

## GOD OR NO-GOD IN THE SCHOOLS?\*

## PART III.

## THE DISCUSSION: A CRITICAL SUMMARY

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'THOSE THAT FLY MAY FIGHT AGAIN.'

(Continued from last issue.)

## B.—THE SECULAR SYSTEM IN HISTORY.

1. A school preparation for life, divorced from religion, has been well described as the most radical and revolutionary change made in education in all Christian history (p. 35). (a) For the first time, in the long history of Christianity, religion was driven from its olden and immemorial place in the schools during the French Revolution—and this, as the result of the anti-Christian view of life (or philosophy of life) taken by the French Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century. (b) On a similar, but more 'advanced,' view of life and its destiny, the various antagonistic, but anti-Christian, philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries likewise stand for the rigid exclusion of religion from all the processes of school-training children for the duties and the destiny of life. And (c) the school without religion is the favorite instrument relied upon by all the various anti-Christian and anti-religious forces in France, Belgium, Holland, Continental Europe generally, and large areas of the American Continent, to uproot faith in God, and belief in revealed religion, out of the hearts of the rising generation. (Nothing in this paragraph has been disputed.) After the Revolution, religious training was revived, in France, in a tentative way, after the Concordat in 1801, and with State aid in 1816, after Waterloo. Like the New Zealand State school system, that of France is now 'entirely secular.' In both countries the law strictly prohibits any act of religious worship or any religious teaching under the system. But in neither country does the letter of the law appear to forbid the teaching of any philosophy of life whatsoever that is 'entirely secular'—that (like materialism, for instance) limits itself to 'the present world,' to 'temporal as distinguished from eternal interests' (see p. 24). And neither in France nor in New Zealand does the school law profess to be 'neutral' or 'dogmatic.' Indeed, the active propaganda of an atheistic and unbelieving and absolutely this-worldly view of life in the French schools is, apparently, in no way whatever a violation of the letter of the laws on public instruction in force in that country. Religion is, by the letter of the law, barred out of the schools, but not irreligion nor, as it seems, anti-religion. In his *Democracy and Liberty* (new edition, vol. II., p. 78), the rationalist historian Lecky tells how the French law of 1882 'severely excluded religious teaching from the public schools.' The new secularising law was (says Lecky) 'extremely tyrannical' (pp. 77-78); 'it was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Government of a country to de-Christianise the nation, to substitute, for religion, devotion to a particular form of government, to teach the children of the poor to despise and repudiate what they learnt in Church' (p. 81). 'The system established in France,' adds Lecky (p. 83), 'was both intolerant and demoralising . . . and the lamentable increase of juvenile crime in France is probably largely due to the new system of teaching.' The merely negative atheism and sham 'neutrality' of the French godless schools of the early eighties speedily reached its logical issue in positive dogmatic atheism. For some time (says Lecky, II., 79-80) Paul Bert, 'who represented the most active proselytising type of atheism,' was Minister of Instruction, and he carried on a personal propaganda among school children against belief in the existence of God. And, to this hour, an open or covert propaganda of dogmatic unbelief is carried on in the secular and professedly 'neutral' schools and departmental training colleges of France, both by oral teaching, and by text-books (some of which are in the hands of the present writer). The reader will find fuller details of the aggressive atheism of the French 'neutral' public schools in *Moral Instruction and Training in Schools: Report of an International Inquiry* (vol. II., pp. 51-69, pp. 70-177), in *The Month* for December, 1908 (pp. 561-576), in the *London Tablet* of January 9, 1908; in the *Journal Official's* report of the sitting of November 8, 1906; in *La Radical* of August 6, 1906; and in most of the authorities quoted in footnote 2, page 58. 'French principles,' and an atheistic view of life and of its destiny, were likewise at the root of the bitter war against religious education that long raged in the neighboring Low Countries, Holland and Belgium. In his *Democracy and Liberty* (new edition, vol. II., pp. 70-71), Lecky tells how, in 1857, the 'revolutionary' party (as it was called) established in Holland a system of 'secular national education,' which 'was at once branded as atheistical,' 'without prayer, without Bible, without faith.' Catholics and Protestants united in the battle for religion in the schools,

