

THE 'BIBLE'-IN-SCHOOLS QUESTION

METHODS EXTRAORDINARY

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE REV. JAMES GIBB,
D.D. (WELLINGTON).

(By the VERY REV. P. J. POWER, Hawera.)

Reverend Sir,—You and I have much in common in our opposition to secularism in education. We have not, it is true, agreed upon the means of combating this evil; the foul demon of bigotry has come up from Hell to bar the way to mutual understanding, and so secularism rides rampant and Christians become a byword to the unholy mob. Still, it is something that we are both opposed to the ugly thing itself; and my heart was filled with joy when I heard you, in a well-controlled 'calm of intempestuous storm,' cry out:

'Oh, how I hate that dry, arid secularism!
Education! it's the merest parody of the name!'

And when in deliberate, well-chosen, and dignified words, you declared that the League would, in certain circumstances, take a leaf out of the Catholic Church's book and establish Christian schools for Christian children, deep down in my heart I prayed that your words might prove no vain and vaporous boast, but the deep-grounded proclamation of a man who knew the worth of reason and of morals.

This is why I was greatly grieved to find much in your address which, if not soon corrected, must kill a cause which has so much inherent goodness; and it is in the hope that you will make the necessary corrections that I take up my pen to write to you.

Now, the first great fault I found in your address and in your answers to questions was a great lack of courtesy. Your old friend, a former Editor of the *Tablet*, whose name you failed to recognise under his new title of Bishop, gave an address and answered questions here some few weeks ago. His was a larger meeting than yours, and was principally made up of men, and by universal consent courtesy was its characteristic. There are some who think courage is greater than courtesy—and I am one of these—and that holiness is greater still; but if you will observe as you walk through life, you will find that the grace of God is in courtesy, too.

When our Lady rode out of Nazareth to cross the hill-country to her cousin, St. Elizabeth, the greatness and kindness that shone in her sweet face came from the courtesy that was in her mind. And when a Christian minister, who believes in Christ's Divinity, and who should, therefore, be a Knight of our Lady, rides out with lance in rest to visit and make conquest of a distant town, he ought to bring with him the aroma and the atmosphere of sweet and gracious courtesy.

Your address was, in great measure, a No-Popery address, and graceful courtesy hid her head for shame. You made false and cruel statements against those who, like you, are opposed to secularism, but who could not adopt, with you, means which they consider to be immoral; and such statements gentle courtesy could not abide. You, a speaker of many years' standing, thought it a duty to wax wrathful at a couple of young men who, asking questions for the first time at a public meeting, were naturally shy, and you further arrogated to yourself the rights of the chairman, growling at a nervous young man, telling him his statement was not a question. You treated as an enemy anyone who failed to accept your utterances as final, or who seemed to call your statements into dispute.

'I am Sir Oracle,
And, when I ope my lips, let no dog bark.'

What these young men had a right to expect from a Christian clergyman, and what the audience desired for them, was a large intent of courtesy. Did not Bishop Cleary do well when, before accepting the

League's invitation to be present at your address, he asked for independent guarantees that you should observe the ordinary rules of public speech? This matter of courtesy may seem of little moment to you, but it is not so to me; for in society as it is constituted here, any exhibition of uncouth or overbearing conduct on the part of one clergyman is calculated to lower the dignity of all.

There was another portion of your address that pained me and others exceedingly, and that was where you referred to the poor little Presbyterian children in Victoria, who jumped through the open windows the first and only time you attempted to teach religion in the schools. Because of this little irreverence towards you, you vowed, and have kept the vow, that you would never again make the experiment. You and I know the story of the pet kangaroo that jumped through the window at the first strains of the Scottish bagpipes; but I know—and I beg of you to take this to heart—that your little item of autobiography that was told *ad captandum vulgus* had the effect only of making the judicious grieve. You opened your address by telling us that you were a very busy man: 'Martha, Martha, thou art busy about many things: one thing is necessary.' Save the children—that is the one necessary thing. Do not be disheartened by difficulties; children are easily won over; a little sweetness and courtesy will go a long way. This is a priest's continual experience. Children are not yet spoilt by the world, and their heart is in the right place. What more do you want? Make a second attempt, after the lapse of thirty years, and you will be all the more secure for it when you stand before the Great White Throne. Or if you choose to spurn my advice, do not continue to shock the consciences of Christian people by boasting of a bad resolve.

Again I fear you are sailing under false colors, and thus tarnishing the fair name of all clergymen and diminishing their honor. You know that it is not your wish to have the Bible, even the New Testament, introduced into the public schools of this Dominion. Instead of introducing either the New Testament or the Old, you want secular men to hack and mutilate it, to select and string together 'inoffensive' passages—that is, passages which, to suit Unitarianising clergy, etc., include not the Virgin-Birth of Christ; to suit Presbyterians, must not suggest the Episcopacy; to suit Anglicans, must not include the words: 'Thou art Cephas, and upon this Cephas I will build My Church.' And yet, in the face of this, you misled an unthinking multitude by calling yourself an official of the League of the 'Bible'-in-Schools. Such conduct may be thought to do very well for a mere political opportunist seeking to gain a temporary advantage, but it will recoil upon your own head in due time, and unfortunately weaken, too, the influence of preachers of the true religion, since you and they enjoy the common name of clergymen. And as if, in your opinion, two wrongs could make a right, you assert that Catholics also treat the Bible as you propose to have it treated for the children of the schools. The children in the Catholic schools of New Zealand have the complete New Testament in their possession. We owe nothing to non-Catholics of any particular sect. We are not constrained to tear out and fling aside (as your party did in Queensland and Victoria, and in New Zealand in 1904) the Virgin-Birth of Christ; neither do we mutilate the Bible, as your party do in New South Wales, Queensland, and elsewhere, by casting out that great body of texts to which Catholics notoriously appeal—such as those relating to the constitution of the Church, its unity, authority, perpetuity, inerrancy, its relation to the written and unwritten Word of God, the texts relating to St. Peter's place among the Apostles, the clear statement of the doctrine of the Eucharist in John VI., the various texts relating to fasting, the power of forgiving sins in the Church, the anointing of the sick with oil, and so on. Practically all these 'Catholic' texts have been suppressed by your party, for an obvious sectarian purpose. We do not, like you, put 'an emasculated caricature of the Bible' into the hands of God's children, who cry for bread. If you wish thus to mutilate and caricature the Bible,



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