

Current Topics

A Word in Season

At the close of the annual conference of representatives of the various New Zealand branches of the Young Women's Christian Association which has just concluded in Wellington, a public meeting was held at which his Excellency the Governor (Lord Islington) was present, and Lady Islington was one of the speakers. Lady Islington is reported in the Wellington press as having spoken in part as follows: 'Lady Islington, addressing the gathering, said that there was a great deal for women to do. The Christian religion, she remarked, was the only religion which properly recognised women. The real beauty of it was the life of Christ and the immense respect and veneration for the Virgin Mary. Religion had not always been presented in its truest sense—hand in hand with happiness. England's greatness would be gone when the spirit of veneration and devotion was dead in her.' 'A word spoken in due season,' says a sacred writer, 'how good it is!' It required some courage to speak in such a strain at such a gathering, for Y.W.C.A.-ism is narrowly 'evangelical,' and is apt to look askance at anything in the shape of honor and veneration for our Blessed Lady, as savoring visibly of 'Rome.' But Lady Islington realised that she was given an opportunity; and Catholics at least will yield her ungrudging tribute for the admirable use which she made of it. Her words were not only frank and brave, but they were profoundly true, and eminently fitting and appropriate. One can only hope that the utterance, coming from such a source, would carry weight; and that some, at least, of Lady Islington's hearers might be induced to think and inquire for themselves, and to study and ponder the life and character and office and dignity of the Mother of our Lord. And if they do, they will experience something of the feeling so beautifully expressed by the non-Catholic Mrs. Jameson, in her *Legends of the Madonna*: 'When the glorified type of what is purest, loftiest, holiest in womanhood, stands before us arrayed in all the majesty and beauty that accomplished Art, inspired by faith and love, could lend her, and bearing her divine Son, rather enthroned than sustained on her maternal bosom, "we look, and the heart is in heaven!" and it is difficult, very difficult, to refrain from an *Ora pro nobis*.'

Parliament and State Scholarships

As will be seen by the report which appears elsewhere in this issue, the discussion on the question of making provision for State scholarships to be taken out at approved denominational secondary schools which took place in the House of Representatives last week was entirely friendly to Catholic interests and to the Catholic view of the question. Not a single speaker expressed opposition to the proposal; and several members spoke in strong support of the proposition that definite and clear-cut provision should be made for giving to denominational secondary schools a recognised place within the State system. Even the Minister (the Hon. James Allen) was in no way hostile. He did not propose to alter the law at present because he held that it gave unmistakable power to the Education Boards to recognise denominational secondary schools; but 'he would see how it worked out during the next few months.' Mr. G. W. Russell (member for Avon) is especially to be congratulated on his vigorous and outspoken advocacy of the claims of the denominational secondary schools. 'I hope,' he said, 'the Minister will take away this power of the boards, and bring down an amendment of the existing law, leaving it to the Government to approve of secondary schools, and that such schools as have been approved should be able to take scholarship pupils. No such discretionary power should be permitted to education boards. In my opinion, it would be a great thing for the country if we encouraged the great denominational schools of New Zealand as is done in other States.'

There can be little question that Mr. Russell is right in his contention that it is desirable that the sole power of 'approving' denominational secondary schools for scholarship and free place purposes should be vested in the Minister of Education, and not at all in the Education Boards. For one thing, as the member for Avon pointed out, the boards do not come into touch with the secondary schools, and have no definite or official knowledge of the work that is being done in them. Again, so long as the matter is left in the hands of the boards there will be no sort of uniformity on the subject, a bigoted board in one district absolutely refusing what is freely and unanimously granted by the board in a neighboring district. The Minister proposes to take no action until he 'sees how the law works out during the next few months.' The way in which the law will work out during the next few months, or at least during the next year or two, may be very safely predicted. Our readers will remember what happened some years ago in regard to the matter of State inspection of private schools. The then existing legislation enacted that Education Boards 'may' send their inspectors to examine private schools on written application from the managers of such schools. On behalf of the Catholic schools, application was made in every education district in New Zealand; with the result that a few of the boards promptly and willingly complied with the request, while several large and influential boards persistently and stubbornly refused. In the end, it was found necessary to amend the law in the direction of changing the word 'may' into 'shall'; and now Education boards are compelled to send their inspectors to examine all private schools whose managers make written application to that end. What happened in the case of optional legislation in regard to inspection of private schools will happen in the case of optional legislation regarding private secondary schools; and, in the end, an amendment of the law will be required, placing the whole position of the denominational secondary schools on an assured and definite footing. The sooner that stage is reached the better, we need hardly say, for all concerned. In the meantime it is a great assistance towards the attainment of that end that we already have permissive legislation on the subject, and that some of the boards, at least, are granting the recognition asked for.

The Rev. R. E. Davies in a New Role

The Rev. R. E. Davies, minister of Knox Church, Dunedin, and during the past year president of the 'Council of Churches,' has some reputation for scholarship, culture, and broadmindedness; but one who had not been informed of the fact would never have guessed it on reading the report of the presidential address delivered by that gentleman at the annual meeting of the 'Council of Churches' held last week. We have read of a famous English barrister who lamented that he found it difficult to 'talk down' to the meagre intellectual level of the jury in a particular case. Whether Mr. Davies adopted the course he did as a matter of strategy in view of the coming Bible-in-schools campaign; whether he is not really the broad-minded, cultured, Christian gentleman which our fancy has painted him; or whether he was merely trying to 'talk down' to his audience, we can only conjecture. On the whole we favor the last hypothesis. We do not know whether Mr. Davies found his task of 'talking down' easy or difficult; but we can congratulate him on having completely succeeded.

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We allude, in the foregoing remarks, to the following references to the Catholic Church which, quite unnecessarily and gratuitously, were dragged into Mr. Davies's retiring address. 'If in the Christian churches they had the spirit of unity they need not worry much about the question of uniformity. The Roman Catholic Church had tried to foist her principle of uniformity upon one nation after another. She succeeded in the case of Italy, and Italy to-day was probably the most Godless nation in Europe. In Spain also the Roman Catholic Church succeeded in foisting her uniformity

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