

'THE CASE FOR THE CATHOLICS'

A WELLINGTON CONTROVERSY

Under the above and other headings the columns of the *Wellington Evening Post* have for some days past been filled with a keen and interesting controversy on what is rapidly becoming a burning question—the question, namely, of the Catholic claims. That the Catholic apologists are defending their position is what the *Post* describes as an 'exceptionally able' way, will be evident from the following letters, which we select as being representative, and as being calculated to give non-Wellington readers an excellent idea of the general trend of the controversy.

THE CASE FOR THE CATHOLICS.

Sir,—Whether or not the Catholics of the Dominion are displaying in their present struggle that great energy and determination with which you credit them in your editorial columns of last Saturday, at least there can be no manner of doubt about your energy and activity in defence of the other side. More than any other leading paper you have sounded the trumpet call, so as to prevent the Catholic claims from even getting the bare justice of a public examination. You will therefore not be surprised to find by degrees a goodly number of your readers disagreeing with your views, and gently but forcibly reminding you of it.

As one of these, let me first of all confess to a mingled feeling of surprise and pain that you, who have so constantly proved yourself the champion of all whose lot it is to suffer hardships in any form or shape, should now rush forward with such intemperate haste against those who, by your own admission, suffer under an undoubted hardship. It ill becomes—if I may be permitted to say so—one who has always held that not only injustice but severe hardship is a fit object of redress by the State, to turn upon the poorest section of the community, when they ask that the burden of paying for the education of their wealthier neighbors' children should be at last removed from their shoulders. In the present case, sir, the 'people's cause' is not the cause you champion, but that of the religious body, which, though the poorest in the Dominion, has made greater sacrifices for its religious convictions than all other denominations put together.

In the second place, I desire to enter a strong protest against your repeated insinuation that the plausibility of the Catholic claim is due solely to the dialectical skill of its leading exponents, notably Dr. Cleary, Bishop of Auckland. But too many of your readers, I fear, will have read their own meaning into your words, and the words sophistry, Jesuitical casuistry, will probably have risen to their lips. If we are natural, they will reply, 'Ars est celare artem'; if we are convincing, they will suggest that we are able logicians; if we show warmth, we are acting the indignant innocent; if we are calm, we are thereby detected as smooth hypocrites; if we clear up difficulties, we are too plausible and perfect to be true. The more triumphant are our statements the more certain will be our defeat. It is mainly to protest against this attempt to cut the ground from under our feet, to poison by anticipation the public mind against us, that I write this letter.

In the third place, if I may further trespass upon your space, I would say that your usual perspicacity seems to have played you false in the present question. You repeat again and again—and the repetition, it seems to me, adds no emphasis or cogency to the point—that Catholics have really no insuperable objection to the secular system; that they are, in any case, not treated unjustly, as all denominations are treated alike; and thirdly, that the Bible in Schools movement was opposed out of a desire to shield Catholic children from interference with their religion. To take the last point first, Sir, I am genuinely convinced that there is not one Catholic in the Dominion who believes that the majority of the opponents of the Bible in Schools movement are mainly actuated by a desire to safeguard our freedom of conscience. If I am not greatly mistaken, Catholics believe that the bulk of that opposition is recruited from men who hold that Christian doctrine is one great delusion and Christian morality another.

As for the assertion that Catholics have no insuperable objection to the secular system, is not that giving us the lie direct and again poisoning the wells? Is there then such total blindness in editorial circles that the most striking and significant facts of years have there remained invisible? For the long course of thirty years, Catholics have (to borrow a phrase from Aesop) seen the track of all their money going into the State coffers, but seen no track that signifies there is any gone out thence. For thirty weary years one section of the community has seen showers of gold lavished upon an educational system in which they can have neither part nor lot, whilst they themselves remained like the fleece of the Hebrew warrior, dry in the midst of that benignant and fertilising dew. And can they be expected to keep silent, when after all the sacrifices they have made out of their great poverty, they are told that they are not so very much in earnest about their schools, that they have only a certain preference for denominational schools? This special pleading, which in the light of facts seems so absurd, is supported by the specious proof that a large number of Catholic children attend State schools. But is it fair to omit to say that

this is true only of districts where there can be no Catholic schools on account of the poverty of the small number of Catholics there residing?

