

Proposed Bible-in-Schools Referendum

A PROTESTANT OPINION.

In our issue of April 30 we wrote as follows in reference to the proposal of the Wellington Conference to refer the question of the Bible-in-schools to a vote of the electors of New Zealand:—

'As to the Referendum, it might be a valuable resort, both for Government and for the people, in matters of which the average elector is a sufficient judge. But we have long since expressed the conviction that no matters should be submitted to it that affect the religious or political rights of minorities, or that have aroused, or are likely to arouse, strong party or sectarian feeling. The proposed solution of the educational difficulty involves, moreover, the acceptance, by the State, of the Protestant and sectarian principle of Bible-reading without note or comment and of the private interpretation of the teachings of the Sacred Volume. It is palpably a question of the non-submittable kind. It is no trifling problem, and requires for its settlement cool heads, a thorough knowledge of all the conflicting interests involved, a spirit of mutual good-will, and a determination to respect rights of conscience at all hazards.'

We are glad to see this view of the subject ably set forth and defended in a letter by the Rev. J. T. Hinton, which appeared in the 'Otago Daily Times' of last Thursday. The Rev. Mr. Hinton is commenting on the following words which appeared in the course of a letter by Rev. Mr. Fairclough: 'That is the present question. Not whether the Bible should be in the schools or not: not whether the people want it there or not, but whether the people should be allowed to speak for themselves.' This, then (says Mr. Hinton), is the question: 'Shall we refer the matter of the Bible in schools to a referendum?' He then goes on to say:—

'Now, the referendum, as a form of popular government, has some value, although it is open to reproach as an evidence of the breaking-down of our parliamentary institutions. Its practical use, however, is limited. It can be used effectively in only comparatively small quantities, and there are certain questions which may not be so decided. The Hon. the Premier declared in the House that this was so, when some few sessions ago he introduced a Referendum Bill. We shall recognise these limitations if we consider what the referendum really is. It is an appeal to a majority vote, and carries with it the right to compel the minority to submit. Now this, of course, is quite correct, and, indeed, inevitable in many of our political and social questions. But even some of these questions, Mr. Seddon says, are barred out. And, besides these, there is a large range of questions referring to religion which may not be thus settled. I lay down this thesis, and earnestly desire that it may be considered and discussed: "That it is wrong and immoral to propose to settle a religious question by an appeal to a majority."

'The majority rule, valuable as it is in many ways, has no place in the sphere of religion. We have no State Church, no national religion. No one Church, be it ever so strong in numbers, can forbid the smallest sect to live and grow. Hence, the illimitable multiplication of our religious sects. We often groan over this, but we fully recognise that a compelled uniformity would be infinitely more disastrous. If no one sect has a right to claim special religious privileges, then also no six sects clubbing together to form a new sect, and calling themselves "The Bible-in-schools Association," has any such claim. And no such association has the smallest right to demand from me (or from anyone else) a conscientious declaration that I object to join them. The "conscience clause" is a mere impertinence.

'But someone will say that the "Bible in schools" is not a religious question. So, when some few years ago the Council of the Churches commenced this agitation, the Rev. J. J. Lewis, the then secretary of the Bible-in-schools Committee, strenuously refused to admit that the question was a religious one. But since his time the platform has been widened and developed, and now it is beyond further controversy that the question is one that reaches far and deep into the realms of religion. It is, therefore, one in regard to which the people who believe in it and wish for it are bound to act as they do with the rest of their religion—work it out and pay for it themselves!

'This is what the Roman Catholic Church is doing. It holds and teaches that religion is the most important part of education, and requires its people to act up to its belief. Hence their separate schools, and their raising of money to support them. It is only to be regretted that they cannot so far separate these two—the secular and religious aspects of education—as to fall in with our national school system; or that, refusing conscientiously to do this, they should not take the resulting martyrdom with a manlier spirit! At the same time it must be acknowledged that they show an excellent example, and prove that they have the courage of their convictions.

'This "religious question" of the "Bible in schools" belongs to the Churches and not to the State at all. The Churches could meet it satisfactorily if they would awake to their responsibilities and resources. But if they will not undertake the religious education of their children, then it, like many other good things, will have to remain undone.

'I am not without hope, however, that when the Churches realise how false and futile is this appeal to Caesar they will arise in their might, and crying: "It must and shall be done," do it themselves!'

