

To promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.

LEO. XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET

THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 1905

THE ANTI-BIBLE-IN-SCHOOLS MOVEMENT



HE home, the church, the school—these are the 'Mars' Orchestra' or training ground of the youthful heart and intellect. In them the mind is trained to useful knowledge, their hearts and wills are formed to the civil, social, and domestic virtues, so that (as our Bishops said in one of their manifestoes) 'each shall contribute the unit of his goodness to form the sum of righteousness that "exalteth a nation."' The child-mind is not built up on the principle of water-tight compartments, each of which is to receive its freight of educative influences from a different and exclusive quarter. The faculties of children are not independent powers. The knowledge which they acquire, unless it is to be a mental chaos, must be systematised knowledge; it should (as a great educationist has put it) hang together in one coherent and undivided whole; it is essentially one. 'On purely intellectual grounds, then,' says the same authority, 'we cannot separate religious knowledge from other kinds of knowledge, and pursue it by independent methods and under independent conditions.' Religious and secular knowledge are complementary parts of one undivided whole. But religious knowledge is not a mere intellectual exercise. It must, to be of any real benefit, enter into every detail, every project and aspiration of practical life. For the whole object of education is, not the mere accumulation of facts or the acquisition of manual dexterity, but the formation of character. This lies at the root of the whole subject. For this reason religion has a high and necessary function to perform in every department of education. For it, of all others, supplies the child with the right estimate of things, the noblest ideals, the eternal principles and conceptions which lie at the root of right thinking and right conduct. It has, therefore, a function, and a weighty function, to perform in the school life, as well as in the home life of the child. It should, indeed, saturate the whole life of the child; and without its gentle influence the training of youth is crippled and incomplete.

For the reasons thus stated in meagre and imperfect fashion, Catholics cannot hold with the thorough-going secularism which is the guiding principle of the organisation known as the National Education Defence League. 'We have never asked or desired,' said our Bishops, 'a grant for the religious education which we impart in our schools. We are compelled to contribute our quota of taxation for the maintenance of a system of public instruction of which, from motives both of conscience and of the highest patriotism, we cannot avail ourselves. And until justice is done to us we shall continue to urge our claim to a fair portion of that taxation for the purely secular instruction, which, in accordance with the Government programme, is given in our schools.' To that reasonable demand, which is accorded as a matter of course in Canada, Germany, England, and sundry other countries, the National Education Defence League is wholly opposed. Between them and Catholics and the Bible-in-schools League there is being

waged a new variant of the triangular duel in 'Mr. Midshipman Easy.' But, apart from the profound difference in principle already indicated, the 'Nationals' are with us in many points of agreement in our struggle against those who are endeavoring to capture the public schools for sectarian purposes. At their meeting on last Monday in Dunedin, for instance, emphasis was given by various speakers (among whom were three clergymen) to the following points, most of which have been urged by our Bishops: (1) That the Civil Government has neither right nor competency to undertake religious instruction in the State schools; (2) that this cannot be safely or usefully carried out in public schools of mixed religion; (3) that Catholics, and Catholics alone, in this country, are faithful to the sacred duty of training up children in the way they should go, and that the other Churches, and especially the clergy of the Bible-in-schools League, have done much to convince the public that the religious education of youth is not a matter deserving of personal effort or sacrifice; (4) that the Bible-in-schools party, while profoundly at variance among themselves, are united only in the determination of contriving, in some way or other, to turn the State schools into sectarian institutions; (5) that there is no such thing as 'unsectarian' religious teaching, and that 'undenominational' religious instruction is (in Gladstone's phrase) 'a moral monster'; and (6) that the Bible-in-schools clergy would be much better employed in imparting the elements of religion to the children of their various faiths (as Catholics do) than in carrying on a political agitation where the limelight glows.

So far, good. What the Bible-in-schools clergy demand is, not religious equality, but a State creed and religious domination. Professor Ritchie sums up their position with the precision of a clever thumb-nail sketch in a recent work by Haynes. 'What often passes,' says he, 'under the name of religious equality is a compound of the Nonconformist conscience, Sabbatarian legislation, and the Greatest Common Measure of Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and very Low Church Anglicans—leaving out Jews, Seventh Day Baptists, and Catholics for many purposes, High Anglicans for some purposes, and Mahomedans, Mormons, and Atheists for all purposes.' The Catholic position in regard to the State schools is well summed up by our Bishops in the following words: 'Much as we deplore the hard secularism of the present Education Act, we would rather see it retained in its integrity until modifications are forthcoming which would confer a substantial benefit upon the rising generation without endangering the faith and exasperating the feelings of a large class of children who frequent our public schools.'

Notes

Church Parades

A wrong idea—in reference to church parades—seems to have taken up its quarters in the heads of many of our volunteers. And the sooner it is dislodged the better. It is commonly supposed that attendance at church parades is compulsory. And it is, moreover, currently reported that men of various creeds are frequently urged to appear at parades in the churches of denominations to which they do not belong. The Rev. J. J. Pendray, a Methodist clergyman, of Waitara, has—for good and sufficient reasons affecting members of his own congregation—been lately poking up the volunteer authorities on the subject. A letter to the commanding officer of his district elicited a reply which he deemed unsatisfactory. He therefore wrote to the Defence Department, and received from Col. Webb a reply which runs in part as follows.—

'1. Under existing regulations, any volunteer corps is entitled to an honorary chaplain. He, like other