



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

LEO. XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET

THURSDAY, AUGUST 24, 1905.

THE PLEBISCITE BILL



ACCORDING to Sydney Smith, the Troglodytes bore with their old people till these began to bore their auditors with long and uninteresting tales. Then the weary tribesmen of the cave arose, strangled the garrulous ancients with stranded cow-tail, and planted the corpses where the lilies blow. The people of New Zealand have long borne with patience the dreary loquacity of a group of clerics whose zeal for the souls of children—if it ever existed—has fallen into senile and inglorious decay. 'There never has been,' says our local evening contemporary, 'a public question in which so little interest is shown, or in which so little popular feeling is evinced, as in that of the Bible-in-schools.' Even Mr. Sidey's Bible Lessons in Public Schools Plebiscite Bill failed to give the ancients of the League a grip upon the lobe of the public ear. A wearied House choked the measure off last week, and in all probability it will (in the opinion of our secular contemporaries) be allowed to lie embalmed for the present session of Parliament and for the year of grace 1905.

This was the foreseen fate of a Bill that aroused so much opposition both in Parliament and in the country. Even if the Bill had been committed, the chances of its ever passing were (says the 'Otago Daily Times') 'more than doubtful. The chances of the enactment of a private Member's Bill upon a controversial subject always are exceedingly slight. Private Members' days are few, the opportunities which a private Member has for securing discussion of his Bill are limited, and frequently he is indebted to sheer good fortune rather than to anything else for them when they do occur, and the opportunities which opponents of the Bill, and those who are afraid to record an opinion regarding it, have for burking discussion are many and various.' Mr. Sidey's Bill was blocked by unappreciative Members till the fatal hour struck after which the Standing Orders of the House made it impossible to take fresh business. A modern Parliament's polite substitute for the stranded cow-tail had done its work, and strangled a Bill that was intended to affirm for New Zealand the evil principle of old-time persecution that questions of conscience and religious liberty should be settled by a count of noses.

Our local morning contemporary has pointed out that, with many Members, the opposition to Mr. Sidey's Bill arose 'not from the existence of objections to the principle of the referendum so much as from the existence of an uncertainty respecting what lies behind the referendum.' We have full many a time set forth the tangle of incompatible schemes that are favored by various sections of the movement for introducing 'an emasculated caricature' of the Protestant version of the Bible, at the public expense, into our State schools. Mr. Sidey's Bill provided for 'lessons from the Bible'—an obvious misdescription. 'Giving Bible lessons,' 'teaching Bible lessons'—these are some of the various pro-

posals that rend 'the marvellous unity' of the sectarianising party. One of the block-lights of the League, Mr. Flux, 'described the present agitation in effect,' says the 'Otago Daily Times,' 'as one for securing one-half of a loaf of which the whole was ultimately desired. The famous text-book,' adds our contemporary, 'was rather severely ignored by the speakers (at the recent Wellington meeting), but Dr. Gibb, clinging to it, said the League would be delighted to have the plebiscite taken upon it.' It was not so much as hinted at in Mr. Sidey's Plebiscite Bill. We hold, with the Dunedin 'Times,' that 'it does seem desirable that the ground on which the League stands should be cleared of some of the present obstacles to the possession by the public of a precise knowledge of the eventual aims of its leaders.'

Notes

They Scored

In the middle seventies a mania of spelling-bees seized a goodly portion of the English-speaking world and got it down and worried it. But it wrought much educational good among both young and middle-aged and old—for they were all smitten; and, incidentally, it led to a movement for that spelling-reform which the English language needs as sorely as Chinese needs the abandonment of its hieroglyphic (or rather ideographic) writing. Over in Bendigo (Victoria) the spelling-bee was recently revived. A public competition took place in the local Masonic Hall. The 'Advocate's' correspondent reports that 195 competitors entered for the two prizes from the various schools in the city. 'Out of that number,' says our Melbourne contemporary, 'after the first round of examination, seven were selected as having specially distinguished themselves.' The seven children were from the two local Catholic schools. Surprise was (says the 'Advocate') expressed at the result, and it was all the greater as 'the words selected for competition were all taken from the State school books.'

Misther McCarthy, Esquire

In his 'History of Our Own Times' Justin McCarthy says: 'The dramatic instinct—if we may be allowed to call it so—which enables a man to put himself for the moment into the condition and mood of men entirely unlike himself in feelings and conditions, is an indispensable element in real statesmanship, but it is the rarest of all gifts among politicians of the second order.' It is as indispensable to the writers of history as to statesmen, and is just as rarely found among them. Our old No-Popery friend Michael McCarthy is one of those who furnish the most crying examples of the way in which history should not be written. To Carlyle, on one of his 'livery' days, the population of the world was mostly composed of fools. To the slipshod 'literary' pet of the Orange lodges mankind (or at least the Irish portion of it) consists of Michael McCarthy (in an aureole); the adherents of the Reformed creeds (who are mostly saints); and Catholics, who are fools, or knaves, or both. There are only two colors in his palette—shimmering gold, with the sun of heaven upon it, and pigments that are as black as Erebus. These latter have been hitherto reserved for 'Rome.'

The imaginative soi-disant 'Roman Catholic' has, in a recent agglomerate of printed paper, divided the Protestant aureole with the Japanese and poured out upon the Russians the tarry tints of Tophet which he usually keeps on tap for the exclusive benefit of 'Papists' and 'Popery.' The Japanese are wingless angels in petticoats and bifurcated continuations; the Russians are demon-savages in human shape; and