Diocesan News

ARCHDIOCESE OF WELLINGTON.

(From our own correspondent.)

June 18.

An 'At home' will be held in the new schoolroom, Newtown, on Wednesday evening next.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was held at St. Mary of the Angels' on Sunday last. The sermon at Vespers on the feast of the day was preached by Rev. Father McNamara.

A social, under the auspices of the H.A.C.B. Society, was held at the Druid's Hall on Wednesday evening last in aid of a brother who has been incapacitated through illness for the past twelve months. A large number of sympathisers were present and thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

The annual meeting of St. Joseph's Choir was held at the presbytery, Boulcott street, on Monday evening last. The Rev. Father O'Shea occupied the chair, and a large number of members was present. The report and balance sheet were presented by the secretary, Mr. Reichel, the latter showing a satisfactory credit balance. Both were adopted. A vote of thanks was passed to Mr. G. D. Cronin, who took temporary charge of the choir during the absence of the conductor. The rev. chairman complimented the members on the excellent result of the year's work and the satisfactory efforts which had been made to reduce the debt on the organ. The following officers were elected for the ensuing year: Secretary and treasurer, Mr. Henderson; librarian, Mr. Foot; organist, Mr. Ennis; conductor, Mr. McLaughlin; general committee, Misses Segrief and McDonald, and the organist, secretary, conductor, and librarian.

A large and enthusiastic meeting of ex-students of St. Patrick's College was held in the college on Sunday last for the purpose of resuscitating the Old Boys' Association. Representatives from Dunedin, Christchurch, and Blenheim were present. The Rev. Father Keogh occupied the chair and explained the object of the meeting and the mutual benefits to be derived by members. The provisional committee, appointed at the meeting held on April 29, submitted a draft of proposed rules which were adopted with some slight alterations. For the ensuing year the following officers were elected:—President, Rev. Father Keogh, Rector; vice-presidents, Messrs. A. J. Malley, M. Burke, George Harper; secretary Mr. M. J. Crombie; treasurer, Mr. W. Butler; committee, Messrs. D. Ryan, S. J. Moran, W. R. S. Hickson, J. Ward, A. H. Casey, and B. J. Devine; auditor, Mr. C. Hickson. All ex-students are eligible for membership, and for the convenience of those residing away from the headquarters of the Association the annual general meeting is to be held during the Easter holidays. The number of applications already made for membership is, I understand, highly satisfactory, and it is confidently thought that the Association is at last on a solid foundation.

Westport

At the Masses last Sunday morning the Ven. Archpriest Walshe commented on the lack of interest taken in the parish library. It was pointed out that many of the subscribers never even take a book out for perusal. This state of affairs is very much to be regretted.

It is anticipated that the erection of the new church at Millerton will be proceeded with in the near future. At present a temporary delay is unavoidable, owing to a necessary alteration in the plans. As soon as this is effected, tenders will be called for the erection of the new edifice. The church committee are fortunate in having the services of Mr. J. Bradley as hon. secretary.

The commencement of operations at the State coal mine will mean a largely increased population in Seddonville, where it is proposed to build a new church. The mining township of Granity is also to be provided with a new church.

A special meeting of the Altar Society was held in St. Canice's schoolroom last Sunday afternoon. It was decided to accept the design submitted by Mr. R. Sullivan for two pedestals for the statues recently procured by the Society for the altar.

As a token of some slight recognition of the valuable services rendered to St. Canice's library by Mr. Slowey in his capacity as librarian, the members have decided to present that gentleman with a handsome gold cross and pen suitably inscribed. The articles will shortly be forwarded to Mr. Slowey, who is now residing in the Empire City.

A successful concert, in aid of the new Catholic Church at Granity was held in Farquhar's Hall on May 23. An excellent programme, consisting of humorous and sentimental songs, dances, and instrumental selections, was provided, and received the cordial approbation of the audience. Acceptable vocal items were rendered by the Misses F. and A. Songten, Williams, Spillane, and A. Pain, and Messrs. Murray, Moyle and Maloney. An amusing trio was given by the Misses Collins, Firman, and O'Rourke, and Miss Williams contributed a violin solo in pleasing style. The vocal portion was varied by the introduction of some capital step-dancing, the performers being the Misses Spillane and Glover, and Messrs. Glover and Hennessy, while Masters Roache and Dawson caused much merriment with their humorous