

DEATHS

HAYDON.—On August 29, at his residence, Central Hotel, Princes street, William Henry, beloved husband of Catherine Haydon; aged 72 years.—R.I.P.

McKENNA.—Mary McKenna, relict of the late Charles McKenna, of Cromwell, and dearly beloved sister of Anne and Margaret Mulholland, of Dunedin; born in the parish of Lavey, County Derry, Ireland. Deeply regretted.—R.I.P.



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

LBO. XIII, to the N.Z. TABLET

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 1905.

SHIFTING COUNSELS

THE Bible-in-schools Executive's counsels are, like Muloch's world, 'full of change, change—nothing but change.' The leaders of the movement are roving uneasily about—each on his separate beat—in pursuit of a definite project, like the disconsolate Caleb in Search of a Wife, or like the lackadaisical maiden that gathered shells upon the shore and threw them one by one away. Thus far all the schemes evolved have one by one been cast aside. Not one has succeeded in gaining the assent of the party who are bent on turning our public schools, somehow, into sectarian institutions. The pearl of great price—a precise and definite scheme for effecting this radical alteration in the Education Act—has not yet been found. And its discovery seems as far off as ever. The Bible-in-schools party are racking their puzzled brains with permutations and combinations of 'simple Bible-reading,' 'Bible-lessons,' 'Bible-teaching,' 'religious instruction'—definite and indefinite, 'theological instruction,' 'the bases of all religion,' 'ethical explanations,' 'geographical and grammatical explanations,' 'the Bible as literature only,' 'the mutilated text-book,' 'the un-mutilated Word of God,' and so on and on. The storm of Babel voices whirls and eddies around a discredited and sectarian version of the Scriptures. This—or fragments of it, edited with a Unitarian bill-hook—it is proposed, in some vague and undecided way, to introduce into our public schools, at the public expense, and on distinctively sectarian lines.

The talking Walrus in Lewis Carroll's poem 'wept like anything to see such quantities of sand' upon the lone seashore. And at last Monday's annual meeting of the Council of the Churches in Dunedin there were oratorical tears a-plenty over the sandy shiftiness and uncertainty of the Wellington Conference's proposals. But from the beginning of the movement 'twas ever thus. 'We have never had much information,' said one of the reverend councillors; 'we are all at sea on the subject, and discussion is useless.' He moved a communication with the headquarters of the Bible-in-schools Conference, 'to get a definite statement as to its programme.' The motion lapsed when it was learned that 'such a statement had been asked for several times, but never received.' There the matter rests. And there—judging by past experience and present prospects—it is likely to rest till the toes of the Bible-in-schools Conference are turned towards the roots of the daisies. For—like the Duke in 'Twelfth Night'—their minds are

as shifting as the iridescent tints on the face of an opal; or like the Earl of Bath in the old political squib of 1742, they wobble from scheme to scheme, unable to hold fast to any, and constant only in their weathercock inconsistency.

'Each party thought t'have won him;
But he himself did so divide,
Shuffled and cut from side to side,
That now both parties shun him.'

But the shifting Earl of Bath knew his mind for at least an hour on end. Therein he differed from the Executive of our Bible-in-schools Conference. What is it precisely that they want? They cannot say. No man can say. Only, whatever it is, they—judging by their clamor—want it very badly. Hodge at a country fair would not buy his humble live stock in a poke. But the Bible-in-schools leaders serenely urge 'the advanced democracy of New Zealand to commit itself on blind trust to acceptance of a sectarianising scheme whose specific form (if form it has) is heavily masked in flowing cloak and domino noir and has never been seen of man.

We have given the most obvious and charitable explanation of the curious reticence of the captains of the sectarianising movement. There is an alternative theory which might readily enter as a suspicion into the minds of those who are acquainted with the squalid story of deliberate and predetermined proselytism of Catholic children that marked the imposition of what was, on the face of it, a much less objectionable scheme upon the national schools of Ireland. The alternative explanation to which we refer was recently outlined by the Rev. J. T. Hinton (Baptist), an able critic of the Bible-in-schools puzzle, in the course of a recent letter in the 'Otago Daily Times.' The Bible-in-schools leaders' 'lack of preciseness is,' said he, 'either helpless or wilful. If it be the former, and the party does not really know what it desires, it reveals the chaos over which darkness and ignorance brood. If it be the latter, and the party knows but will not speak out frankly what it precisely desires, then there is surely ground for grave suspicion as to ulterior purposes. The party needs most vigilant watching and challenge.' And so say all of us.

We hear less now about the 'marvellous unanimity' of the Bible-in-schools League than in the enthusiastic days when the pleasant fairy-tale of their oneness of heart and soul smote the mind of Mr. Seddon with a sense of deep 'impressiveness.' Then, as now, that 'unanimity' was of the kind of which the bard in 'Hudibras' once sang:—

'For discords make the sweetest airs,
And curses are a sort of prayers.'

The Anglican Primate of New Zealand (the Most Rev. Dr. Nevill) furnishes a curious instance of the hopelessly incompatible views that are held by large classes of those who are held together by the loose and slippery withes of the Bible-in-schools League. Last week, at one of the usual thin and chilly meetings that damn the movement, the Primate laid the cold steel on the raw nerve-pulp of some of his clerical hearers by an infant-terrible frankness of statement of some of the reasons which have led him to dissent from 'the Wellington plan.' He, for instance, dislikes the plebiscite. Worse still, he clubbed the listening clergy with the following declaration:—

'This scheme does not seem to me to lay the duty of religious instruction upon the right shoulders. God forbid that I should say a word against the teachers of our schools, many of whom are most estimable men within my knowledge; but at the same time I do think that the discharge of this duty rests upon the ministers of religion. . . . It seems to me that these are the proper persons to present the teachings of the Book to the children.'

He, too, frankly insists upon formal 'religious instruction' being imparted to the children—and that,