

## The 'Referendum' on Religious Instruction in State Schools

EVIDENCE OF THE RIGHT REV. HENRY WILLIAM CLEARY, BISHOP OF AUCKLAND.

SERIES D.  
(Continued.)

### XVIII.—'SUCCESS' IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

1. Roseate tales are told regarding the alleged 'success' of this scheme in parts of Australia. This 'success' is asserted more particularly of New South Wales, where the 'system has existed' (says the League's petition card) 'since 1866.' The story of 'success' is built up in the manner favored in the League's petition card, and in its partial reflex, the ballot paper of the present so-called 'Referendum' Bill—namely, by direct misstatement, and by the suppression or concealment of even the most notorious evidence that tells in a contrary sense.

2. The 'success' in New South Wales is asserted as the 'success' of what the League, in its petition card, describes as the 'system of religious instruction in State schools prevailing' in that State. This means that the alleged 'success' is from the view point of religious principles and religious practice. Such 'success' necessarily implies two things:—(a) Negatively, there should be in it no departure from, or violation of, religious principles or practice; and (b) positively, that it has promoted religious faith and practice; above all, among the youth brought up under the care of the education system in question. The burden of proof of all this falls naturally upon the shoulders of those who allege this 'success' as a reason for extending that system to the Dominion of New Zealand. That proof has not been undertaken; it has not even been seriously attempted.

3. On the contrary, the League's failure to furnish such evidence of 'success' is, in itself, a significant, though negative, confession of failure. Nay, in a positive way high-placed officials have furnished us with evidence that, in certain vital respects the system has been inimical to the common good in the oldest Bible-in-Schools State.

4. Thus, the Bible-in-Schools League of 1904 declared that the majority in any State has no moral right to 'coerce the minority to violate its conscience, for, the League added, 'it can never be for the common good that conscience should be violated.' This sound principle of natural and Christian morality was signed by (among others) the Rev. Dr. Gibb (a vice president of the present League) and by Bishop Sprott (a member of the League executive). Now, in its methods of violating conscience the 'system of religious instruction in State schools prevailing' in New South Wales is the very same as that advocated by the League and embodied in the Bill now before Parliament. The New South Wales system violates the conscience of large bodies of objecting taxpayers: it (in effect) bribes numbers of teachers to do that which loyalty to conscience does not permit: it violates parental rights, by the operation of the odious and tricky Irish proselytising conscience clause: it violates the Crown rights of the Almighty Himself by enabling a certain number of parents and clergy to abdicate, in part, one of the most sacred duties of parents and the Christian ministry, and to force them upon the shoulders of State officials. There is no need to point out once more the gravity of these various forms of sin against conscience, and of violation of God-given rights, which are chargeable to the New South Wales system. They have been sufficiently dealt with in the previous parts of this evidence. Here, in these violations of conscience, we find the deadly, permanent sin of the New South Wales system. The cause of religion can never be served by defiance of religions and religious moral principles. In this fundamental respect, the New South Wales system must be adjudged a radical failure.

### 'OPINIONS OF EXPERTS.'

5. A certain amount of 'evidence' has, however, been tendered by the League, purporting to assert the 'success' of the system of State 'religious instruction' prevailing in New South Wales and certain other parts of Australia. A study of this 'evidence' soon reveals what a mockery, what a ludicrous delusion, it is, as 'proof' of the 'success' of the system referred to.

6. The 'evidence' in question is published in an official League publication, entitled *Opinions of Experts*. In it are expressed 98 opinions. An ex-Governor of New South Wales is responsible for one; Ministers of Education and inspectors (past or present) for 18, and schoolteachers 79, of whom 60 come from New South Wales, the balance from Queensland, Tasmania, and Western Australia. The pamphlet opens with a letter from Mr. P. Board (now Director of Education, New South Wales). It is dated October 11, 1906, appears as a reply to some unnamed 'Right Rev. Sir,' but the bulk of it has been lifted bodily from page 149 of an 'Interim Report of the Commission on Primary Education, New South Wales,' under date 1903. A lamentable feature of that official letter is the amazing manner in which the Commissioners' report has been garbled in the interests of the 'system.' Take, for instance that part of Mr. Board's letter where he quotes from the report of one of their most experienced inspectors. This inspector wrote of the 'benefits' derived from the New South Wales system *in cases where the teachers dwell 'with judicious force and impressiveness' upon 'points of religion and morals.'* The evident implication was that no 'benefits' accrued where this was not done by the teacher. The inspector adds: *'I believe that in about 50 per cent. of our schools these lessons have been so treated.'* Mr Board suppresses this, —and with it, the implied official statement that, from the view-point of religion, the system of State 'religious instruction' in New South Wales is not a 'success,' but a 50 per cent. failure.

7. The reports quoted in the League's *Opinions of Experts*, date from 1891 to 1912, and there are eight which bear no date. The majority—65—are dated 1908. Thirteen date from 1891 to 1907. There are 65 replies from teachers in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, and Western Australia. The total number of State teachers in these States is 10,572 (*Official Year-Book* for 1913). Thus, only six teachers in every thousand in those States advanced any opinion upon the school systems there. The question was put as to whether the clergy visits to the schools caused friction. Out of the 65 teachers, 43 said 'no,' the remainder (perhaps discreetly) did not reply. Only six to eight of the 65 asserted that the clergy visits were attended with good results—the remainder are (also, perhaps, discreetly) silent hereon. Six to eight teachers out of 10,572! And twelve teachers acknowledge their practice of giving religious instruction to children of various faiths (among whom Catholics are sometimes included) in the same class. Two circumstances tended (especially in New South Wales) to render frank expression of opinion by the teachers somewhat difficult: (a) The prohibition of criticism of the education system and its administration; and (b) the fact that the then Under-Secretary for Education, the senior inspector, and other high-placed officials, were strong religionists of one particular faith, and ardent supporters of the New South Wales system of 'religious instruction in State schools.' Latest reports from Sydney indicate that there is only one Catholic inspector in the whole of New South Wales. The collectively vast private education systems there are intense evidence of dissatisfaction with the State system. According to the *New South Wales Year Book* for 1908 (p. 81 and following) one-third of the children in the cities attend private schools, one-fourth in the country towns, and only one-fourteenth in the rural districts,—proving that it is only by its vast resources that the State system is able to retain its children. The intense dissatisfaction of Catholics with the State system in New South Wales is eloquently testified by the following facts: During the period 1883-1913, inclusive, their enrolment in the

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