

## Current Topics

### A Distress Signal

After the fiasco of the last Bible-in-schools 'public meeting' in Dunedin the League promoters evidently realise that some inducement must be given to the people to turn out other than the motive of disinterested zeal for the cause. Accordingly the latest advertisements have not only dropped the collection announcement but contain also the alluring intimation: 'Refreshments.' If this does not fetch the people—and so far the response has not been of a kind to arouse enthusiasm—the Bible Leaguers may, so far as their 'public meeting' propaganda is concerned, just about as well 'throw in the towel.'

### Christian Women Against It

In an appeal to the members of the Young Women's Christian Association at Wellington in November of last year Canon Garland delivered himself of the following high-pressure rhapsody: 'God cannot do without women. . . . How much the world owed to woman! God limited Himself until Woman had done her best! It was woman who would found all our civilisation, and who would do the big things in the work of the world! Amidst all arguments used there is a feeling that women will uphold and see through this campaign, and have religious instruction in our schools.'

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In one sense, at least, women are not quite the 'soft' sex they are sometimes imagined to be; and it is now evident that they are going to 'see through' this campaign in a manner somewhat different from that intended by Canon Garland. The annual Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of New Zealand, sitting at Nelson, on March 12 passed, amongst others, the following resolutions: 'That the Convention favor the incorporating of the Nelson system of religious instruction in schools in the Education Act, as under this system instruction will be given by those best qualified for the task, and will not involve the risk of the introduction of denominationalism, nor would the liberty of conscience in any one of either parties or the teacher be interfered with.'

'That the Convention *strongly disapprove of the platform of the Bible-in-State-Schools League of New Zealand.*' Those, therefore, who anticipated that the women would vote 'to a man' in favor of the League's proposals have made a miscalculation. The W.C.T.U.—which has a paper of its own, called *The White Ribbon*—represents a considerable section of zealous women; and their votes, and still more their influence, will count for something in the coming struggle.

### The League and the Teachers

We reproduced in last week's issue a letter by Mr. J. A. Scott which had appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* on the day of the Bible-in-schools demonstration, and in which the speakers on that occasion were invited to give plain answers to five plain questions arising directly out of the League's proposals. So far as the press reports disclose, only one speaker—the Very Rev. Dean Fitchett—attempted to deal with these questions; and the following further letter from Mr. Scott, which explains itself, appeared in Monday's *Daily Times*.

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'Sir,—I am glad to notice from your report of the Bible-in-schools demonstration that at least one of the speakers—and one who personally, if I may be allowed to say so, I have always regarded as easily the ablest representative of the movement in the Dominion—has attempted to answer at least one of the five questions which I submitted in your issue on Monday. The question I had stated in this form: 'Is it a fair proposition to compel a teacher, say, of the Jewish faith—without the option of a conscience clause—to administer such a lesson as that on "The Crucifixion," given on page 123 of the Queensland Bible text-book?'

Dean Fitchett's reply, as given in your report is: 'Certainly the teacher would be required to teach from the lesson book, but only as literature.' The object of the Bible in State Schools League is to secure the introduction into this country of what is known as the 'Australian system'; and the character of the Scripture lesson to be given by the teacher under that system is determined, not of course by Dean Fitchett, or by Canon Garland, or by any member of the Bible in State Schools League, but wholly and solely by the Education Act (and its regulations) in which the system is embodied. If the Act says the Bible lesson is to be given 'only as literature' that will be, so far as it goes, authoritative, though how the teacher could hope to keep the 'doctrine' out of the 'literature' would still be a problem. If, on the other hand, the Act says the Bible lessons are to be given as 'religious teaching' that will be final as against the 'literature' view and as against the mere personal opinions of individuals. Will Dean Fitchett kindly quote any section of the laws of any of the Australian States in which it is laid down that the Scripture lessons are to be taught 'only as literature?' I have before me the Education Acts of New South Wales and Queensland, and there is not one word in these requiring the Scripture lessons to be given 'only as literature.' On the contrary they are therein frankly and plainly referred to as 'general religious teaching' and as 'religious instruction.' If these lessons are to be taught, not as religion but 'only as literature' will Dean Fitchett explain why a conscience clause—such as it is—has been provided for the children?

Will Dean Fitchett kindly answer also another query on this subject? He is reported by your paper as saying, in effect, that the compulsory Bible lessons in no way infringed on the rights of conscience of the teachers. On this point the teachers themselves are, of course, the best and final judges; and my question is, Is the Bible in State Schools League willing to modify the Australian proposals and grant a conscience clause for the teachers so as to allow each one to say for himself whether it is in accordance with his conscience to give such lessons?

When Dean Fitchett has kindly (1) quoted the clause in the Australian Acts which entitles him to say that the Scripture lessons are to be taught 'only as literature,' (2) has explained why, if the lessons are to be given 'only as literature' it was necessary to provide a conscience clause for the children, and (3) has told us whether the League is willing or unwilling to give the same rights of conscience to the teachers as to the children, we can proceed, with your permission, to discuss by reference to the lessons themselves the possibility or otherwise of teaching them 'only as literature.' In the meantime the four other questions which I submitted still remain unanswered.—I am, etc.,

J. A. SCOTT.'

March 13.

### A Baptist Disclaimer

There is an element of 'slimness' about the methods of the Bible-in-schools leaders that one would not expect to find in ministers of the Gospel, and that is not calculated to favorably impress the ordinary straight-going citizen. An instance was furnished in connection with the proceedings at the 'demonstration' of supporters held in Dunedin last week. In the advertisement, the name of the Rev. E. H. Hobday, Baptist minister, was included amongst those who were to take part in the meeting. Before the meeting eventuated, however, it was ascertained that that gentleman was willing to speak at the gathering only on condition that he should be allowed to state frankly his opposition to an essential feature of the League's proposals. It was then apparently decided to drop Mr. Hobday as a speaker. That would have been all right if nothing had been said on the subject. But before the close of the gathering, the chairman (the Rev. R. E. Davies) made the following statement: 'He regretted that an opportunity had not presented itself to allow the Rev. Mr. Hobday to speak. *That gentleman was anxious to throw in his lot with the League, and he repre-*