

'Undenominational' Teaching

Butler, in his 'Modern Politician,' looks upon the insincere and tricky use of words as something akin in malice to the crime of treason. For some years past this form of offence has been committed with pestiferous iteration by the clergy of the Bible-in-schools League. They have drawn up a 'non-final' scheme for the teaching of a flaccid Unitarianism in the State schools at the expense of the taxpayers of the Colony. It is ultimately based on the Reformation principle of 'the Bible and the Bible only,' it is an unsuccessful attempt to discover a common denominator for all the Protestant creeds; and yet it is blandly labelled 'undenominational.' The Bible-in-schools clergy have left their proper sphere of quiet duties and thrown themselves upon the political stage—right in front of the footlights. And they have not adorned their new profession. Like Pudd'nhead Wilson, they seem satisfied to 'get the formalities right—never mind about the moralities.' Their talk about 'undenominationalism' is, like that about their vaunted 'conscience clause,' a piece of sheer verbal jugglery—a mere electioneering trick. There is, of course, no such thing as 'undenominational' religious or moral instruction. It has been pointed out to them—and they have not denied it and cannot deny it—that from the view-point of the Atheist or Agnostic all Theistic teaching is denominational; that in the eye of the Jew all Christian teaching is denominational; that from the standpoint of the Catholic all Protestant teaching is denominational; and that the doctrinal attitude of the Catholic Church, and that of the Bible-in-schools clergy, towards the Sacred Scriptures, are hopelessly, 'denominational' one towards the other.

In England some spider recently spun this queer fancy of 'undenominational' religious instruction in the brain of Mr. Asquith. Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in an article in the 'Daily News' of May 27, said some things that were highly calculated to remove the cobwebs from the headpiece of the Member for Fife. Mr. Chesterton says in part:—

'There may be such things common to all Christians. Presumably, there are. But the one thing perfectly evident is that the supremacy and sufficiency of the Bible is not one of them. . . Mr. Asquith may be quite right in saying that there is a grand something common to all our European creeds. But his hair will be very white and his soul very faint with fierce and spiritual labours before he has found out what it is. Mr. Asquith will have brought mystical meditation to the border of madness before he has seen that thing common to Christendom. . . It is much more dogmatic to be undenominational than to be denominational. For the man who propounds an undenominational religion is propounding a new religion; a religion made up of what he, on his own responsibility, supposes to be the first or best or deepest elements in the old ones. The sectarian only professes to know what is most important to him. But the unsectarian professes to know what is most important to everybody—even to his opponents. He claims to be in the love-secrets even of his enemies. Now there is plenty to be said for the sincerity or spiritual value of both these positions; but surely there can be no doubt about which is the more arrogant, dogmatic, and final. The man who claims to have found the truth in his own religion makes a claim comparatively modest. But the man who claims to have found the truth in other people's religions makes a claim of which the sublime and sacred impudence reaches the madness of Mahomet. He declares himself to have seen something more than all the creeds of the earth. He has seen the creed below the creeds; the sea below the sea. He understands Calvinism better than Calvinists, and Catholicism better than Catholics; he knows the first principles of Sandemanianism better than the Sandemanians; he knows why Salvationists wear red jerseys better than they know it themselves. In the dark heart of some Indian temple he learns the secret which is hidden from the priests. He picks up the missals of the mighty mediaeval civilisation, and he reads them right while those who would die for them read them wrong.'

We commend this luminous extract to the careful consideration of the Know-all of the Bible-in-schools League, with this one observation: that the best way to see the daylight is to put one's smoking candle out.

Confiscation-Taxation

In his 'Tancred,' Disraeli laid down the seeming paradox that confiscation destroys public credit, taxation improves it, and that both, nevertheless, come to the same thing. Ireland has long been afflicted with the kind of taxation that is a form of confiscation. And the steadily progressive character of her fiscal burdens promises the near approach of the state of things that was satirised as follows by Sydney Smith: 'The school-boy whips his taxed tops, the heedless youth manages his taxed horse, with a taxed bridle, on a taxed road; and the dying Englishman, pouring his medicine, which has paid seven per cent., flings himself back on his chintz bed, which has paid twenty-two per cent., and expires in the arms of an apothecary who has paid a license of a hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death.'

In January, 1896, the Royal Commission on the Financial Relations between Great Britain and Ireland published their historic report. It was duly presented to her late Majesty and opened the eyes of some British politicians with surprise; for did it not show that the Cinderella Nation of the West was overtaxed for Imperial purposes to the lively tune of practically two and three quarter million sterling per annum? The finding came with the electric shock of a great surprise to English politicians who knew nothing of the western isle. And they made haste to swathe the report in cotton wool and lay it on a shelf, a prey to moth and dust—like the heartless mother that soothes her crying child with doses of chloroform or laudanum. The subsequent course of Irish taxation is told in an article in the June 'Contemporary' on 'Ten Years' Tory Rule in Ireland.' The author is Mr. Thomas Lough, M.P., a noted writer on questions of Irish public finance. He points out how, on this excessive drain of some two and three quarter millions annually 'was based the total taxation of 1893-4, which amounted to seven and a half millions. It was,' he continued, 'this finding that the Government resolved to set aside, but the decision would, at the worst, only imply that no relief could be given. Few would think that it would justify a direct increase of burdens far exceeding in weight anything that Ireland had yet been called upon to bear. Yet such has been the case.'

He then proceeds to enter into full details of the progress of Irish taxation during the last ten years of Tory rule. We extract the following summary statement only: 'The amount named above as the total taxation works out at an average per head of £1 15s 9d. The report of the Commission implied that this was excessive to the extent of 12s per head of the population. Instead, however, of any reduction being made, the amount has been increased to £2 5s 6d per head. The only period of similar duration since the Union in which any such severe change had been made in the taxation was in the ten years after 1849. In that year the total Imperial taxation amounted to 14s 9d per head, and by 1859 it had been increased to 26s 7d, being an increase of 11s 10d, as against 9s 3d during the past ten years. During thirty years after 1859, further increases amounting to 11s 7d were made. These figures lead us at once to the root of every Irish grievance. Ever since the famine period, the British Chancellor has been piling fresh burdens on a population that is rapidly wasting away.' During the past ten years alone the fresh burdens of taxation thrown upon the unhappy country have amounted to two and a half millions sterling per annum. And a great part of this has been imposed upon the people for the blundering campaign against the Dutch Republics in South Africa.