

'Nor, indeed, need we go beyond the members of the Commission to find proof of the lamentable divisions and differences which the reading of Scripture with private interpretation, or with an unreliable internal standard is capable of producing. The Commission was composed of men who all, in some sense, recognised the authority of the Bible. They must be regarded as favorable exponents of the results of Scriptural interpretation made according to one or other of the methods to which I have referred. And yet now lamentable are the differences and how wide the divisions that exist amongst them. Even in regard to what must be recognised as the most important truths of religion, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the virgin birth of the Saviour, the divinity of Christ, the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture, the Atonement, the constitution of the Church established by Christ on earth; on these and other revealed truths an impassable gulf lies between them. How could it be hoped, then, that suitable Scripture lessons could be drawn up by that heterogeneous Commission, or taught with safety in State schools to Catholic and non-Catholic children alike? Great credit was claimed by the Commission for the extent of the compromise by which a united report was secured. But what did that compromise mean? It meant that each party believed that such parts of Holy Scripture had been embodied as would sufficiently express their own peculiar beliefs. These Scripture lessons, therefore, are supposed to be consistent with the belief in and a denial of the Trinity, of the virgin birth and divinity of Christ, of His atonement for the sins of men—in a word, in the belief in and denial of Christianity as it is ordinarily accepted and professed by the general body of Christians. By the use of unauthorised headings, favorable selections, capital letters, and italics an effort has been made, if not to reconcile the jarring elements, at least to give expression to the various views that prevailed amongst the members of the Commission.

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'But, however they differed on other points, they were evidently united in one effort, no doubt unconscious, namely, to make the Scripture lessons as Protestant as possible. From beginning to end they are made to appear in a Protestant dress. The authorised version, which has been used, is distinctively Protestant. Greater accuracy cannot be claimed for it, as the later "Revised" version was undertaken to correct the inaccuracies of the "Authorised" version. The indignant utterance of an Anglican bishop regarding that "Authorised" version is too recent to be forgotten. In that "Authorised" version there is an addition to the Lord's Prayer, "for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen," which is not found in the Douay version, or in the text of the "Revised" version, and which is not used, therefore, by Catholic children. Here was an opportunity of adopting what might be regarded as a neutral form of the Lord's Prayer—that which appears in the "Revised" and more accurate version. But, apparently, such a concession would interfere somewhat with the Protestant coloring of all these Scripture lessons, and, therefore, is not recommended. What is true of the text is also true, to a great extent, of the suggested hymns and forms of prayer, namely, that in what is omitted, as well as in the general tone of what is expressed, they help to make the whole volume as Protestant as it could well be made in the circumstances. I do not believe that the sinister motives which actuated Dr. Whately in recommending the Irish Scripture Lessons actuated the members of the Commission in compiling the present Scripture lessons, but no one can fail to see that they inevitably lend themselves to the same proselytising purposes. And yet the teachers are expected to read those lessons and to deduce from them such moral truths as they are supposed to contain, without saying a word that would reveal to the children their own beliefs or disbeliefs. If that could be done, the teachers would succeed where the members of the Commission have egregiously failed. I shall not dwell on the proposed conscience clause beyond saying that, at least in the proposed form, it would give no practical protection to Catholic children. Children will not withdraw when they know that their withdrawal would expose them to the displeasure of the teacher or the derision of their fellow-pupils.

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'We may judge of the effect of the proposed conscience clause by what is occurring in some of the State schools at present. Mr. Francis H. Rennick, head teacher of Rathdown street State school, when examined recently before the Commission, stated that "the teachers in a school generally welcome any religious teacher coming in, and do all in their power to assist him." Then he added: "I know very few cases in which the school has been dismissed; the act is worded in that way, but teachers have, to a large extent, disregarded that. Whether they have been justified in doing so I am not prepared to say, but in nearly all cases where religious instruction was given the scholars were kept at work while the religious instructor was engaged." The same witness told the Commission that it was only occasionally that a Roman Catholic child was absolutely withdrawn. This statement should open the eyes of Catholic parents to the danger of having the faith of