Finally, we protest, as we have done again and again, that we are not on an equal footing with our fellow-Christians of other denominations. They have built no schools of their own, and they have not and do not pretend to have the same conscientious objections as we have—and that, in our eyes at least, destroys the whole argument, shell and kernel.

In conclusion, sir, allow me to say that the *Evening Post* has often in matters of Catholic interest written with so much kindness and understanding, and with such evident desire to be fair, that I should be very sorry if in these words of comment or correction there should seem to be anything wanting in the appreciativeness and responsiveness which are its due. Catholics, however, cannot help feeling that in their present struggle for equality and fair play they are opposed but too often on principles other than your own, principles which I will qualify by a sentence of Cicero, which at least some of your readers interested in this question will understand:—

'Totius iniustitiae nulla capitalior est quam eorum qui cum maxime fallunt ut agunt ut viri boni esse videantur.'

My advice to my fellow-Catholics is in the words of Shakespeare:—

'But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And ye will not fail.—I am, etc.,

B.J.G.

PROFESSOR MACKENZIE AND SECULAR EDUCATION.

Sir,—I crave space to point out a piece of bad logic on the part of Professor Mackenzie in his treatise on education—a summary of which appeared in Saturday's issue of your paper. I pass by his statement that the Church is 'an institution that began in the service of the State.' Of which State? Was it the one presided over by Nero? But it is the extraordinary logic of his argument that Catholics deserve no special grants that I wish to draw attention to. 'The National System,' he says, 'is quite as much in the public interest as the maintenance of our Army or Navy.' Let that pass, as a logician would say. He continues: 'Where would we be as a nation and Empire if those who are conscientiously opposed to war were allowed a remission of rates or taxation on the ground of conscientious scruples? The very idea of such relief is absurd.' So concludes the Professor, or at least he leaves his readers to draw the conclusion that Catholics are entitled to no relief, because they are opposed to education on conscientious grounds. Professor Mackenzie does not, of course, dare to say that Catholics are opposed to education, but his argument can only hold together on that supposition. That is what it logically demands, to warrant the parity and the conclusion he draws. This fallacy has a name in logic that Professor Mackenzie must be acquainted with. Now, Sir, I will use as 'a pari' argument to prove just the opposite of what the Professor attempts to show. It is not original—it has been used before. Let us suppose that the State decided to give all the schoolchildren free breakfasts when they went to school, and let us suppose that it decreed that the breakfast should consist of a pork chop every morning. Soon the Jewish parents of some of the children would protest that they cannot conscientiously allow the children to partake of that breakfast, because they, on conscientious grounds, can have nothing to do with pork in any shape or form, and they ask that a mutton chop be substituted for the pork so far as their children are concerned. But the State refuses this demand, and tells them that if they are not content to accept the pork, which they abhor, their children can go hungry. And when the Jewish members of the community proclaim that they have a grievance founded upon conscience, they are told by the upholders of the State that those 'who prefer the luxury of exclusiveness from the national system must pay the price.' What would your readers think of that for an answer? And now, Sir, if we substitute Catholics for Jews, and the pork chop for Secular Education, we have exactly the position of Catholics under the present system of education. Who will deny that the grievance which the Jews would justly complain of under a pork regime is not on all fours with that under which the Catholics of this Dominion are suffering in matters educational at the present moment? We have not withdrawn from the national system—we were forced out of it. And, as 'An Englishman' so ably put it in your columns last week, the granting of aid to Catholic schools would not destroy the national system—on the contrary, it would make them become part and parcel of that system, and thereby strengthen instead of weaken it. It is so in other countries such as England, Germany, Belgium, Canada, and many others, and the national systems of education in these countries cannot be classed as being behind the times or inferior to what we have in New Zealand. It is only because men cloud the issues and use catch phrases instead of solid arguments that systems which are unfair and unjust are allowed to exist. I commend this to Professor Mackenzie, and advise him to carefully revise his treatise if he wishes it to contain sound argument, and not fallacy and sophism. In conclusion, Sir, I would like to quote a few remarks of the late Sir Harry Atkinson, made in 1889 on the second reading of the late Mr. Vincent Pyke's Bill as follow:—'If you really want