

THE EDUCATION QUESTION.

THE following is the report of a lecture lately delivered at Invercargill by the Rev. Father McEnroe, S.J. :—

Great stress has been laid by the advocates of the State-school system on the supposed advantage of having the youth of New Zealand, of all religious denominations, brought up in the same school, at the knee of the same mother. Specious pretence this, which has deceived thousands! For who is it that does not desire to see Christian youth trained in the school of Christian charity and of every Christian virtue?—not only desire it as a great blessing, but regard it as the only solid basis of social happiness and prosperity. Nor would it be too much to say that anyone who would ignore the vital importance of such charitable training deserves not the name of Christian. But who are they, let us ask, who claim to have at heart that the future men and women of this Colony should be trained up to a high moral standard? Monstrous that anyone would seriously pretend to give effect to such wishes by the secular system! All Christians concur in believing that the Gospel maxims, as they have been the basis of all true civilisation in the past, so must they be of the highest civilisation attainable hereafter. And yet, strange contradiction, those who are so clamorous for an education befitting the hoped-for grand future of New Zealand are the very persons who disavow moral training from secular instruction, and banish the former from the schoolroom. Not only the moral instruction of religion, but the very groundwork of Christian morality, the redemption, and a divine sanction for divine law, are ignored by the system and relegated from the schoolroom. If the case is really so bad as this, how could such a system have been introduced, and how can it be allowed to exist? An explanation is needed why an eminently intelligent Christian people allowed its introduction, and why they do not rise as one man and hurl it to destruction. And the explanation is not far to seek. The framers and the most influential abettors of the system saw it as you and I saw it to-day, and they intended it for the very purpose it is so well calculated to effect—the gradual subversion of Christianity. It is essentially a Freethought institution. The Catholic Church, from its experience of a like system in France and elsewhere, has from the first done all in its power against it. And though many religiously-minded Protestants, clergy and laity, were not alive to the mischief at first, they now commonly declare themselves convinced that if Christianity is to be preserved the free, secular, and compulsory system of education must come to an end,—the Bible, they say, must be introduced into the schools. It has taken the people of these colonies some years to understand the mischief with which the secular system was fraught; but now is heard in all quarters a cry for religious instruction of one kind or other in the schools. For years, then, a Christian people, possessing free institutions, have been governed by a few Freethinkers. A more remarkable instance of how a nation, possessing the most liberal institutions, may be tyrannised over by a few is afforded by Belgium. Belgium is one of the most Catholic countries in the world. It is densely populated, and its people enjoy an eminently high degree of prosperity. Parliamentary representation in that country is remarkably comprehensive, and yet the State system of education there is as godless as our own here, and like us, too, the people there have to establish and maintain Catholic schools out of their own private resources. All this seems a paradox, but like all paradoxes it has its explanation. The Freemasons who throughout the Continent of Europe are infidel, and are at the same time very numerous and powerful, govern the country, chiefly by the agency of an infidel Press, in a way the bulk of the people abhor. There seems to be a very flagrant error underlying the countenance that some religiously-minded men would give to the secular system. They think Christianity may well flourish under it, and they resent as a grievous wrong the accusation that it is at all calculated to injure either Christian faith or Christian discipline. In all this they think and speak seriously. But do they fancy that Christian faith and practice can be obtained as readily as goods exposed for sale in the marketplace? Do they fancy that to have the mind and heart endowed with divine faith and love, neither parent nor child need take any concern? Do they think a man naturally possesses them, that they are the outcome of everyone's own head and heart? Have, I ask, these men to be told that everyone is born a Pagan, that no natural talents, no literary or scientific attainments can raise anyone to the knowledge of the Trinity or the Incarnation; that for the knowledge of these and other truths of religion we must owe ourselves indebted to divine revelation; and that since these truths are so high above the best efforts of the human mind to reach or fully to comprehend them, even when known, our mind has to be trained to accept them, and further still the influence of divine grace is needed to bend reason to faith? Did not our Lord Himself give a long and careful training to many of His disciples, and even when that training was gone through, and under such a master, they remained but indifferent scholars until after the descent of the Holy Ghost? And observe, my brethren, they entered our Lord's school instructed in the Old Testament, which was a preparation for the New. Your child is, as once you were yourself, and as all of us once were, a Pagan. And all the evidences of divine revelation have to be brought individually before him—the same slow process has to be gone through in his case, as in case of the first disciples, before he can possibly become a sincere Christian. So far regarding faith. But what shall we say of the training in the moral law of the Gospel? The Christian law has been given in order to guide and control every power of the soul, to direct every act of the Christian's life, his every thought, every desire. In youth and in old age, in prosperity and in adversity, his naturally wayward heart must never be allowed to swerve to the right or to the left, but must ever steadfastly aim at and strive for something high indeed, and most worthy of his ambition, but yet far above the visible, future, invisible. And for this future and invisible good the disciples of Christ must be ever ready to sacrifice, if necessary, every pleasure, every honour, and the whole world's wealth. Does not Christianity require all this? And surely to be prepared for all

