

typhoid fever and blood-poisoning. It seemed that the gates would soon swing open and let her spirit pass beyond the great barrier that the footsteps of all of us must one day cross. But (so runneth the report) a timely flash of lightning struck her house, set the sick-room on fire, and (by some unknown electric alchemy) restored the patient to the health that not a drug in all the pharmacopeia could have given her. An analogous effect may be produced upon the Bible-in-schools leaders in Victoria by the heavy shock of censure that was passed upon them by the State Legislature of Victoria within the past two weeks. It may cure them of their ready resort to intimidating methods of electioneering, and induce them to consider some means less unworthy of 'the cloth' for shaking salt upon the Parliamentary tail. The means adopted by them to 'persuade' Members contributed largely to produce the deadly majority—forty-five votes to six—which pole-axed the Scripture Instruction in State Schools Bill introduced on their behalf by Mr. Watt. Is it not high time for our parson-politicians both in Australia and New Zealand to cease for a time the application of the knobkerry to the Parliamentary pate, and turn—for a change—to their long-neglected duty of instructing unto justice the little ones of their respective flocks?

That Text-book

Verdi, in his 'Rigoletto,' sang of woman's variable moods. His merry aria ('La Donna e Mobile') was a lengthened echo of the couplet that (according to tradition) was traced by the royal hand of Francis I., who was a somewhat luckless King of France in the Reformation days, and was confined in the same year as his many-wived neighbor, King Hal the Eighth:—

'Souvent femme varie;
'Bien fol est qui s'y fie.'

['Woman changes full many a time and oft; foolish is he that puts his trust in her']. Verdi cruelly likens lovely woman to a bit of soft feather-down upon the breeze—the southern emblem of hopeless inconstancy. But never was woman more tossed about by every wind that blows than are the thistle-down heads of the Bible-in-schools League in regard to the details of their scheme for Protestantising the public schools of New Zealand. On the one lone question of the now notorious text-book they have pretty well boxed the compass. Some time ago they invited the population of New Zealand to sound the loud timbrel over that incomparable compilation of 'religious instruction' which they had imported from over-sea and docked and pulled and lugged this way and that to suit (as they for the moment thought) the young idea in New Zealand. Up to a certain point (says the Rev. P. B. Fraser), synchronising with his public attacks upon it, 'the trumpeting of this text-book was unceasing. A Bill was instantly to place it before the people, and it was to be pitchforked right over the heads of Parliament into the schools, and become the established and endowed sectarian religion of the land. Objectors who didn't want it could just leave it—they would not be 'forced' to learn it, though they would be forced to pay for those who did.' But that day has gone by. The mobile-minded clerics that lead the movement seem to have wrapped their precious manual in cotton-wool and left it to the mercy of moth and dust upon the shelf. And no wonder. For they know full well that the country does not want it, and that it has had no honor in the land from which it came—having been relegated to the rubbish-heap by the Parliament and people of Victoria. Thus it comes to pass that the famous text-book is, for the present at least, kept out of sight and out of mind by the very men in New Zealand who licked it into such fantastic shape. 'And now,' says the Presbyterian clergyman already quoted, 'the issue for the country is the "abstract" question of Bible in schools—with the text-book up the sleeve of the oecumenical Council of the Churches with headquarters at Wellington.'

And thus, like Moore's harp, the cold chain of silence hangs over the famous text-book of mutilated Bible-extracts that was to have made an 'educational peace' as deep as the peace of Nirvana to settle upon New Zealand. Even the paid small-bore politician of the League seems unwilling to talk about it until his tongue is set a-wagging by the point of a goad. A few days ago, at Lovells Flat (Otago) he was provoked into putting up some sort of a fight for his employers' 'emasculated caricature of the Bible.' On his part, however, the combat was what has come to be called, by a happy euphemism, 'an offensive movement to the rear.' 'Nothing of vital importance,' he pleaded—over his shoulder, 'was omitted which could vitiate its Christian character.' 'All the salient features of the New Testament,' he urged, as he sprinted along, 'were preserved, and the condensation was done in such a way as not to do any violence to the Scripture narrative.'

The debate that ensued proceeded somewhat on the lines of the discussion that broke up the society upon the Stanislaw. But, incidentally, it was shown (among other things) that Daniel, for instance, was, so to speak, 'defenestrated' (or fired out through the window) from 'the Scripture narrative'; that Jonah was thrown overboard and drowned—the incident of 'the great fish' of the inspired record being, possibly, treated as a 'snake-yarn' by the reverend 'higher critics' of the League; and that a child would have to be six years at school, taking his daily dose of the Bowdlerised Protestant version of the Bible, before hearing of such events 'of vital importance' as the Creation and the Fall. On our own account we might add the omission—by no means accidental, we deem—of the very remarkable series of texts and incidents which go to establish what Catholics call the 'prerogatives' of St. Peter; while emphasis is given, by nothing less than triple repetition, to his denial of the Lord in the days before he, being converted, received from the Master the commission to strengthen his brethren and feed the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ. This and sundry other musty old controversial fallacies are bad enough in their way. But the Wellington clerics have perpetrated a still worse form of 'violence to the Scripture narrative.' They tore out of it and threw over the fence the grand central fact of the Christian faith—the Virgin-Birth of the Saviour of the world. This (says the Presbyterian professor, Rev. Dr. Rentoul) 'is a wanton and a deadly wrong to the bona fides of the story and to the central faith of the Protestant Churches themselves.' The idea of mutilating the inspired record of the Incarnation in this disgraceful way must have come from a place a long way off from heaven. The Victoria Commission rejected it 'because (as it turns out) some of the clergy composing it do not believe in the Virgin-Birth and Divinity of Christ. History has a trick of repeating itself. Over fifty years ago Archbishop Whately endeavored to force upon the National Schools of Ireland his 'Evidences of Christianity'—a book that is chiefly remarkable for containing not so much as the shadow of a reference to the Divinity of Christ. Foiled in this, and in his various other attempts to use the public schools of Ireland 'as an instrument of conversion,' he retired in dudgeon from his place on the National Board..

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