

The discussion at the Presbyterian General Assembly was interesting as evidencing a strong undercurrent of opposition to the Bible in Schools League's scheme. At last year's meeting of the Assembly not a voice was raised in opposition to the scheme, and the resolution pledging the Church to support it was carried, according to Wellington press reports, 'unanimously.' At this year's discussion two hostile amendments were moved; and though one of these was withdrawn, and the other rejected by a very large majority, the opposition was such as to show that some of the strongest men in the Presbyterian Church are out of sympathy with the League's proposals. There are not three greater names in the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand to-day than those of Professor Hewitson, the Rev. A. Cameron, and the Rev. Dr. Erwin. Professor Hewitson is the distinguished Master of Knox College; Mr. Cameron, last year's Moderator of Assembly, is a member of the Otago University Council and has a New Zealand reputation as an educationist; and Dr. Erwin, the scholarly author of several theological works, is universally esteemed amongst his brethren alike for his high Christian character and for the ripe years of service which he has given to his Church. All three opposed the scheme sponsored by the Bible in State Schools League—the grounds of objection being chiefly that it was the duty of the Church and not of the State to administer religious instruction, that the introduction of denominationalism (in the form of ministerial right of entry) was contrary to the policy of the Presbyterian Church, and that it was impossible for the teachers to teach the Bible without at the same time teaching religion. The venerable Dr. Erwin was particularly outspoken. 'It had been said,' says the *Lyttelton Times* (December 13) report of his address, 'that they were solid on the subject. He would show them that this was not so. . . . They were being dragged at the cart-tail by the Anglican Church, and they were getting the support of the Anglican Church as the price of the right of entry. They were using the Presbyterian Church as a catspaw to get what they wanted from the State. He objected that the Church should bring pressure to bear on the State. Regarding the teachers they were being asked an impossibility. They were asking the teachers to teach the Bible without giving religious instruction. It could not be done.' The debate, which was at times of an impassioned and almost heated character, extended over six hours; and although the dissidents were in the end out-voted by ten to one yet they witnessed a good confession, and made it abundantly clear that the opposition to the League's proposals within the Presbyterian body is very far from being a negligible quantity.

*

Even more marked is the division on this question within the ranks of the Methodist denomination—which body is also claimed by Bible-in-schools advocates as being wholly on the League's side. On this point the following facts, given in a local in the *Dunedin Evening Star* of Monday last, are sufficiently conclusive: 'Yesterday, Bible in State Schools Sunday, 10 out of the 12 Methodist pulpits in the city and suburbs were silent on the question. Of the two preachers who referred to the subject (Revs. P. W. Fairclough and J. T. Pinfold), the latter gave a general support, while the former adversely criticised the League's proposal re sectarian teaching, while supporting simple Bible teaching. The silence of so many can only have one interpretation, as in the *Methodist Times* the president of the conference particularly requested all who could conscientiously do so to preach in support of the League. Not one Dunedin Methodist vestry responded to the appeal to lift a retiring collection towards the League's funds. When this is compared to the enthusiastic support given by the same churches to Prohibition and anti-gambling crusades, the claim of the League that it has the support of the Methodist Church must be taken at a discount in Dunedin at least. The last Methodist Conference supported the League, but the vote was not unanimous, and a spirited protest was made by the minority against

the proposal to teach sectarian tenets under the auspices of the State. At the Methodist Synod held recently at Milton a resolution supporting the League platform was vigorously opposed, on the same grounds, and as time would not permit of a full discussion the resolution was withdrawn. Last year the Dunedin Methodist Ministers' Association decided against the League's proposal for sectarian teaching, while supporting unsectarian teaching in the schools, and this would seem to represent the true attitude of the great majority of Methodists, though many support the League because they have been given to understand that they must either support the whole of its proposals or shut the Bible out of the State schools.'

*

Again and again it has been urged by League advocates in justification of the demand for a referendum that the Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and members of the Salvation Army unitedly number 74 per cent. of the population; that the authorities of these four denominations have more or less officially endorsed the League's platform; and that therefore 74 per cent. of the voters are in favor of the League's proposals. The argument is on the face of it disingenuous and inconclusive: in the face of the evidence above set forth it becomes positively absurd.

Notes

To Correspondents

The usual Christmas congestion, arising chiefly from the receipt of school prize lists, lists of musical successes, and reports of school break-up functions, is already with us, and will make itself felt for the next few weeks. Correspondents, therefore, whose communications do not appear as early as the senders anticipated, will understand the reason why. With regard to school reports, these will be printed strictly in the order in which they reach this office.

Father Bernard Vaughan on the Lourdes Miracles

Father Bernard Vaughan must have been in excellent form when interviewed at Edinburgh the other day on the subject of the Lourdes miracles. In the course of some pithy and common-sense remarks, he said: 'What a surgeon can do with his knife you must allow God can do without it, and if some bodily ill will yield to a physician's treatment, it may yield with even greater facility to the word of the Great Physician, but before I can pronounce upon any individual case I must first of all investigate the matter. I must know the nature and character of the disease as it was before the patient went to Lourdes and pleaded before the Blessed Mother's shrine. If the Divine Son did at the mere intimation of a wish change water into wine, why cannot He change bad blood into good, with plenty of red corpuscles in it? Any individual case must stand the test of evidence, without which imagination, superstition, and credulity may play a masterly part. Personally, I believe many miracles have been wrought at Lourdes, and in every part of the Church, and I, during my time of ministry, have come across quite a large number of cases among our Catholic poor which I have no hesitation in setting down to God's special kindness to them, going out of His way, so to speak, to step in and heal where the doctor has failed. We cannot deny that God has the power. Who would care to deny that He ever has the will? He is kinder than you or I, and loves to bestow the largesse of His healing smile among His aristocracy, the poor in our slumdoms.'

*

Asked if he would go a great distance to see a miracle, the Jesuit Father made the striking, thoughtful, and, in its concluding sentences, beautiful reply: 'Personally, I would not go across the street to see a miracle. They would be of no help to me. For instance, if our Lord, in the Blessed Sacrament, were to

Wm. R. Kells

UNDERTAKERS AND FUNERAL DIRECTORS,

46 MAIN STREET, PALMERSTON NORTH.

Chas. Pike

Polished Caskets Supplied. Catholic Emblems in Stock. Telephone 504 (Night or Day).