

Current Topics

A Debate on the Education Question

Through the incautiousness of a reverend bigot of Melbourne the Catholic Federation in that city have been given a splendid opportunity for vindicating and ventilating the justice of the Catholic claims in regard to the education question, and they have very promptly taken advantage of it. The Rev. Joseph Nicholson, who is perennially attacking the Catholic Church, offered in a letter to the press to debate with a representative of the Catholic Federation the 'equity'—as he expressed it—of the educational claim made by the Catholic people. The Federation at once called upon him to state in exact terms the proposition which he was prepared to affirm, whereupon Mr. Nicholson replied with an affirmation embodying not one but two propositions in the following words:—'That the Roman Catholic claims for financial aid from the State Treasury towards their denominational schools are not just, and would be destructive of our State system.' Obviously, the second proposition is an entirely new one, having no necessary connection with the original statement, since the Catholic claim might be absolutely just and might at the same time be destructive of a particular existing State system. The Federation therefore asked Mr. Nicholson to adhere to his original challenge to debate the 'equity' of the Catholic claim; and, on receiving a refusal from that gentleman, the Federation offered to debate his original proposition in the following slightly altered form: 'That the Catholic claims for financial aid from the State Treasury towards their schools are (a) not just, and (b) would be destructive of a State system of education.' After much backing and filling on the part of Mr. Nicholson, who evinced a marked unwillingness to face the music, the Federation, rather than allow him to escape from his rash challenge, agreed to debate it exactly as stated by him in the terms above quoted, and we understand the debate is now definitely arranged. Six representatives of the Federation have been appointed on the joint committee to arrange details; and a representative has been selected to defend the Catholic position who is well qualified to do the subject justice. Given a thoroughly capable and impartial chairman, an instructive and valuable discussion will eventuate; and we await the result with much interest and with every confidence.

More Misrepresentation

In a letter to one of the Wellington papers the other day Mr. A. R. Atkinson declared that after his recent experiences nothing that Canon Garland could do would surprise him; and there are a good many others in the community who have arrived at the same state of mind in regard to the actions and methods of the reverend gentleman. His latest exhibition of unscrupulous 'slimness' occurred in connection with the recent Bible-in-schools deputation to the Prime Minister. Mr. Massey asked for information as to the form of the question which the League desired to be submitted to the electors if a referendum were granted, whereupon Canon Garland replied: 'The best answer he could give was that in the question should be included the principle that every child should have the opportunity of reading Bible lessons, that every child should have the right of being taught the faith of his fathers, and that that decision should be in the hands of his parents.' The answer is a shamefully perverted statement of the facts of the 'Australian' system and of the League's officially printed demands. The card which is being officially circulated by the League for signature by its supporters states the 'Objective' of the League to be the 'system of religious instruction in State schools prevailing in Australia'—the system, it is added, as it exists in New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia, and Queensland. The Education Acts of these States, as has been again and again pointed out, provide not for the mere reading of Bible

lessons by the children but for the giving of 'religious teaching' or 'religious instruction' by the teachers; the children are examined in the subject matter of the lessons administered by the teachers, and are awarded marks according to the degree of knowledge displayed; and one of the most experienced of the New South Wales inspectors has reported that it is only in those cases in which the teachers 'dwell with judicious force and impressiveness on such points of religion and morals as the lessons inculcate,' that they are of any benefit to the children. As an official League pamphlet shows, the lessons are, in cases observed and reported by the Rev. A. Don, given 'in the manner of a first class Bible class teacher.' It may suit Canon Garland, for his present purpose, to pretend that all that is asked for is that the Bible lessons should be read by the children, while the teacher stands away in a corner and looks on; but the deception is not likely to go down with members of Parliament or with intelligent electors who have taken the slightest interest in the general press discussion which has taken place on the subject.

More 'Popery'

Some of the members of the Auckland Presbytery appear to be extraordinarily and somewhat unintelligibly sensitive on the subject of 'Popery.' According to a paragraph in the daily papers a suggestion that some of the verses of the well-known hymn 'Abide with me' should be deleted was put before that body by Mr. W. J. Rees last week. The hymn, written by Mr. H. F. Lyte and very happily set to music by Dr. Monk, was, probably, he said, the most popular of evening hymns. As written it consisted of five verses of great beauty, but when the *Church Hymnary* and *Church Praise* had been issued by the Presbyterian Church it had been found that an unwarrantable addition had been made by some person. Mr. Rees urged that some action should be taken with a view to preventing the verses from appearing in any future edition of the Hymnals, and urged that their use should be discountenanced at the present. The matter, it is gravely added, is to be considered.

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The verse which is specially taken exception to runs thus:

'Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life and death, O Lord, abide with me!'

That invocation and aspiration would seem harmless enough, but it appears that the reference to the crucifix as the symbol of salvation is regarded as savoring of 'Ritualism' and of 'Rome.' As the Presbytery are to 'consider' the matter we commend to their favorable notice the method adopted by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould of disposing of a similar objection urged against one of his compositions. This author submitted to his Bishop, for episcopal approval, the manuscript of his now well-known hymn 'Onward, Christian Soldiers'; and when the Bishop read the lines

'Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the Cross of Jesus
Going on before,'

he immediately took exception to this undisguised reference to the crucifix. Whereupon the author at once re-wrote the lines, and asked his Lordship how this would do:

'Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the Cross of Jesus
Left behind the door.'

The Bishop hurriedly withdrew his objection, and the verse was printed as originally written.