

Current Topics

Ananias Again

Under date June 25 the following message, supplied per medium of the independent cable service, appeared in many of our New Zealand dailies: 'Some lively scenes have lately been witnessed in Limerick. For the last two Sundays members of the Confraternity of the Holy Family have taken possession of the streets of the city. Altars have been erected and decorated, and thousands have marched in procession reciting prayers, and holding services. An extraordinary incident was one that occurred at the house of a poor Protestant woman. One of her lodgers, a Catholic mechanic, ordered her to remove a text that was hanging in the kitchen, but as she refused the fellow took the text down himself. The woman subsequently hung the text up again. Later in the day a crowd of some hundreds attacked the woman's house, and wrecked all the crockery and furniture. The hapless woman herself was seized by the hair and dragged into the street, where she was thrown down and kicked.'

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The story was wildly improbable on the face of it; and we duly filed the message and confidently awaited our Home files. We have gone carefully through all our Irish and English exchanges of June and July; and while they contain full accounts of the impressive Confraternity celebrations in Limerick and many detailed references to interesting incidents in connection with the jubilee processions, we have been unable to find anywhere so much as a syllable about this alleged 'extraordinary incident,' or about any occurrence even distantly resembling it. Our contemporary, the *Adelaide Southern Cross*, has conducted a similar careful investigation of its Home files with the same result. The cablegram in this instance is not, as is often the case, a distortion or exaggeration—it is apparently sheer invention, and a very ridiculous invention at that. The late Marquis of Salisbury, in a passage-at-arms with the newspapers, on one occasion described leading articles as 'insipid productions written by office boys for office boys.' Similarly, and with much greater truth, cable messages of the kind under notice may be described as idiotic productions written by imbeciles for imbeciles.

Mr Caughley at Dunedin

On Wednesday of last week Mr. J. Caughley, M.A., head master of the West Christchurch District High School, speaking expressly on behalf and under the direct auspices of the Otago Educational Institute (of teachers), addressed a public meeting in Dunedin on the Bible in State Schools League's proposals; and from every point of view the gathering was an unqualified success. The meeting had been very insufficiently advertised; but the announcement that Dean Fitchett had accepted the Institute's invitation to be present and to reply to the evidence to be produced by the lecturer in demonstration of the failure of the League's system in Australia proved an adequate draw, and the Early Settlers' Hall, capable of accommodating a large audience, was well filled. Mr. Caughley spoke quietly, almost conversationally, and made not the slightest effort at platform or oratorical effect; but he was so thoroughly informed on his subject, his authorities were so carefully gathered and so weighty, and his facts and statements were so incontestably established, that his points practically made themselves, and the intelligent and representative audience was safely left to draw its own conclusions.

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The main purpose of the meeting was to enable Mr. Caughley to give, publicly and officially, the Otago teachers' reply to the challenge issued by Dean Fitchett at his meeting in the Garrison Hall, Dunedin, some few weeks ago. Dean Fitchett had said: 'I offer them (the teachers) a challenge. They distrust the Australian evidence. Then let them select two of their most

trusted teachers as a commission of inquiry to proceed to Australia and investigate the facts on the spot. If they will abide the result, the League will pay the expenses. . . . Let them accept this challenge, or let them hold their peace.' Mr. Caughley pointed out, first, the utter one-sidedness of this challenge. It was a case of 'heads I win, tails you lose,' inasmuch as the teachers were asked to bind themselves to abide by the result, but the League on their part would not so bind themselves in the event of the decision of the commission being adverse to the League's system. In the next place, the challenge, in the form in which it had been issued, was quite impracticable, as it would be impossible for any two leading teachers to get leave of absence for the necessary four or five months, and the expenses of such a commission—including salary, hotel and travelling disbursements, and payment for clerical assistance required—would reach a total that would rather surprise the League if it really meant to foot the bill. Finally, inasmuch as there was sufficient official, authoritative, and unimpeachable evidence already available as to the working of the Australian system, the spirit and essence of the challenge could be met without an actual visit to New South Wales. In the sense indicated he accepted the challenge, and would submit his evidence and allow the audience to judge. The evidence given—on indisputable authority, and accompanied always with chapter and verse—must have come as an eye-opener to the majority of the audience after the way in which it has been dinned into the ear of the public that the system is giving complete satisfaction, that it is an unqualified success, and that in the countries in which it has been tried it is accepted as a happy and adequate solution of the education problem with practically no dissentient voice. The evidence included quotations from the Education Acts of New South Wales, Tasmania, and Queensland, from inspectors' reports, from Government Year-books, from reports of Royal Commissions, from League pamphlets and utterances, and from official statistics.

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The effect of the whole body of evidence was to show that the much-vaunted system was a very serious failure. The system, the speaker explained, worked 'without friction' in much the same way that a wheelbarrow standing in the street worked without friction—for the simple reason that it did not go at all. The scheme was largely a dead letter. One of the most experienced inspectors in New South Wales was quoted as reporting that in only about 50 per cent. of the schools were the Bible lessons given in a way that was of any benefit to the children. Even the Churches in Australia showed very little faith in the system; and their specific part in the work under the right of entry was steadily neglected. The *Commonwealth Year-book* showed that only rather more than 10 per cent. of the opportunities offered had been availed of. The *New South Wales Year-book* said the same. 'Speaking generally,' said the *Year-book*, 'the religious instruction of New South Wales was largely confined to that given by the teachers.' Eight visits per school per year was the average paid by Anglican ministers, who had daily opportunities. The Methodists averaged 2½ visits, the Presbyterians 2½, and all other denominations 1½! In Queensland all denominations put together paid 1½ visits per school per year. And no one child could receive those 1½ visits. Each child could only receive the visits paid by the minister of his particular denomination. Hardly any child would get four visits per year. The Standing Committee of the Anglican Synod in Sydney this year reported that unless a more lively interest were taken in the work by members of the Synod the work must languish, and eventually be abandoned. It had even been necessary in 1904 for the department to send out a notice informing the ministers of New South Wales Churches that they had the privilege of entry. Yet the system had been at work for 40 years.

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Examining, so far as can be done by figures and statistics, the actual results of the system, Mr. Caughley