

long a puzzle to the philosopher. 'What is the secret of your happiness?' asked Franklin. 'There's no secret, doctor; I've got one of the best of wives, and when I go to work she always gives me a kind word of encouragement and a blessing with her parting kiss; and when I go home she is always there to meet me with a smile and a kiss of welcome. And then tea is sure to be prepared; and as we chat in the evening I learn of so many little things done by her with the view of making our home the resort of love, of joy, of peace and plenty, that I cannot find it in my heart to speak an unkind word or give an unfriendly look to anybody.'

## THE SECULAR PHASE OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

### A DISCUSSION

(By the Editor of the *New Zealand Tablet*.)

The following article on the above subject—the fifth of the series—appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* of February 6:—

#### V.—THE ARGUMENT FROM RESULTS: CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND CRIME STATISTICS.

The advocates of the exclusion of religion from the schools advance a double-barrelled argument from results. This may be summarily stated as follows:—The secular system has not clearly increased the number of crimes (with which, for convenience, I include offences) committed in this Dominion; Catholics, on the other hand, despite their religious system of education, show in the statistical returns a greatly disproportionate number of crimes. The inference is sufficiently obvious. The first part of this argument has been tested and found wanting; the second is here under review.

As shown in the fourth article of this series, the whole of this statistical argument is dominated by the following consideration:—Good principles of action must be assumed to produce good results in action, except in so far as these results may be hindered by external obstacles, such as human frailty or malice, etc. An anti-Christian philosophy may indeed contend that Christian truths and principles are bad in themselves, and lead to bad results. But throughout these articles I assume that the defenders of the secular system are believers in at least the fundamental verities of Christian faith. With the non-Christian philosophies one argues along different lines. Now, Catholic schools, like other truly Christian schools, put into the place of first importance the Ten Commandments, the love and worship of a Personal God and His Christ, and the assiduous training of the conscience and the will to virtue. If all this leads of itself to the prison cell or the hangman's slip-knot, it is high time to dynamite Christian churches, and to send the Christian clergy on tumbrils to the bonemill. Besides, on philosophic grounds, we must not assume that pious Catholics are, as a body, so beef-witted as to make great sacrifices for a generation to maintain a system of schools, if these, like Fagan's den in 'Oliver Twist,' are practically academies of crime. The argument proves a vast deal too much. Here is a charming variety of its 'fallacies of figures,' which show that it is nearly as dangerous to handle statistics without logic as it is to handle a 'live' wire without protected palms.

1. The crime argument against religion in the schools assumes the completeness of our records of crime and of crime by religious denominations. But whole classes of crime (including such prevalent enormities as pre-natal murder) are seldom discovered; only a relatively small number of arrests are made for crimes discovered; not much more than half the persons charged with crime are convicted; and only a fraction of those convicted have their religious denomination entered upon our statistics of law and crime—namely, those who, after conviction, are sent to prison. Thus, out of 27,561 persons convicted in the Supreme, District, and Magistrate's Courts of New Zealand in 1906, only 2439 received sentences of 'peremptory imprisonment,' while 3476 had the option of escaping durance by payment of a fine.—(*New Zealand Official Year Book*, 1908, p. 230.) Why draw wide conclusions against religious schools upon a fractional part of the facts of the case?

2. The crime argument against religion in education, as commonly stated (e.g., *Otago Daily Times*, January 6, 1909), is based, not upon a comparison of the gravity of the crimes committed, nor even upon the total number of crimes, but only upon the number of crimes that are punished by actual imprisonment. This argument makes a goose quill count for as much as a warship—it assumes

that it is the number, and not the weight, of the delinquencies that tips the balance of legal wrong-doing to this side or to that. The denominational crime table in the *Official Year Book* (1908, p. 230) lumps together, for instance, under heading 'Convicted on Indictment,' large classes of legal misdeeds, from quack surgery on an ulcer up to wilful murder and to abominations of an unmentionable kind. It gives no details as to the distribution of specific offences and crimes amongst the different religious denominations.

3. The argument of the gaol records against religion in the schools assumes that religion is the only factor in our prison-punished crime. There are mysteries in crime of which no man holds the key. But among the known factors of the problem are the following: The comfortable and well-to-do furnish our prisons with the more detestable criminals—those that sin against the greater light, with less of blind passion and more of perverted volition. The poor supply, perhaps, the best and brightest examples of every Christian virtue. But the sins they commit are much more likely to appear in the courts and to earn punishment in prison. And, numerically, the vastly greater part of our convicted prisoners come from the (financially) lower social strata. We find among the great bulk of our prison population a low social status; poverty in a greater or less degree, undesirable environment or associations, often some measure of physical or intellectual or moral degeneracy, religious education rare or brief, and (extremely commonly) practical irreligion, often of life-long duration. Why are all these circumstances ignored, and the rare and unlikely factors—religion and religious education—alone taken into account? A child religiously educated may, indeed, grow up a criminal—but only by disregarding the truths and principles of conduct instilled into him at school. The vast bulk of our criminals become sinners first and criminals afterwards, chiefly because they push the secular principle of our public school system to its logical issue—by banishing God and religion from the whole of their lives. So far as our crime statistics may be an argument against any school system, they tell against the secular system, and against that alone.

4. The argument of the prison statistics falls into the further error of supposing that Catholics are an integral seventh of the population of New Zealand. As a matter of fact, they are only a numerical seventh. To be an integral seventh Catholics should be a seventh of all the principal sections of the population—of the landowners, the merchants, the farmers, the manufacturers, the professional classes, the mine-owners, the shopkeepers, and the rest. But this is notoriously not the case. The vastly greater part of New Zealand Catholics are of Irish birth and of the first generation of Irish descent. Owing to the statutory destruction of Irish industries, the official starvation of Irish education, and the wholesale Irish land law confiscations which have been carried out almost continuously till a comparatively few years back, the Catholic population of these countries belongs in an overwhelmingly high proportion to the poorer and the poorest classes—namely, to those that furnish the numerically greatest (but not necessarily the worst) part of our prison population. For purposes of comparison Catholics should, therefore, be contrasted in the matter of crime, not with the total population of the country, but in proper proportion and class by class with the classes to which they belong. Catholics number about one in seven of our total population. What proportion do they hold among our poorer and poorest classes? Statisticians do not say. But it is probably safe to say that they are, proportionately, twice, or over twice, as numerous in these classes as the members of other chief denominations taken collectively. Are Catholics in this Dominion represented on the crime calendar, or in the prison returns, above their proper proportion of those sections of the population to which they belong? There is nothing whatever in our statistics of crime to suggest, much less to prove, this.

5. The gaol return argument against religion in the school assumes the equal all-round liability of offenders to imprisonment. But this is not so. The mercurial disposition of the Western Celt (which is a racial, not a religious, trait) impels him, when tipsy, more than his phlegmatic neighbors, to offences of pugnacity; while his greater comparative poverty makes him do his drinking more in the open, where he is relatively more liable to arrest, and exposes him relatively more to imprisonment, on account of his greater inability to pay a fine. He is, in so far, relatively more exposed to enumeration on the denominational statistics of legal crime. Moreover, the Irish National School system is not properly a religious system, at least in the Catholic meaning of the term.

6. The prison argument against religion in the school assumes that Catholic criminals become criminals precisely because of the religious principles and practices which they learned in the Catholic schools. But (a) this takes it for granted that all the Catholic prison population has been

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