany these lessons with "simple explanations of a literary, historical, and ethical character"; (3) to make these lessons and their explanations form part of the school curriculum under the inspectors, with (4) a conscience clause for pupils and teachers.

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V. The following are our chief grounds of objection to the project of Scripture lessons outlined above: (1) Under the sanction of the State, it would introduce into the public schools the well known Protestant principle of the interpretation of the Scriptures by the exercise of private judgment. This is wholly incompatible with the position of Catholics as regards the Bible, which is briefly summed up in the following words by the Archbishop of Melbourne:—"We hold that the Bible is the depository not the organ, of God's revelation to man. We hold, therefore, that it requires an interpreter, and we hold that the Church, through its representatives, is the Divinely constituted interpreter or organ of revealed truth. We hold, too, that dogmatic morality is the basis both of faith and of morality." (2) The religious education of parents and of the Christian Ministry. That sacred duty the clergy can never abdicate, either wholly or in part, in favor of the State. The proposals referred to above are an attempt on the part of a number of clergymen of various denominations to renounce one of the most hallowed obligations of that calling and transfer it to paid officials of the State and to get done at the charge of the public treasury duties which Catholics perform as a matter of course at their own expense. (3) It is the junction of the State to protect the natural and acquired rights of its citizens and generally to promote the welfare of the State. The State can neither claim nor exercise an authority in the matters of conscience; it has neither right nor competence to set up as a teacher of religion nor to usurp the spiritual duties of any of its subjects. The reading and explanation of the Scriptures cannot be regarded as merely a proposed new feature in the course of language or literature in our public schools; they are exercises of religion. In the case under consideration they are avowedly intended to afford a certain measure of religious instruction, and that instruction cannot be "sectarian" for the simple reason that unsectarian religious teaching is a mental action and an impossibility. The proposals outlined above are in fact an invitation to the Civil Government to set up a bureau of religious teaching, viz., to found, establish and endow a new State creed as the official religion of the public schools, and to make good at the expense of the general taxpayer the failure of the clergy of some denominations to adequately discharge their duty of the religious instruction of youth. (4) Our objection to the proposed lessons is strengthened by the following facts: (a) They were drawn up as a compromise by a heterogeneous assembly of representatives of various reformed denominations, who while unanimously rejecting the Catholic principles of Biblical interpretations, differed profoundly among themselves upon the most fundamental truths of the Christian religion (b) The Scripture lessons are taken from the Protestant authorized version of the Bible, and the incorrect Protestant form of the Lord's Prayer is set down for daily use of the pupils. (c) The basic dogma of Christianity—that of the incarnation and virgin birth—is outlawed from the New Testament narrative, and the Christ that is presented to the mental eye of the little ones is not the God-Man of Holy Writ, but the Christ of the Unitarian (d) Protestant teaching is suggested throughout the Scripture lessons by the free use of unauthorized headings, capital letters, italics, etc., and it has been truly observed that "in what is omitted as well as in the general tone of what is expressed, the lessons are made as Protestant as they could well be made in the circumstances." (5) It would be obviously impossible for the teachers of various creeds and no creed, to

whom it is proposed to entrust these lessons, to do such watchful and continuous violence to their convictions as to avoid coloring their "literary, historical and ethical" explanations with their own beliefs or unbelief. In a great number of cases they would no doubt conscientiously, or unconsciously, derive from the lessons conclusions prejudicial to the faith of the Catholic children, and cases might readily occur in which teachers would foster scepticism or unbelief—in a word, the projected scheme of Scriptural instruction would, under the specious appearance of relieving the consciences of a section of the Protestant clergy, aggravate the double financial burden which we Catholics now bear by adding the greater grievance of compelling us to pay for the conversion of the State schools into Protestant Sunday schools.

VI. —A conscience clause for pupils, and teachers is offered as an offset to the proposed Protestantizing of the public schools, but a conscience clause if seriously intended by its framers as a protective measure for dissenters should, on principle, exclude all children from Scriptural or other religious instruction, except those whose parents positively signify a wish that they should attend, but (1) by what we understand to be the terms of the proposed or suggested conscience clause, Catholic children, in order to avoid proselytism, would be compelled to go to school armed with written protests against religious instruction; (2) At least one State of the Australian Commonwealth, namely, Victoria, furnishes (as the late Royal Commission's report abundantly proves) plentiful evidence of the flagrant manner in which the religious rights of minorities may be violated with impunity in public schools despite the provisions of Acts of Parliament and the pretended protection of this form of conscience clause. (3) Even a scrupulous observance of an ideal conscience clause by teachers would still leave Catholic children exposed to a serious measure of moral pressure or compulsion to remain for Protestant religious instruction, namely, to the fears and insults of their companions and to the other forms of social martyrdom which children know so well how to inflict on those whom they deem foreign to their modes of thought and action. Catholic pupils in State schools would, in a word, be placed between these two alternatives—proselytism or penalties to which no children should be exposed. (4) For teachers a conscience clause would in many cases inflict a grave degree of compulsion upon conscience or feeling. It would, moreover, inevitably lead to the general imposition of a religious test in the matter of appointments to schools.

VII. It is proposed to submit the suggested alterations in our State school system to a referendum of the electors of the colony. We, for our part, hold to the sound principle of statesmanship that no question should be submitted to the referendum that affects the rights of conscience of minorities. These remain for ever sacred and inviolable; but if this question be ever submitted to the voice of the electors of New Zealand we should look with confidence to the result, feeling sure that our fellow-colonists would approach it as the people of South Australia did in 1896, with a spirit of justice and a firm and unalterable determination to respect the rights of conscience which a minority, however small, can never sacrifice. But the issue should be placed fairly and honestly before the electors, and the first issue to be determined is whether our State school of education is to be secular or not. The form of LaFol paper contained in last year's abortive bill was suggested by the framers of the Bible-Schools project. It was vague and reticent to the last degree. (1) It gave no information whatever regarding the nature and source of the scriptural and other religious instruction proposed to be introduced, or (2) regarding the nature of the explanations thereof which it was intended to give. (3) Worst of all, the terms of reference were so worded as to suggest that the new scheme would be simply something added by way of extension to the present system of State instruction, and not, as it would really be, an alteration of the most radical kind in our Education Act. It is difficult to avoid the conviction that the ballot paper to which we allude was deliberately intended to confuse the electors of the colony, and to snatch a victory rather by a ruse-de-guerre than by a straightforward appeal to the country on a clear cut and definite issue.

VIII. Much as we deplore the hard secularism of the present Education Act, we would rather see it retained

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