

'I am very sorry to note that among the circumstances which, for the present, prevent Mr. Barnett from doing full justice to his views on the question is included that or bodily infirmity. I sincerely hope that this disability, at least, will soon pass away, and that with better health will come better judgment, better reasoning, and a juster view of a system which seems to me, in certain of its essential features, to literally reek with injustice.—I am, etc.,

J. A. SCOTT.

April 5.

The League 'Christians' and the Jews

The following letter, which appeared in Saturday's *Otago Daily Times*, explains itself:—'Sir,—I observe that Mr. Joseph Braithwaite shows a disposition to come to the assistance of his friend and comrade, Mr. A. M. Barnett, and so long as the latter makes no demur to such dubious succour as Mr. Braithwaite proffers, I, for my part, will not object.

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'There are two points in Mr. Braithwaite's letter which call for special notice from me. (a) I avoid "the present school books," for the simple reason that they have nothing to do with the question of religious teaching. In regard to the lessons in these books—including Kipling's "Recessional" hymn, and others—the teacher's duty begins and ends with seeing that the children are able to read them clearly, intelligibly, and with proper emphasis and expression, and that they understand the meaning of the words used. He is not only not compelled, he is actually by the existing law forbidden, to make them the vehicle of religious teaching. And Mr. Braithwaite seeks to place them on the same footing as a series of set "religious lessons"—to use his own expression—which the teacher is compelled to teach as the inspired Word of God, and in regard to which the children will be definitely and specifically examined on the religious teaching conveyed. If Mr. Braithwaite cannot see the difference between the two cases he is either more obtuse than I had ever suspected him of being, or he is presuming upon the supposed obtuseness of your readers. (b) I have never in my life "defended an atheistic system of education," and Mr. Braithwaite owes me a prompt apology for such a gross misrepresentation. In the very letter on which he is commenting I said: "I am as strongly in favor of religious education for the young as Mr. Barnett is, but I hold that those who desire such instruction have no right to compel other people, who conscientiously object to such teaching, to pay for it." If Mr. Braithwaite calls that "defending an atheistic system of education," he does not know the meaning of words. For the present, I am "defending" nothing. I am merely, as a citizen and a taxpayer, protesting against certain features of a scheme for which I am to be compelled to pay, and which seem to me to involve an odious tyranny over the consciences of the teachers and an utterly indefensible religious persecution of those taxpayers who are conscientiously opposed to the form of religious teaching devised. Mr. Braithwaite cannot hope to advance his cause by making gross misstatements of the kind under notice, and I have to call upon him either to substantiate his statement—which I know he cannot do—or frankly to withdraw.

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'Mr. Braithwaite thinks "the wonder is that any Christian should object" to the League's scheme. I, on the contrary, think the wonder is that any Christian, who has thought the thing out, and whose Christianity has the least particle of genuineness in it, can possibly bring himself to endorse the system in its present form. In this connection I will ask Mr. Braithwaite two questions—and they are only an instalment of those which I hope to get an opportunity of asking. (1) Is it a Christian thing to compel Jewish teachers, without the option of a conscience clause, to handle such lessons as "Gethsemane" (page 118 of the Queensland manual), "Christ before Caiaphas" (page 120), "Christ before Pilate" (page 121), "The Crucifixion" (page 123), etc., and to administer religious teaching of a kind which they have been taught from

their infancy to regard as blasphemy against their God? The teacher is a servant of the State. All State employment ought to be open to all citizens qualified for it, irrespective of their religious opinions. The Bible in State Schools League says, in effect, that the teaching profession will be open to the Jewish applicant only on condition that he shall teach what he conscientiously believes to be blasphemy, and it flatly refuses to grant him a conscience clause. That is the Test Act over again with a vengeance. (2) Is it a Christian thing to compel Jewish taxpayers, by the long arm of the law, to pay for the propagation of Christianity, and of religious teaching which they regard as blasphemy against the God of their fathers? There is here no imaginary bogey or mere theoretical case, but a concrete and incontestable fact. Here is a clear-cut question of right and wrong; and no amount of friendly testimony from outside can alter the moral quality of this proposal. Is this, then, a Christian thing to do? Is this the way in which Christian ministers propose to demonstrate to the descendants of the ancient people the superior excellence of Christianity—by picking their pockets to pay for the spread of it?

'I leave Mr. Braithwaite to answer these questions, only premising that he must not attempt to put us off with the disgraceful defence that this sort of thing is to be tolerated because the victims are not a numerous body—as if religious persecution and oppression of conscience were perfectly justifiable so long as they are not done on too large a scale. If it should be considered that these questions are a little difficult for a mere layman to answer, I would be more than willing that a Christian minister should essay the task, say the Rev. W. Gray Dixon, the local secretary of the League, over whose signature an advertisement recently appeared asking the public to rally to the cause in the name of "liberty of conscience." And to allay in advance any apprehension which that gentleman may feel in regard to again "putting pen to paper," I will promise faithfully that, unlike that wicked minister at St. Clair, I will be scrupulously polite.

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'A similar objection to that here taken applies—though not precisely to the same degree—in the case of all other conscientious objectors to the State-established and State-endowed religion proposed by the League. I have drawn attention to it because, as evidenced by the attitude of the W.C.T.U., there are many sincere members of the Christian churches who are willing enough to see some provision made for the religious education of those children whose parents desire it, but who would cut their right hands off rather than be parties to injustice and religious persecution; and I ask these to give earnest consideration to the aspect of the case now presented. I invite them further to watch carefully the answers given to the above questions, and to note with what remarkable unanimity League apologists will evade the point.—I am, etc.,

J. A. SCOTT.

April 4.

Mr. John D. Nugent, general secretary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, speaking at the annual meeting of the Dublin Divisions, said:

'At this moment the energetic and capable secretary of the Orange and Protestant approved society in Ulster was working in perfect accord and unity with himself in connection with the State insurance scheme. It was not that the millennium had arrived, but during the last couple of months the secretary of that organisation has been with them as the representative of that society, so that they might act in common on the question of National Insurance. In politics they differ, in business they were one; and it was, therefore, no exaggeration to say that three months after the Irish Parliament assembled in College Green the business friendship which had now been created between the Orange and Protestant Society and the A.O.H. would unquestionably fructify in the unity of larger interests, when the democratic forces of what were generally regarded as the extreme in politics and religion had joined hands in a holy concord for the benefit of our country and our people.'