

the Bible—as Newman has expressed it—is the depository, not the organ, of God's revelation to men, and that it requires an interpreter. From the Catholic standpoint, therefore, the reading of the Scripture lessons, without explanation or comment, would at once mean the acceptance by the State of a Protestant principle in the schools—i.e., it makes them, in a wide sense, denominational. It would appear that under the Nelson system the Scripture lessons are explained by the State school teachers; but this does not mend matters. Such explanation is necessarily, in the vast majority of cases, given by Protestants, of various shades of belief, and it must naturally be tinged with their peculiar views and prepossessions. We must also take into serious account the instances in which the comments will come from the lips of atheists and agnostics. There is a multitude of oft-recurring Scripture terms which have a Protestant as well as a Catholic meaning. Take, for instance, such words as 'baptism,' 'Church,' 'penance,' or 'repentance,' 'forgiveness,' 'grace,' 'salvation,' 'faith,' 'good works,' etc. Here again, in the act of explaining even the meaning of the commonest terms of Scripture, you may, under the aegis of the State, as effectually denominationalise a public school in certain matters of doctrine as if it were the Sunday school of a particular sect. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as 'unsectarian' or 'undenominational' religious instruction. In his letter of January 14, 1904, to Mr. Younger, Mr. Balfour, dealing with the 'confusion of ideas underlying "undenominational" teaching,' said: 'It is clear that, from the point of view of the Jew, all Christian teaching, and from the point of view of the Roman Catholic, all Protestant teaching, is denominational in the one sense relevant to the present issue.' The doctrinal or dogmatic element may be more or less watered down; but the religious instruction of the Nelson system—and of all Bible-in-schools systems—is a hopelessly sectarian thing, being, in reality, nothing less than Protestantism in a 'reduced' or diluted form.

We shall be told, of course, that Catholic children are protected, either by a conscience clause—framed, presumably, when the Education Board grants the necessary permission to the committee—or by provision for the formal dismissal of children who do not wish to take the lessons prior to the assembling for religious instruction. There is something almost hypocritical in all this smug talk about a 'conscience clause.' As if the conscience of a Catholic, or a Jew, or an Infidel, was not as much violated by being compelled to assist in supporting by taxation what they deem to be religious error, as by being compelled to listen to it! And yet it is gravely argued that because the Protestant Christians are a majority in the community they have the right, in effect, to take the common fund, contributed alike by all of every creed, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and Infidel, and use it for instructing their own children exclusively in their own religion, saving the consciences of their neighbors by telling them that if they cannot consent to that kind of religious education for their children they can either go without or provide it elsewhere at their own expense! So far as protecting Catholic children is concerned, we have again and again shown that the so-called 'conscience clause'—as usually framed—is hopelessly ineffective, the inevitable result being that a percentage of Catholic children are brought within the influence of non-Catholic teaching through the mere indulgence of their parents in not complying with formalities. The provision for the formal dismissal of the school, or of those of the children who are not to take part in the religious instruction lessons, is even more unsatisfactory. How it works out—or at least may work out—in actual practice may be judged from what occurred a few years ago in some of the Melbourne schools under a similar arrangement. Mr. Francis H. Rennick, head teacher of Rathdown Street State School, when examined before the Victorian Commission on Religious Instruction, 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.' The same witness told the Commission that it was only occasionally that a Catholic child was absolutely withdrawn. Naturally children will not withdraw when they know that their withdrawal will expose them to the displeasure of the teacher or the derision of their fellow-pupils. The danger to the faith of Catholic children under such an arrangement as the Nelson system is obvious and real.

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Catholics cannot accept as satisfactory for their children any system which provides some or any form of religion at some set hour *only*, while God and religion and the play of religious principles and religious influences are excluded from the remainder of the working hours of the school. They cannot, therefore, accept for their children

any system that subordinates—as the Nelson system does—religious training to secular instruction, nor can they for a moment pretend to countenance an arrangement under which Catholic money is applied to the work of Protestantising our State schools. If, in spite of our protests, the Nelson system continues to be permitted and adopted, Parliament will be bound in all justice and consistency to give consideration to Catholic claims. As the Rev. Dr. Bevan, the Victorian Congregationalist leader, expressed it in an interview published in the Presbyterian *Outlook* a few years ago: 'If we have Bible-reading and Bible lessons in the schools given by the State, I do not see how we can resist the claims of our Roman Catholic fellow-citizens. If we satisfy the Protestant conscience in this way, we shall have to satisfy the Roman Catholic conscience also.' The objection of the average citizen, the average politician, the average journalist to every form of Bible-in-school proposal is that their adoption would be an absolute violation of the neutrality of the system, and would necessarily open the door to denominationalism. The objection is well taken. If the authorities allow the Nelson system to obtain a footing as a recognised part of our education system, the Catholic claim to State aid will, on every principle of honesty and fair dealing, be irresistible.

## Notes

### St. Patrick's College

As intimated in our columns a fortnight ago, the silver jubilee of the well-known and ever-popular 'St. Pat's' occurs on 1st June of this year, and the authorities have decided to commemorate the occasion by raising a fund to be applied (1) to the building and equipment of science laboratories in connection with the institution, and (2) to the reduction and, if possible, the complete extinction of the existing debt on the college. With regard to the first object, it is pertinent to point out that the gifted Rector of the College (the Very Rev. Dr. Kennedy) is a man of European reputation as a scientist, and, given reasonably adequate facilities, there is every reason to anticipate that St. Patrick's would achieve very special distinction in scientific work. Regarding the general work of the institution, we recall the pregnant saying—uttered recently at a prize distribution by the Bishop of Goulburn—to the effect that the Church's greatest need at the present day was leaders for the laity. 'Give me officers,' said the great Napoleon—'I can get soldiers any day.' 'It is the leaders,' added Bishop Gallagher, after quoting this story, 'not the many, who make a party, an army, a people, a nation.' It is the special function of our colleges to supply the need referred to by the Australian prelate. In this work—so capably carried on by all our Catholic secondary institutions in the Dominion—St. Patrick's College has borne a more than honorable part, and throughout New Zealand the ranks of the priesthood, the law, the medical profession, and other important and influential callings are today graced by men who received the most important portion of their moral and intellectual training within its walls. Under such circumstances a benefactor to the College is a benefactor to the Church at large, and we hope that the efforts of the very representative committee who have charge of the movement will meet with the full measure of success which they deserve. All communications are to be addressed to either of the secretaries, Rev. J. Tynons, S.M., St. Patrick's College, Wellington, or Norman J. Crombie, 5 Tasman street, Wellington.

### Catholic School Successes

One of the noticeable features of the recent Inspectors' Conference was the friendly and appreciative tone in which various speakers referred to the work being done by the Catholic schools; and it was evident that the respect manifested was begotten of a close and first-hand knowledge of the facts. Our Catholic teachers do their work quietly and unostentatiously, but ever and anon little incidents are recorded which indicate in a striking way what excellent grounds Catholics have for being proud of their schools. Only last week our Oamaru correspondent chronicled the fact that Miss Annie J. Lynch, pupil of the Dominican Convent, had been successful in securing an exhibition of six guineas awarded by Trinity College, London, to the candidate gaining the highest marks in pianoforte in intermediate division. The merit of the achievement is indicated by the fact that the exhibition was competed for by candidates in New Zealand, Tasmania, and Canada. In 1908 the same young lady carried off the junior prize of six guineas. Our correspondent added that Miss Maggie Twomey, of the same school, had also secured a national prize of £5 awarded by Trinity College to the candidate obtaining, in the same year, honors in both practical and theoretical work in the senior division.