

Current Topics

Teaching the League a Lesson.

The Bible in State Schools League, whose deplorable methods of controversy have made the name of the organisation almost a by-word amongst decent citizens, have at last been brought to heel, though it required nothing less than a definite threat of legal proceedings to awaken them to a sense of their duty. Some short time ago the Rev. P. W. Clarkson, a clergyman engaged in lecturing on behalf of the League, made a grossly defamatory statement regarding Mrs. A. R. Atkinson, of Wellington, a prominent member of the Women's Christian Temperance organisation. The statement, which was made publicly in a lecture delivered at Ellerslie, was as follows: 'That Mrs. Atkinson, of Wellington, when one of the deputation to the Prime Minister, told a deliberate lie—knowing it to be so—in representing that the whole of the W.C.T.U. were against the proposals of the Bible-in-Schools League, when only three out of nineteen branches were against it.' The matter was taken up by the National Schools Defence League, and brought under the notice of Canon Garland; and the organising secretary, with the certain prospect of legal proceedings staring him in the face if the League failed to make a proper amende, duly ate the necessary humble pie. In a letter to the National Schools Defence League, Canon Garland, after admitting 'that the recital of the facts in your resolution is substantially correct as to what actually occurred,' proceeds to say: 'In justice, however, to the lecturer, it is fair to state that he never intended to reflect upon the lady personally, of whom he writes to me in terms of great respect. Although devoid of such personal intention, the words, in my judgment, as used, do reflect upon the lady's veracity. I, therefore, in the name of the executive of this League, unreservedly express our disapprobation of such a charge, our entire and sincere regret that anyone advocating our cause should have made, however unintentionally, such a statement, and hereby tender a full apology to the lady whose name was mentioned. I have taken steps to have this apology made known in as full a manner as possible in the place in which the lecturer made his statement; and I am also requesting him to address to the lady personally the regret which he has expressed to me for the annoyance she has been caused.'

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This apology is at least complete and unreserved, though the stilted and elaborate humbug in which the writer tries to convey the impression that it is possible to accuse a lady of 'telling a deliberate lie, knowing it to be so,' without 'intending to reflect upon the lady personally' or without 'reflecting upon the lady's veracity,' will not escape notice. The attempt in no way deceived the members of the National Schools Defence League, who acknowledged receipt of the Bible League's apology in the following caustic resolution: 'That the organising secretary of the Bible-in-Schools League be thanked for his letter, and for the unreserved expression of his executive's disapprobation of the charge in question, and for their full apology therefor. This executive fail, however, to see that a charge of deliberate lying cannot have been intended to reflect upon the lady personally, or is compatible with the great respect professed by the accuser, or can have been made 'unintentionally,' but accept the letter as an assurance that the lecturers of the Bible-in-Schools League will in future be instructed to express their respect for their opponents in a less unconventional fashion.'

Anti-Gossip Legislation

The public man who sets himself in dead earnest to eradicate or even to materially abate the plague of gossip, tittle-tattle, and calumnious small talk which is such a fixed and constant feature of our social life, is up against a tough proposition; but the object is such a transcendently praiseworthy one that good citizens

will wish success to every attempt in this direction however imperfect they may be. It is amazing what an amount of mischief can be done in a community through idle talk—uttered often lightly, without malice, and from sheer thoughtlessness. 'By the tongue,' says Cardinal Manning, 'men may weaken their whole inmost soul; for verily it "setteth on fire the course of nature, and itself is set on fire of hell."' 'A cruel story,' says 'Ouida,' 'runs on wheels, and every hand oils the wheels as they run.' The latest anti-slander legislation is announced from Wisconsin, where Governor McGovern has just signed the Tompkins Bill providing a penalty of a heavy fine or imprisonment for gossipers. The Act provides that anyone who, in the presence or hearing of another other than the person slandered, whether he be present or not, shall maliciously speak of or concerning any person in such a manner as shall impair his or her reputation for virtue, or expose him or her to hatred, contempt or ridicule, shall be punished by a fine of not more than 400 dollars or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year. A somewhat similar Defamation Bill has just passed its second reading in our own House of Representatives; but its provisions are directed more against written than against spoken slander. The defect of most of our anti-defamation laws is that they are not put into operation except in the graver cases, and consequently do not touch the constant stream of vicious small talk which in the aggregate works more evil than the more glaring scandals.

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A determined attempt to deal with this less conspicuous aspect of the evil was made a couple of years ago by the worthy burgomaster of Hattersheim in Nassau. Because of the amount of scandalous gossip current in his district, this sturdy German issued a formal decree forbidding such defamation, and establishing a black list for notorious gossips. The Burgomaster's decree was in these terms: 'While the men are hard at work away from home the women waste their time talking scandal and quarrelling. The children are brought up all wrong, and the household is not properly looked after. The husband gets home tired and is given an entirely false account of the day's quarrel. Then of course he has to "protect his wife" and run off to the police, the local court of arbitration, or the nearest solicitor. And that's the kind of place in which the husband has to seek a real "home." It is perfectly useless to tell this sort of woman to stick to her real sphere, chase the scandal-mongers out of her house, and look after her children and her husband's comfort. Wherefore, be it known that the police have stringent instructions to place the names of these litigious and quarrelsome people on a list in order that the house owners and lodgers may be warned against them.' The scheme has much to commend it, but there is no reason why the list should be confined to women. Men are able to do quite their share in the matter of tittle-tattle and tale-bearing; and in any black list for gossips ample room should be left—for it will certainly be required—for the male variety.

I.W.W. Intolerance

'Liberty, equality, and fraternity' has always been supposed to be the motto and the watchword of our social and industrial revolutionaries; but in practice the recognition of the rights and the display of the virtues embodied in the words have been strictly reserved for those who in all points agreed with the professors of violence and upheaval. In former times for those who differed there was the guillotine; to-day, the guillotine, indeed, has gone, but the apostles of revolution still exhibit their peculiar notion of 'fraternity' by repaying any of their fellows who dissent from their industrial creed with the extremest forms of intolerance and intimidation. An illustration in point is furnished by an incident which has just occurred at Baltimore, and which is recorded in the *Philadelphia Catholic Standard* and in other of our exchanges. In the United States, as