this is the most glorious achievement of a Christian education. Who would hope the Christian law would be so observed by one who has hardly been taught even its existence? To say, therefore, that the present system undermines the faith of our children, is to speak very incorrectly. Your children naturally have no Christian faith to be undermined. What it does is to keep them in the heathenism in which they were born. Oh! you will perhaps say, my children were all baptised in infancy, and by baptism do they not receive the habit of faith? True. But on occasion of your child's baptism, was there not the god-father or god-mother, or both, pledged to look to the Christian instruction of that child, when he should arrive at an age to learn? Lest you should not live to impart it, or lest you should be irreligious enough to neglect this first duty of yours to those souls whom God has intrusted to your paternal or maternal care, sponsors undertake the responsibility of giving religious instruction to their god-child. The child does, indeed, in baptism receive the habit of faith. But soon after he has attained the use of reason, he will be required by the divine law to exercise the habit of faith by acts of faith, and to do so at frequent intervals all his life. The motives of faith must, therefore, be presented to him when he is capable of understanding them, and increased knowledge of them imparted with the increasing development of his understanding. And all through life, but especially in youth, the vigour of faith has to be sustained by frequent reference to the truths of Revelation. Let the clergy abstain from the controversy, it is said, and soon it will be seen what side the people are on! Singular means this of discovering God's side in a dispute. The meaning of this argument, if argument it can be called, must be that the laity would be always right in case of any difference of religious opinion between them and the clergy. It is equivalent to saying, let the clergy withhold from the controversy, and the action of the laity will determine the uprightness of the State school system. Strange requirement! Let the clergy withdraw from a dispute in which the very existence of Christianity is at stake! If the clergy must be silent on this question, when, I should like to know, would it be proper for them to speak? Is it to be silent when the dearest interests of their Divine Master are imperilled that the sacerdotal order has been instituted? Who would invite us to become like the Jewish priests who are thus sketched by the Prophet Isaiah: "Their watchmen are blind, they are ignorant, dumb dogs not able to bark?" Shall the Catholic clergy, who have converted from Paganism every Christian nation on earth, and who are at this hour gloriously prosecuting the same divine mission among the blacks of Australia and of Central Africa, and, indeed, among the heathens everywhere, shall they as "dumb dogs" not open their mouth while the children of those who have inherited the Christian faith for decades of generations past, are being robbed of their sacred birth-right? But are the laity necessarily right in any difference of opinion regarding faith and morals, should any difference of opinion on such a subject arise between them and the clergy? Or rather, in such an hypothesis, would not the presumption be that the clergy were right? Are they not the authorised guardians and expounders of the divine law? Are not they the salt of the earth to preserve it from corruption? "For the lips of the priest," says the prophet Malachi, "shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth, because he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 11, 7). "Go," said our Lord to the Apostles, "teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things which I have commanded you," etc. And are the Catholic clergy faithful to their divine commission? There is much that has ever been admired in the Roman Catholic clergy. They are faithful to their flocks, even at the peril of their lives. No contagious disease, however virulent, will deter them a moment when called on to minister to the dying. Celibacy enables them to be brave, when married clergy are in a sense forced to be cowards. And the Catholic clergy in this southern hemisphere, and in this our own day, have won for themselves special laurels by the zeal with which they have devoted their time and money to maintain Christianity ever since it became so seriously endangered in these colonies. As they have been God's authorised ambassadors to man, thank Heaven, they have shown themselves determined, at any cost, to deliver their Master's message. It is a very unwarranted assumption that the Catholic people prefer godless education for their children. God forbid there were any foundation for such a charge. Certain alluring baits are offered to induce Catholics to betray their conscientious duty—valuable prizes, scholarships, State and other influential patronage, besides gratuitous instruction. What greater temptations could be offered? Yet even they who bend the knee to Baal would decide on the abstract question which alone we are considering that it is unfair, and in the highest degree criminal, that such school advantages should be offered only on a condition imperilling the Christian faith of the scholar. Why not offer them to all in such a way that all may accept them with a safe conscience and with gratitude as for a gift of heaven? The reasonableness of our claims to a share of the public expenditure for education is so patent that rarely does anyone openly dispute it. The public money is pocketed by the dormant party, who say nothing about it. And very fitly do people abstain from discussing any act of theirs which they find it difficult or impossible to justify. An utterance has, however, lately been made on the subject, and though it is as good as perhaps could be made in the cause, it is pitiable in the extreme. "Who are to rule," it is asked, "the majority or the minority?" The question implies that no medium is conceivable between public plunder on one side or the other. What an inconsistency, it is asserted, in one who calls himself a democrat to entertain the idea of giving the minority a share of the education grants—that is, of giving them their own? If the democrat, then, is bound by his principles to shelve the just claims of the weak and the oppressed poor, in whom are the weak and the poor to put their trust? If not in the democrat, is it in the aristocrat, or the plutocrat, or the autocrat? The common opinion used to be that the interests of the weak would be best consulted in a democracy. Yes, and democrats generally will not admit the oppression of a minority to be a necessary part of their principles. They will repudiate such an idea. Neither can they even in doing so claim for themselves any special advantage; for the