

Current Topics

That Conscience Clause

At his Garrison Hall lecture some time ago in 'reply' to Bishop Cleary the Very Rev. Dean Fitchett vehemently repudiated the notion that the religious bodies composing the Bible in State Schools League were in any way committed to the worse than fraudulent 'conscience clause' of the 'Australian' system. At the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1910 a committee was appointed 'to prepare a report on the New South Wales system of religious instruction in public schools'; and in going through our Bible-in-schools cuttings the other day for information on another point we happened to alight on the report submitted by that committee. After setting forth various points in the New South Wales Public Instruction Act which it approves or disapproves, the report concludes thus: 'The committee approves of the "conscience clause" in section 18.' The report of this committee was adopted by the General Assembly at its meeting in 1911. All the Bible-in-schools denominations have by plain and unmistakable inference endorsed the obnoxious 'conscience clause'; while the Presbyterian body has expressly and officially committed itself to it.

A Manly Tribute.

'I like the Roman Catholic Church because it stands so immovable in its allegiance to Jesus Christ, as very God. None of its leaders ever question the Divinity of Jesus. I like it because it believes in the religious training of its children, and at great sacrifice of time and money, gives it. I like it because it stands for the purity of home life and the sanctity of the marriage vows. Thank God for that Church's strong and clear protest against the cheap divorce-mills that disgrace our American civilisation. I honor it for its defence of the Bible. I especially thank God for the stand that Church takes in this land against anarchy on the one hand, and an impossible socialism on the other. I go to sleep every night with a firmer feeling of security because we have in this city the Roman Catholic Church.'

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This honest and manly tribute is a quotation from a sermon by a Methodist clergyman recently read at a meeting of the Catholic Federation in Seattle. It is not only true—it is indisputably and incontestably true. There is not a sentence in it which the blindest bigot or the wildest zealot can question—much less deny. It is just the sort of tribute which one would expect an honest and fair-minded man to pay to the Church of the ages. That such tributes from our Protestant friends are not more frequent than they are only goes to show that honest and fair-minded men are somewhat scarce.

A Tariff Question

It is announced that the Government intend to submit to Parliament this session proposals which provide for at least an instalment of tariff revision. Certain rumours have appeared in the daily papers as to the particular items which are to be the subject of the proposed changes; but these statements are not authorised, and in official circles the secrecy usually observed regarding contemplated tariff alterations is being maintained. If the question of tariff revision—even on a limited scale—is under serious consideration by the Government it seems to us that the Prime Minister's attention might well be drawn to the desirableness of reducing, or, better still, of abolishing the duties on articles imported for use in religious worship. We refer, of course, to those articles which cannot be manufactured in this country. The duty on chalices, monstrances, statuary, etc., is very high, amounting, with the preferential surtax against foreign goods, to practically 30 per cent. *ad valorem*; and the aggregate amount paid by our churches under that head runs into

a considerable sum. In America, it would seem, several Catholic prelates have been making efforts to secure a more reasonable arrangement of the tariff in regard to material or objects imported for the use of churches. In the record of tariff hearings before the Ways and Means Committee (says an American exchange) are several letters in identically the same language, as follows: 'The undersigned respectfully urges upon your committee and congress that the duty on stained glass windows shall be reduced to 25 per cent., and that provision be made in the free list of the new Tariff Act for the free entry of statuary and casts of sculpture imported for the use of churches and other societies of a religious or educational nature.' All of these letters are signed by such prelates as Archbishop Prendergast of Philadelphia, Archbishop Rordan of San Francisco, Archbishop Keane of Dubuque, Bishop Colton of Buffalo, and others.

A Fisny Story

The following paragraph with a distinctly fishy flavor is going the rounds of some of our dailies, and has been forwarded to us for comment by one or two correspondents. It appeared originally in the London *Daily Chronicle*, having been sent by that imaginative 'Milan correspondent' who supplies the *Chronicle* from time to time with truly remarkable 'Rome news.' The paragraph runs: 'The Pope set his seal on July 22 on a much-debated case of exceptional interest in ecclesiastical law. Father Gaetano Arena, an Italian secular priest, who had been exercising the functions of the Roman priesthood for twelve years past, recently desired to be freed from all sacerdotal obligations, on the plea that he was merely constrained by his parents, while under age, to enter the sacred ministry. Pius X. pronounces the ordination null, and will restore to Arena all the rights of ordinary citizenship, including that of contracting religious marriage. It is believed that the decision will have a far-reaching effect in the ranks of the Roman Catholic clergy.'

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The ridiculous comment in the last sentence is itself sufficient to render the story suspect; and the further absolutely untrue statement that 'Pius X. pronounces the ordination null' is certainly not calculated to inspire confidence. For, as the least instructed Catholic knows, 'once a priest, always a priest'; and not even the Pope himself can pronounce an ordination null. The paragraph has been admirably dealt with by the reverend editor of the *Catholic Herald of India*; and we cannot do better than hand on our esteemed contemporary's comments: 'On the face of it, this is a full-fledged canard. That a man, after *twelve years* in the sacred ministry, and therefore at the very least 36 years of age, should suddenly plead that he was morally constrained by his parents to enter the ministry, and that his plea should be accepted, well, this sounds preposterous. The minimum age for ordination to the priesthood is 24—is this under age? It is true, he contracted the obligation of celibacy when he became subdeacon, let us say at the age of 22, most likely 23, or perhaps even 24. At this ceremony, when he was presented for the grade of subdeacon, he was solemnly warned by the bishop at the beginning of the ceremony regarding the gravity of the obligation which he was incurring. "You ought," he was told in the words of the Ritual, "anxiously to consider again and again what sort of a burden this is which you are taking upon you of your own accord. Up to this you are free. You may still, if you choose, turn to the aims and desires of the world. But if you receive this order, it will no longer be lawful to turn back from your purpose. You will be required to continue in the service of God, and with His assistance to observe chastity and to be bound for ever in the ministrations of the Altar, to serve whom is to reign." By stepping forward despite this warning, when invited to do so, and by co-operating in the rest of the ordination service, the candidate is understood to bind himself equivalently by a vow of chastity. He is henceforth unable to contract a valid marriage. No doubt, the Pope can dispense in the