

DEAN FITCHETT'S 'REPLY' TO BISHOP CLEARY

The following letter from his Lordship Bishop Cleary appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* of September 5 :—

'Sir,—Dean Fitchett's summary of the discussion does not, as a summary, do justice to his talents. But it well reflects the League's customary evasion of the vital issues of the controversy. Let me give a few instances in point:—

(1) In clear words of the Scriptures the Almighty imposed only upon parents and the Church the duty of the religious instruction of children. The worthy Dean declared that he would resign membership of the League if the Government (through the teachers) usurped these duties of religious instruction. He, however, denied that, under the "Australian" system demanded by the League, the Government does not thus impart religious instruction. But (a) why, then, a conscience clause? To this pertinent query there has been no reply, so far as I am aware. (b) In my lecture, and in your issues of July 9 and 18 and August 4 and 6, I quoted the wording of the "Australian" Bible-in-schools laws, departmental regulations and circulars, declarations of State Ministers, Government syllabuses, the contents (including a preface) of Government manuals of "religious instruction" and worship, and official publications of the Bible-in-Schools League, clearly proving what follows: Under the "Australian" system demanded by the League, the Government (through the teachers) conducts religious instruction and religious worship—both of a sectarian Sunday-school type. The League, in effect, demands a sectarian, denominational, anti-national, State-taught, State-endowed, Established State Religion in the public schools. To secure this the League must burst up the so-called "national" secular system, changing it (in the words of Premier Kidston, of Queensland) from a secular system to a religious system, and giving the clergy a legal standing on the teaching staffs of the public schools. The learned Dean has quite failed to face squarely this mass of legal, departmental, and League testimony. It stands unassailed and unassailable.

(2) In my Dunedin lecture I showed, by League testimony, that the League's scheme would prevent teachers holding State teacherships except on religious tests devised by the League; that it would offer temporal inducements from the public purse (pay and pensions) to large classes of teachers, to lure them into disloyalty to oft-specified principles, doctrines, or disciplinary laws of their various faiths; and that objectors refusing to violate conscience would be driven like malefactors from the public service. Even so gentle a soul as the Dean admitted that it would be "a serious thing" for the objecting teacher who would be loyal to his conscience. Other League leaders quoted by me (whom I am ready to quote again) were vastly more outspoken in their demand for the harshest kinds of religious tests for teachers. I quoted, moreover, Presbyterian, Anglican, and general Christian principles which condemn such temptation or oppression of consciences, such violations of religious liberties that even the worst criminals enjoy in our prisons. Not the slightest attempt has been made to justify, on Biblical and Christian moral grounds, this compulsory proselytism of teachers, by Act of Parliament, into at least outward conformity with the proposed new Established State Religion.

3. In the same way, no serious attempt has been made to deal with the mass of legal and League evidence showing that that odious formula, the Irish proselytising conscience clause, is the only conscience clause in the "Australian" system demanded by the League; and that this same conscience clause is demanded or taken for granted some 50 times in the League's official publications, and hundreds of times in pronouncements of the League organiser and other high League officials whom I am at any time ready to quote.

'It is difficult to understand how the "Australian" system can be deemed to work "satisfactorily" and

absolutely without "sectarian trouble," in view of the following facts: (a) To create a sectarian system, the Government improperly usurps spiritual functions denied to it by the Presbyterian *Confession of Faith* and by Christian teaching generally; (b) for a sectarian purpose, it forces the consciences of objecting taxpayers, parents, and teachers; (c) it violates religious liberty by setting up sectarian tests for teachers, and otherwise invading their rights of conscience, as already set forth; (d) as a protest against the sectarianism of the system, about one-fifth of all the school children in the oldest Bible-in-schools State are withdrawn from the system, at a cost of tens of millions of money to their parents; (e) as I showed in my lecture, and am prepared to show again, not alone Catholics, but many Anglicans, Lutherans, Jews, etc., object to the system on sectarian grounds, while numbers of teachers positively "hate the lessons" or find a "sectarian trouble" in imparting them; (f) according to official figures before me, the clergy utilise only a quite insignificant portion of their opportunities for religious instruction under the system; and (g) the oldest Bible-in-schools State is a warning example to all Australasia for the sectarian rancour which poisons its public and social life, and which nowhere else under the Southern Cross finds such frequent and savage expression in the press and on the political and politico-religious platform. As stated by me in Dunedin, I say this after long years' perusal of certain New South Wales newspapers in my possession. There are other matters on which I may, perhaps, have an opportunity of commenting later one.—I am, etc.,

* HENRY W. CLEARY, D.D.,

Bishop of Auckland.

'August 30.'

The following supplementary letter from his Lordship Bishop Cleary appeared in Monday's *Otago Daily Times*:—

'Sir,—May I, with your good leave, supplement my last letter with the following further comments:

'1. The League's proposed State-conducted "religious instruction" and religious worship in the public schools is, in its nature, a question of religion. The objections of great bodies of teachers, parents, and taxpayers to the League's scheme is based, in at least a large number of cases, on clear and oft-stated grounds of religious doctrine, religious discipline, and religious conscience. The question is, therefore, emphatically one of religion, of religious conscience, and of moral right or moral wrong with a religious reference. In the Presbyterian *Confession of Faith*, God is declared to be sole Lord of the conscience. And Christians generally hold that matters of religious conscience, forbidding this or that, are intimate matters between the individual soul and the Creator, in which no League, no political party, has any right of interference, lordship, compulsion, or control. Christians also generally hold that questions of moral right or moral wrong are to be determined by God's moral law, written in our hearts or positively revealed, and not by such an accidental external circumstance as the passing state of passing and local popular feeling, which has justified or condoned numberless forms of crime, including wholesale infanticide and the horrors of the Coliseum. Not the slightest attempt has yet been made, so far as I am aware, to justify, on any Biblical or Christian moral principle, the anti-Christian and anti-democratic plan of deciding questions of religion and conscience by Pontius Pilate's method or its modern equivalent.

'2. Now for a word of necessary explanation. (a) Catholics do not, like the League, ask for endowments from the public purse for the State-compiling, State-printing, and State-teaching of a view of religion acceptable to them; nor would they tolerate such State interference in the spiritual domain. (b) In New Zealand's own Cook Islands non-Catholic religious schools (and they alone) are subsidised from public funds contributed by people of all faiths. So are, in New Zealand, the Anglican Girls' Friendly Society and the inter-Protestant Y.W.C.A., for their secular work among