

M. R. ROSSELL PARKER,
DENTAL SURGEON,
8 PRINCES STREET (next Herbert, Hynes).
Telephone ... 1807.

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

NEW ZEALANDER.—(1) Yes. (2) Write to Rev. Mother, St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, and enclose recommendation from your parish priest.



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

LEO. XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 1905

THE BIBLE-LESSONS PLEBISCITE BILL



EDITOR PEPPER, of Virginia City, once forgot his own name. The 'Bible-in-schools Referendum League' never knew theirs. For they will not hear of the introduction of the Bible into the schools, and nothing is farther from their thoughts than an appeal to a referendum. For a referendum, as even the Bible-in-schools clerics know, is a popular vote for the purpose of ratifying or vetoing a Legislative Act already passed by Parliament. A mild rebuke to one of the false pretences in the title of the League is contained in Mr. Sidey's Bill, now before our legislators, and bearing as its short title 'The Bible Lessons in Public Schools Plebiscite Act, 1905.'

Now, a referendum often is, and even a plebiscite may, possibly sometimes be, a useful resort in countries that are governed by parliamentary institutions. But, with our Bishops, we hold to the sound principle of statesmanship that no question should ever be submitted to either a referendum or a plebiscite that affects the rights of conscience of minorities. 'The rights of conscience of a minority, however small, are as sacred and inviolable as those of a majority, however great. God gave them. Man cannot lawfully take them away.' To this the Bible-in-schools leaders made reply to the following effect: that majorities must rule at all times and in all things. And they added the callous reminder that Catholic and other objectors are free to turn themselves into a majority—if they can! Now we are democrats—not of the Atheistic, but of the Theistic, type. And being, moreover, Christian democrats, we differ radically from the Atheistic notions regarding the democracy that were, directly or in effect, formulated by the plumed field-m Marshals of the Bible-in-schools League. We, too, stand by popular government. But we do not, for instance, hold that governments originate in mere convention; nor do we believe in the doctrine that (as Brownson puts it) 'the people, as the State or nation, are the origin and source of all authority and all law, that they are absolutely supreme, and bound by no law or authority that does not emanate from themselves.' We hold, with St. Paul, that 'all power is from God'; that He is above all peoples and States; that He is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'; that His law binds the conscience of nations as it does the conscience of individuals; that the secular authority, no matter how constituted, can never

override the moral order; and that justice should reign in every country as the crowned king by a right which is eternal, immutable, and divine. A government which holds not from God has no ultimate moral support, and can rule only by brute force. The will of a people organised as an empire, kingdom, republic, commonwealth, etc., when such will is constitutionally expressed, is to be obeyed when it is not incompatible with the supreme law of God, Who is the source of all authority and law. But the will of even a democracy is limited by moral and divine right. It is bound, for instance, to treat rights of conscience—which are rights of God—as sacred and inviolable. These are not of conventional origin, and can never be lawfully treated as if they had no existence. The democracy of New Zealand has never sought to override rights of conscience by submitting them to the decision of majority votes. That proposal has come from a coterie of clamorous clerics, who desire to create and endow a State creed, to shift their own proper duties to the unwilling shoulders of public officials, and to pick the pockets of objectors to meet the expenses of the process.

The voting-paper of Mr. Sidey's Plebiscite Bill is in its way a gem of purest ray serene. Here it is:—

'Are you in favor of the proposal that the public schools of the Colony shall be opened daily with the Lord's Prayer, and that in such schools Bible lessons shall be taught to the children by the teachers during school hours, subject to a conscience clause for teachers and scholars?'

YES.
NO.

'If the voter desires to vote for the proposal he must mark a cross on the square opposite the word "Yes." If he desires to vote against it he must make a cross in the square opposite the word "No."'

That voting paper is heavily laden with ways that are dark and tricks that are vain. On reading it we can well understand that it is the voice of the Bible-in-schools 'Referendum' League speaking through the mouth of Mr. Sidey. (1) The proposal contained in the question involves a complete subversion of one of the three fundamental principles of our Education Act. But the terms of reference are so worded as to suggest to the unwary voter that the new scheme would be simply something added, by way of extension, to the present system of State instruction. (2) The ballot-paper supposes that a radical alteration in the Act has already been decided on—namely, that the following fundamental question has been answered in favor of the sectarianising party: 'Are you in favor of the Education Act remaining free, secular, and compulsory, as at present?' (3) And it is furthermore taken for granted that the only matter to be now determined is whether one particular change in the Act—out of some dozens that have been or might be suggested—is, or is not, to be accepted by the people.

Moreover: sundry leading terms in the reference are shrouded in what looks like studied ambiguity. For instance: (4) It is not even hinted that the Lord's Prayer of the schedule is the incorrect and discredited Protestant version, with all its unauthorised additions, and that, in its form and in its history and associations, it is as sectarian as the Thirty-nine Articles or the Westminster Confession of Faith. (5) Take, again, the term 'Bible lessons.' The average voter is, so far as the ballot-paper goes, to be gulled and confused by the apparently deliberate withholding of the following vital items of information: (a) The 'lessons' are not to be given from the 'Bible.' (b) It is proposed to impart them from a 'text-book'—which text-book, having aroused very considerable opposition and deadly