their children undermined in State schools where, in violation of the act, the teachers do not dismiss the schools as prescribed, but allow Catholic children to be present while other scholars are receiving distinctly sectarian instruction. If such a violation of the act is permitted at present, what may be expected if State school teachers themselves became the religious teachers? What, then, should we do? We must trust in the honor of our fellow-citizens that they will not subject Catholic children to this, and direct attention to the violation of parental rights which would be involved in forcing these Scripture lessons on Catholic pupils. We should for the present confine our efforts to this endeavor. The eve of a Parliamentary election is not the time for pressing our claims for compensation for the educational work we are doing for the State at a saving of £98,000 to the Treasury. At present we are contributing largely towards the secular instruction imparted to non-Catholic children. We ask not to be subjected to the additional grievance of having to pay for the sectarian instruction which it is proposed to provide for non-Catholic children, and which our Catholic children, who in large numbers are forced by circumstances to attend State schools, would be compelled to receive.'

#### THE HOME ELECTIONS.

GENERALLY speaking prophets have but little honor in their own country, but in regard to the General Election they foretold that the Salisbury Government would have a sweeping majority, and so once in a way their prognostications have come true. This result has been a surprise to no one, as nothing else was expected under the circumstances. The Conservatives chose an opportune time for the dissolution, and consequently fortune favored them. They appear to have laid their plans very secretly, for when the last mail left England there was considerable speculation as to whether the General Election would be held in the autumn or next spring. The Government went to the country with practically only a single plank in their political platform—the success of the British arms in South Africa. The Opposition had neither a political programme, unity, nor leaders. Theirs was a sort of guerrilla campaign, every man for himself. The wonder is that they came out of the contest as well as they did. In Great Britain the Ministerialists polled about 300,000 more votes than their opponents, improving their position since the previous General Election by over 90,000 votes, whilst the Liberals received 36,000 more than they did in 1895. Taking the returns as cabled we find that England returned 339 Government supporters, Wales 9, Scotland 37, and Ireland 21, or a total of 406 against 411 in 1895. In England the Ministry lost 10 seats, against which they gained one in Wales and four in Scotland. Taking the Liberals and Nationalists together as the Opposition, the Government will have a majority in the House of Commons of 142 instead of 152 before the dissolution. In Scotland political parties are pretty evenly divided—Government 37, Opposition 35. In Ireland the contest found the Nationalists unprepared and scarcely united, still they succeeded in keeping all their old seats except one—Galway, which was lost through rival Home Rule candidates splitting the votes and allowing a Conservative to step in. To make up for this they wrested the South Dublin seat from the Unionists. There is little doubt that had they not wasted their energies in puerile disputes during the past few years, and had they attended to organisation and registration of electors they would have secured a few more seats. As it is they have done remarkably well in securing the return of 82 members, considering the many difficulties they had to contend with. The Government have obtained another lease of the Ministerial benches, but with a slightly diminished majority, their success at the polls being due in a great measure to Lord Roberts and the practical termination of the war in South Africa.

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Unless something unforeseen happens the Conservatives will remain in power for some years. The only thing that is likely to cause any friction is trouble from within, a probability not at all unlikely. Lord Salisbury is getting old, and will very likely retire in the near future. The question is, who is to be his successor? For many reasons the claims of Mr. Balfour cannot be easily set aside, but on the other hand Mr. Chamberlain, it is said, aspires to the position, and he might demand it as the price of Unionist support. It is doubtful if the majority of Conservatives would consent to such a sacrifice. The chosen of Birmingham has been found exceedingly useful to them, but they do not trust him. The man who would desert his chief because his ambitious claims were not recognised is not likely to be looked upon as an ideal leader in the opposite fold. Of course Lord Salisbury may still remain at the head of affairs for the sake of preventing friction, but it is hardly probable. He has been Prime Minister for about 12 years, nearly for as long a period as Lord Gladstone had been. The reorganisation of the Cabinet must come sooner or later, and when it takes place there is sure to be dissatisfaction. Before the Liberals seek office again they must close up their ranks, formulate a policy, and secure a leader acceptable to all sections. They stand badly in need of another Gladstone.