

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 sixth of the series—appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* of February 13:—

VI.—SOME NON-FACTS AND FALLACIES CONSIDERED.

When Sir Edward Fry was inaugurating an investigation of the working of the Irish Land Acts, he exhorted the lawyers 'so to present the case on either side as to generate the maximum of light and the minimum of heat.' To achieve this happy result with the least misunderstanding and the least waste of time and energy, it is well, where possible, to get back to some dominant fact or principle on which both disputants can agree. With this object in view, I have all along strongly insisted upon one general ground of agreement upon which both the Christian supporters and the Christian opponents of our secular system of public instruction can stand together—namely, a common acceptance of the teachings of Christian philosophy and revealed religion, in regard to the origin and the sublime destiny of the child. Here we stand hand-in-hand in a common belief and hope, and, I trust, also in the bond of a common charity. This common teaching (which is not Christian exclusively) determines broadly for us what should be the chief aim in any and every system of training the child; it indicates, moreover, in a general way what the processes of such training should be.

Among the supporters of the secular system who have thus far taken part in this discussion there has been, however, a singular unanimity in avoiding the fundamental issue—namely, the Christian philosophical and pedagogical justification of the exclusion of religion from the school life of the child. Yet, as already shown, this is the only ground upon which an effective defence of the secular system by Christians can be set up. An anonymous writer has furnished four out of five articles on the religious difficulty. These have, unfortunately, been couched in a heated and exaggerated tone. The points of view with which they deal will receive due attention at the proper time. For the present, let the following summary remarks suffice: (1) He, in effect, contends that Catholic prelates (or some of them) were really the persons who lowered the flag of Christ from the public schools of New Zealand and Victoria, and brought about the conditions that prevail at present in the educational system of New South Wales. But (a) even if the writer's version of these matters were true in every particular, it would not prove that the Catholic bishops were even the occasion, much less the cause, of the banishment of God and religion from the schools; neither would it in any way affect the fundamental merits or demerits of secular, as opposed to religious, education. But (b), the anonymous writer's statements are (unintentionally, no doubt) misleading to an amazing degree. This will appear at the proper time. (2) He sets forth to 'prove'—chiefly by quotations (more or less) from the Syllabus of Pius IX. and from deductions based thereon—that the Catholic claims in regard to education are so preposterous that no sane legislature could for a moment entertain them. At the proper time the reader will see that the anonymous writer's treatment of this subject is simply ablaze with errors in fact and inference. (3) He repeats, in a way, the argument from results, both for the secular, and against the Catholic system. At the time that he penned this argument, he had before him (as he admits) the two last preceding articles of this series, which clearly set forth the principles on which alone a rational and informative discussion on that argument from results can be carried on. But, significantly enough, he neither attempted to disprove these principles of discussion nor to follow them. He preferred the pitfall path of fallacy. And his contribution to this part of the discussion is of interest chiefly as evidence of the extent to which, logic apart, 'you can prove anything by statistics.'

A very important contribution to the secular side of this discussion is the article by the Rev. N. A. Davis on 'Church and State and the School.' It is marked by an ability, clearness, and courtesy that those who know the Rev. N. A. Davis expect of him as a matter of course. He frankly 'upholds the purely secular school system'; he sustains it, moreover, on a Christian principle—to wit, on the ground that the civil Government, being a secular institution for secular purposes, should neither teach, nor pay for the teaching of, religion, but 'should be restricted to secular instruction.' Added importance is given to the Rev. Mr. Davis's meaty and well-written article by the

fact that it reflects views that are current among the adherents of several Christian Churches in this Dominion. Catholics are hand-in-hand with them in denying the competency of the civil Government to set itself up as a direct teacher of religion. Its function (in our view, and probably in the view of most of the Christian creeds) is to procure the good of the people in the secular or worldly order—to protect and co-ordinate their rights, to press upon them their social duties, to secure public tranquility. These temporal objects it does not achieve by the direct teaching of religion. The duty of the civil law in regard to these is rather of the protective order—the 'hindering of hindrances' (as Bosanquet puts it), the removal of obstacles, the affording of facilities of environment, and so on. By these various means, as Devas remarks (*Key to the World's Progress*, p. 194), people are 'enabled to live more easily in agreement with the rule of reason or the law of God, and to fulfil the very object for which they are on earth.'

Catholics do not admit the competency of the civil Government as a teacher of religion. But neither do they conclude from this that religion must therefore be excluded from State-subsidised systems of education.

1. The question raised above is, practically, the question of the respective rights and duties of State and Church (and, presumably, also of the family) in education. But the real issues under discussion here lie back of all that. These issues are, in briefest terms, the following: Is religion in education inconsistent with, or hostile to, the true end and aim of the life of the Christian child, and the true principles of pedagogy (the science of the training of youth)? If so, why and how? Does the exclusion of religion from education promote the true end and aim of the life of the Christian child, and accord with the true principles of pedagogy? If so, why and how? If religion is clearly proved to be a mischievous, or even a useless, factor in education, there is an end of the matter. If, on the other hand, religion is (as the immemorial belief of Christendom holds, and must be deemed to hold rightly) an essential part of true education, it must retain its rightful place therein, even if the heavens should fall. If the State cannot itself directly effect this, it becomes its duty to entrust it to those who can.

2. The civil Government may not itself teach religion. Does it follow from this that State-aided schools must of necessity be purely secular? Certainly not. Does it follow that the State must therefore create a monopoly of free education, and banish therefrom religion and morality based on religion? Certainly not.

3. The civil Government may not itself teach religion. Does it follow that the Government must therefore perform the hostile act of excluding religion and religious training during the formative processes of education—when such training is calculated to produce the best and most permanent results? Does it follow that the high capacity of the child for religious and moral development during school life is to be neglected as of no practical use or interest or value as a national asset? Are not carefully-trained and delicate consciences better safeguards for social order and temporal well-being than battalions of bayonets or hillocks of policemen's bludgeons? And when can this priceless culture be imparted under more favorable conditions than in the training processes and the religious atmosphere of the ideal school?

4. The civil Government may not itself teach religion. Does it follow that it may not therefore provide, in some way—or get provision made in some way—through those who are competent, to make religion what it has been from immemorial ages in Christendom, the very soul of education? This does not, of course, necessarily imply a money payment for religious training—Catholics, at least, do not expect or require this. Religion is, for instance, a chief factor in the training and reform of inebriates by the Salvation Army on Pakatoa Island. But that religion is not paid for by the State; the State (as I am informed) merely makes a capitation grant for the maintenance of those committed, and affords facilities and a suitable environment for the play of religious influences in that noble and well-conducted charity. There we have in actual operation the substance of the Catholic demand in education. If this principle is good (and it is) for inebriate children of a larger growth on Pakatoa, how can it work mischief to the life-aim of our little men and maids at school? Our Health Department rightly lays the chief stress on preventive methods. Why does our Education Department so neglect them?

5. The civil Government must not impart religious training. Well and good. But either the child is, or is not, to receive a religious training (this is something vastly more than religious instruction). If not, why not? (I am writing all the time for Christian men and women.) If the child is to receive such training, its doses of religion must, in the secular system, be administered in different

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