with the result that denominational schools were admitted as part and parcel of a national and truly comprehensive system of public instruction (Lecky, p. 72). 'Belgium is the close neighbor of France; Belgium as a State came into existence through Revolution; as a young State Belgium imbibed the French Revolutionary ideal in the matter of civil education; and to-day, more than ever, perhaps, great numbers of Belgians look across the near frontier to France for political models and inspirations towards change.' Such is the statement authoritatively made in *Moral Instruction and Training in Schools: Report of an International Inquiry* (London, 1908, vol. II., pp. 120-121). The adherents of 'French principles' were in power from 1878 till 1884. One of their first acts was 'La Loi du Malheur' ('The Law of Misfortune'), which drove religion out of the schools. In the *Contemporary Review* for April, 1882, E. de Laveleye admits that the politicians who expelled religion from the schools of Belgium, were 'anti-religionists.' Belgium, like Holland, sickened of godless schools, and, on the fall of the secularising 'anti-religionists,' in 1884, religion and its sweet and refining influences were once more restored to their olden and rightful place in education. Illuminating facts in regard to this episode in educational history will be found in Verhaegen's *La Lutte Scolaire en Belgique* (Ghent, 1905). To-day, the same anti-religious spirit, the same atheistic view of life, and of its duties and destiny, animates the opponents of religious education, and the supporters of the purely secular system in Belgium (*Moral Instruction and Training in Schools*, vol. II., pp. 121-2). The same remark applies to the advocates of the secular system in Italy, in Spain, and in other foreign countries, in which the present writer has lived long or journeyed much. Strong whiffs of 'French principles,' and even of anti-religious feeling, marked the movement which, in Victoria (Australia) ejected religion from the place that it had occupied in public education till the purely secular Act of 1872 came into operation. Mr. J. Wilberforce Stephen (Attorney-General) was the introducer and exponent of the new measure. He expressly commended the new Bill upon the plea that a purely secular system of public instruction would 'effectually purge the colony of clericalism.' He, furthermore, avowed his belief that 'in a couple of generations, through the missionary influence of the State schools, a new body of State doctrine and theology would grow up, and that the cultured and intellectual Victorians of the future would discreetly worship in common at the shrine of one neutral-tinted deity, sanctioned by the State Department' (Cardinal Moran's *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, pp. 882-3; see also, for the detailed history of the secular system in Victoria, Benjamin Hoare's *The Great Betrayal*, second edition, A.C.T.S., Melbourne, 1907). The reader will duly note the intended tendency and effect of the exclusion of religion from the schools, as indicated by the man who first introduced the purely secular system, with its 'State doctrine and theology,' into Australasia. The system was clearly intended for the destruction of organised religion, as we know it. But, in a special way, Attorney-General Stephen aimed at the Catholic faith; and, in his Prahan speech of June 25, 1872 (reported in the *Melbourne Argus* of the following day), he openly declared that the new secular system was intended as a 'wedge' which should 'rend the Catholics asunder.' The secular system in Victoria rent the wrong tree.

2. Till the 'Education' Act of 1877 came into operation in New Zealand, nearly all the Provinces had accepted and acted upon the immemorial Christian belief and sentiment in favor of the intimate union of religion with the processes of education. (This is not disputed.)

3. The 'Education' Act of 1877 (still in force) drove religious teaching out of the place it had previously occupied in the schools. It provides: (a) That, in the public schools, during school hours, 'the teaching shall be entirely of a secular character'—that is, 'entirely' excluding 'religion and religious teaching.' (This is not denied.) (b) The Act of 1877 goes further still: it makes it illegal, for any person whomsoever, to introduce any religious instruction whatsoever, or any religious exercises whatsoever, into the working hours of the system. (This is not denied.) This system is, in Australasia, commonly styled 'the secular system,' or 'the purely secular system.' As stated in paragraph 1, above, it is, apparently, no violation of the letter of the law to impart to children under the New Zealand and Victorian laws, any views of life and of its destiny that are 'entirely secular' and do not involve religious or spiritual truths or principles.

(To be continued.)

The true Catholic is he who has such a lively sense of the blessing of being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ that he guards himself carefully against giving scandal to those within or without the fold by any words or actions unworthy of a Christian. In a community containing a number of non-Catholics, he is particularly mindful of showing to them, suspicious of the Church as they usually are, that the Catholic Church is a teacher of the most exalted morality; and as the spirit of any organisation is judged by its expression in the lives of its members, he is watchful of his doings and sayings that he avoids even the appearance of evil.

\* Bishop Cleary's latest work, of which the above is an instalment, is procurable at all Catholic booksellers.