

JAMES's Bible, with its mistranslations and its missing books and parts of books, is no more a true Bible than our 'Hansard,' with a dozen volumes left out, would still be 'Hansard.' The reading of this Protestant and sectarian version of the Scriptures in our public schools would naturally be regarded as a Protestant service, and our rulers have no more right to supply and teach King JAMES's Bible, at the general taxpayers' expense, in our public schools of mixed religion than they have to supply and teach the Douay Bible or the Jewish Bible or the Mormon Bible or the Mohamedan Koran. (2) But the confusion is still worse confounded when we come to the term 'Bible-lessons' on the proposed ballot-paper. The unexplained term, as it appears there, has a sufficient variety of meanings to puzzle a philosopher, much less an average elector. (a) It might, on the face of it, mean that the Bible is to be used as a common text book in our schools, like, for instance, the 'fourth reader.' Now all Catholics and many thoughtful and intelligent Protestants object to this, as it would almost inevitably lead to the written Word of God being handled by the great majority of pupils with irreverent familiarity. Or (b) it might mean that the 'Bible lessons' would be given, on the Protestant principle, 'without note or comment.' But this would be an openly sectarian use of an openly sectarian book. Or (c) it might mean that the lessons would be given with general note and comment. This would, in practice, come to the same thing; for experience shows that it is morally impossible for teachers to give explanations of the Sacred Word without tinging them with their own beliefs or unbeliefs. Again: (d) the unexplained term 'Bible lessons' might mean Bible lessons with merely historical, literary, and geographical explanations. If this proposal were strictly carried out, it would reduce the Sacred Volume to the level of an ordinary text-book. But the experience of other countries goes to show that the 'merely historical, literary, and geographical explanations' are, consciously or unconsciously, made the vehicle of distinctively sectarian instruction. (e) The proposal embodied in the Bill (but nowhere mentioned on the ballot-paper) provides for 'simple literary, historical, and ethical explanations' by the State school teachers. 'Ethical'! What percentage of electors understand that this Greek derivative means 'moral'? And why did the framers of this precious Bill go so far out of their way to use a word which 'is not understood of the people'—which is, as it were, 'a Hebrew speech' to them? It is plainly part and parcel of the studied vagueness, the unworthy playing upon words, the discreditable catchiness which characterise this wretched Bill, and which can have no other object than to confuse the electors of the Colony, and to snatch a victory by ways that are dark and tricks that are vain rather than by a straightforward appeal to the country on a clear-cut and definite issue. The same invidious tactics find expression in the 'Outlook,' whose heading for the subject is 'The Battle for the Bible'! We may remark that the manual of Bible lessons proposed to be taught in our schools is, with very slight modifications, that which was drawn up by the Victorian Commission in 1900, and which was thrown out by the Legislative Council in the course of last year.

A mighty parade is made about the 'conscience clause' for pupils and teachers. But the 'conscience clause' is a delusion and a snare. What right has any creed, or any aggregate of creeds, or the State itself, to compel Catholic, Jewish, or Protestant children to receive instruction in a residuum of Protestant theology unless their parents sign a conscience-clause paper?—to turn little dissidents into pariahs and expose them to the ridicule or ill-treatment of their companions by compelling them to stay outside in rain or sleet or sun while Bible lessons from a sectarian book are going on inside, and to stand up day by day and declare themselves nonconformists to the State religion? The Rev. Mr. HINTON (Dunedin) has properly denounced the conscience clause as 'a clumsy and inefficient protection to objectors'; and this is precisely what Victoria's experience has abundantly proved it to be. If teachers generally took advantage of the clause, it would, in a great measure or altogether, defeat the purpose of the framers of the Bill—to have the new Unitarian creed taught by State officials at the public expense. In practice, however, the result would be the creation and application of a religious test in the

appointment of teachers. For the rest, the proposals of the Bible-in-schools party, even if they found their way into the statute-book, would by no means settle the education difficulty. They would merely substitute half-a-dozen grievances for one, alter our Constitution by the creation of an official or State creed, and consecrate by Act of Parliament the principle that underlies religious persecution. Protestants in and out of New Zealand are profoundly divided on this subject of Bible-lessons in public schools. And great numbers of them will join with Catholics and Jews in a vigorous protest against being compelled to pay for the State teaching of Unitarianism in the schools. This pettifogging Bill is an odious attempt to catch hostile votes, on an indefinite and confused issue, for an issue which is kept out of the elector's view. The obvious remedy for our educational difficulty has long been in operation in England, Scotland, Canada, and Germany. It is, apparently, too advanced for the advocates of the Bible-in-Schools. They will, however, probably live long enough to regard it as the only way out of a situation that has become even more ruinous to them than it is financially burdensome to their Catholic fellow-colonists.

Notes

A Question of Criminality

People who make odious and ill-taken comparisons should clothe themselves in armor like a medieval knight or a modern American footballer. For they provoke reprisals and must expect hard knocks. A Scottish clergyman in Palmerston North would have done well to have looked to his own land before going out of his way to fling unfair, unprovoked, and groundless charges of excessive relative criminality against the Catholics of New Zealand, who, as he falsely averred, do not give their children the Bible. As his whole contention was based upon an absurd misreading of our prison statistics, we invite him to exercise his mind upon the fact that the commitments in his native country alone are, proportionately, greatly in excess of those of England or Ireland. The annual report of the Scottish Prison Commissioners shows that there were 63,721 commitments to prison last year in the Land o' Cakes. Of these, 46,000 were for breaches of the peace, drunkenness, and obscene behavior. For offences closely associated with excessive drinking, Scottish commitments are, in proportion to population, twice as numerous as those of England or Ireland. In Ireland, on the other hand, the authorities have closed prison after prison for want of occupants, the presentation of white gloves to judges is the order of the day, last year's return of misdemeanors shows an exceedingly low calendar, grave offences are almost unknown, and, with the agrarian question happily settled, the record of real crime in Ireland will almost be like the historic chapter on its snakes: 'there are no snakes in Ireland.'

A Sensation that Failed

The Sydney 'Evening News' recently lapsed into temporary forgetfulness of Billings's cautious maxim: 'When you find a mare's nest, be sure that the old mare is in it.' It found a mare's nest and announced the discovery with a triple scream: 'A Mysterious Inquiry Rumored Death of a Priest. Information refused to the Press.' And then followed a startling account of a mysterious death of a priest by suicide at Marrickville. The sequel is briefly told by the 'Catholic Press' of July 2. 'The morning papers,' says our valued Sydney contemporary, 'were more guarded. They spoke of a mysterious death, and said nothing more, but this rather confirmed the report of the "Evening News." However, that paper next day came out with the following, but not with the prominence they gave to the original report: "We learn that the report that the subject of the inquiry was a priest or theological student was unfounded, and we regret having giving publicity to the rumor which was in persistent circulation in the district. Even up to the present the facts of the case are unobtainable. But all inquiries show that the supposed suicide was not a priest." We understand that before the contradiction appeared legal proceedings were being taken by the priests of Marrickville. For the death in question was not that of a priest or of a theological student. The deceased was not even a Catholic. He was a Protestant, and he was in no way connected with any Catholic institution. It is likely,

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