

loses the consciousness of what it is, when it snatches at the weapons of the State, and tries to wield them instead of its own.

### The Debate on the Education Question

The debate on the Education Question between the Rev. Joseph Nicholson, Protestant minister, and Mr. T. C. Brennan, LL.B., representing the Catholic Federation of Victoria, duly eventuated on the 29th ult., and in point of attendance, of the tone and temper both of speakers and audience, and of the tense interest displayed by the immense gathering, was a complete success. Long before the hour appointed for the opening of the doors of the Auditorium, large numbers of people crowded in the vicinity, and by 7.30 the body of the great hall was filled. Before 8 o'clock every one of the 2500 seats was occupied. 'At five minutes to 8,' says the *Advocate*, 'when Mr. Brennan went on to the platform, he was greeted with a loud outburst of cheering, which lasted for several moments. A few minutes afterwards Mr. Nicholson appeared, and was received with loud applause. At 8 o'clock sharp the chairman, Professor Harrison Moore, opened the proceedings in a short and graceful speech. Mr. Nicholson was again greeted with loud applause, but it was noticeable that, for almost half an hour, he spoke to an absolutely silent house. There was some applause at intervals after that, but it was not until Mr. Brennan began that the enthusiasm of the meeting really asserted itself, and from that on, whichever the speaker, it found vent in bursts of applause or occasional peals of laughter.'

Each of the speakers was permitted fifty minutes for his opening speech, and twenty minutes was allowed for each reply. The proposition which Mr. Nicholson had undertaken to affirm was as follows: '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.' As opening speaker, Mr. Nicholson had an obvious and very great advantage in that he was free to choose his own line of treatment and was in a position to open the discussion with a speech fully prepared. It is no mere partisan criticism to say that he utterly failed to rise to the level of his opportunity. His speech showed evidence, indeed, of careful preparation: but the preparation had been on lines that were totally irrelevant to the issues. The second half of the proposition—that the recognition of Catholic claims would be destructive of the existing State system—was never so much as touched upon. In support of the first half, the principal 'evidence' advanced was a succession of decidedly disjointed and disconnected selections from the speaker's controversial rag-bag—most of the items having not even the most distant connection with the specific issue under discussion. There was a snippet from the syllabus of 1864; a patch about the alleged illiteracy in Spain and all other Catholic countries; and quotations—given in all seriousness as being weighty and entitled to respect—from such authorities as 'Father Crowley' and 'Dr. Cook of Boston.' 'Father Crowley' was actually quoted as speaking from 'within the Roman Catholic Church,' Mr. Nicholson being evidently in blissful ignorance of the fact that when the particular book quoted from—*Parochial Schools: The Curse of the Nation*—was written, the unfortunate Crowley had been for some time under formal sentence of excommunication. On the understanding that Crowley would go West and desist from his scandal-giving the excommunication was removed by Cardinal Martinelli: but after leaving Chicago the unfortunate man by his marriage with a woman of Schuyler, Neb., incurred *ipso facto* a fresh excommunication. He has now gone the limit, having recently allied himself to that 'pole-cat of the American press,' the infamous, anti-Catholic gutter-journal, the *Menace*. And this is the man whom the Rev. Nicholson, in his ignorance and innocence, quotes in all good faith as a Catholic authority, speaking from within

the Church! Dr. Joseph Cook, whose 'Boston Lectures' had a certain vogue some years ago, was an ultra-Protestant. He was a man of ability; but where Catholic matters are concerned his works are marked by extreme bigotry. He was quoted by Mr. Nicholson as having stated that seven out of ten of American Catholics are in favor of the public school system. On such a point Dr. Cook has about the same title to rank as an authority as Joseph Hocking or Marie Corelli. As we have said, Mr. Nicholson's speech gave evidence of careful preparation, and showed plenty of ability of a kind; but fully nine-tenths of it was entirely away from the specific points at issue. He concluded by setting forth some fifteen reasons for his contention that the Catholic claims are unjust, one half of them, however, being a mere duplication or repetition of the other half. For many of these reasons no evidence at all was advanced: for the rest the 'evidence' was for the most part of the rag-bag kind above indicated.

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Mr. Brennan, whose speech had necessarily to partake largely of the character of a 'reply' to Mr. Nicholson, was at a disadvantage in having to follow more or less closely the lines laid down by the opening speaker. This meant restricted time and opportunity for developing the fundamental principles governing the Catholic position, and it meant also that he had to depend entirely on the inspiration of the moment for the form in which his argument and his defence were to be clothed. Nevertheless Mr. Brennan made a splendidly effective vindication of the Catholic claims; and the fact that his address had to be entirely *extempore*, so far from proving really a handicap, only served to bring out his superior platform ability and his vastly superior knowledge of the whole subject under debate. His points were made clearly, cogently, and concisely: there were sufficiently frequent touches of humor to keep the subject from being in the slightest degree dry or heavy; and the speaker's frank and manly appeal to the sense of justice and spirit of fairness of his hearers could not fail to leave an excellent impression. We have space for only a couple of examples of the ready and effective way in which Mr. Brennan made his points. Dealing with the unrevoked commission given by our Saviour to the Church, he said: 'It was Christ Himself, if I may say so without irreverence, Who created the difficulty for us when He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"; and when He said on Pentecost: "Going, therefore, teach all nations, teaching them whatsoever things I have commanded you." Did He refer there to nature studies and sloyd work? The school is the place for teaching, and we are carrying out the Master's commands in what we are doing. Now, I ask you, my Protestant friends, do you claim to be members of that Church which Christ founded on earth, or do you not? If you do not, then you should make yourselves right as soon as possible; if you do, then why do you not obey the commands of your Mas'er?' And referring to the alleged effect of denominational schools in destroying national unity, he said: 'The next matter which Mr. Nicholson dealt with had reference to national unity. I do not know exactly what he means, and whether he says that if we are to have a Catholic grant it will have any effect on our unity. If it is to have any effect, I presume it would have manifested itself ere now, because the Catholic schools are, here in Melbourne at all events, in all their glory, and practically not one Catholic child is being educated in a State school. That being so, if the results would be evil, those results should have manifested themselves; but none have been shown, so far as I know. Besides, Mr. Nicholson is on unsafe ground. Having taken that position, he must go either backward or forward. If the effect of denominational schools is to endanger national unity, then that effect must apply where there are denominational secondary schools as much as in the case of denominational primary schools. Indeed, it would apply with more strength in the case of denominational secondary schools, because they are the natural nursery and

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