

The Education Bill.

I. The Bill Criticised.¹

BY THE VEN. ARCHDEACON MADDEN.

THE Education Bill is best described as a misleading Bill.

1. It is misleading in its *title*. It is described as a "Bill to make further provision with respect to *education* in England and Wales." Upon examination we find it does very little to advance education as such, but it does much to discourage and discredit religious instruction, whether denominational or undenominational, in all elementary schools.

2. It is misleading in its *principles*. Its author declared that the Government in this Bill stood for two great and sacred principles—public control and no tests for teachers. Yet in Clause IV. the Bill violates both principles. Mr. Asquith said from his place in the House of Commons that Clause IV. was specially inserted to please the Romanists—inserted by a professedly Protestant Government!

3. It is misleading in its *promises*. It is firmly believed by some that the Bill *secures* simple Bible teaching in all schools. It is one of the misleading features of the Bill that it promises so much and gives so little. So misleading is it on this question of Bible instruction that even the "elect" have been deceived. It offers *no security* whatever for any kind of religious instruction. It is all optional from beginning to end. It is a Bill not to perpetuate, but to discredit Bible instruction.

4. It is misleading in its many *provisions*. Where the real danger lies is in the details of the Bill. Great principles of justice and religious equality are announced in one clause, to be given away in the next. Clause IV., of course, is the most glaring example of this. It is the same with religion. With a great flourish of trumpets Mr. Birrell declares, "Religious

¹ Address at the Southport Lay and Clerical Conference in May.

instruction must be in all schools." Then follow the conditions. It is to be outside school hours ; the children need not attend during the half-hour of religious instruction, and the teachers need not be present to teach. The Bill in this respect is not only wickedly misleading : it is undoubtedly preparing the way for the complete disappearance of the Christian religion from our schools.

5. It is misleading in its *property clauses*. Its authors boast of their generosity in offering to pay rent for our schools. But it is really doubtful whether in many schools any rent at all will be paid. And if rent is paid, can such rent compensate for the alienation of our schools from the religious purposes for which they were built? Well might that stalwart Wesleyan Dr. Rigg describe the transaction as "depriving the denominations of their property, and dismissing the Churches from the Christian service of the nation."

6. It is misleading, because, while professing *peace*, it brings a *sword*. If this Bill passes into law without drastic amendments it will perpetuate religious controversy and introduce religious strife into every municipal election, into every urban area, into every Parish Council throughout the country.

Is there any hope that in the Committee stage we can come to a peaceful settlement that will be at the same time a permanent settlement? Up to the present there is no sign of the Government meeting any of our objections. There can be no satisfactory settlement unless the views of the predominant partner in elementary education be reasonably considered. We Churchmen are educating 2,000,000 children in 11,800 schools, and there are besides thousands of our children in Council schools. Then, surely, Churchmen, as well as Roman Catholics and Nonconformists, have a right to a voice in the settlement of this controversy. The Roman Catholics have only one-eighth the children we have, and yet they are not only heard, but special consideration is shown to them in Clause IV.

In going over the amendments proposed in Committee, I have selected four which, if embodied in the Bill, would go far to reconcile us to the measure.

These amendments are :

1. All religious teaching, in all schools, to be given in school hours.
2. All teachers in transferred schools to be left free to give denominational instruction two days in the week if willing to do so.
3. That facilities should be given in all schools alike for denominational teaching if desired by the parents.
4. That Clause IV. should read "three-fourths" for "four-fifths," and should be mandatory, not optional.

The subjoined statement will show the effect of the Bill upon the religious instruction given in my own school, St. Luke's, Liverpool :

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

UNDER ACT OF 1902.

More Bible.

1. Religious teaching is given during school hours, 9 to 9.45 a.m., when teachers and scholars are present. The *conscience clause* safeguards the wishes of Nonconformist parents.

2. Bible teaching, as an integral part of school work, is given daily, according to the diocesan syllabus, and includes the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments, with explanations. There are no Nonconformist withdrawals.

3. One of the clergy takes a short service and gives a short Scriptural address to the children on Friday mornings.

UNDER NEW BILL.

Less Bible.

1. No religious teaching will be permitted during the regular school hours. Religious instruction, if permitted by the Local Education Authority, may be given for half an hour previous to the time appointed for compulsory attendance. *The children need not attend to receive it* [Clause VI.], *and teachers need not attend to give it* [Clause VII. (2)].

2. Religious instruction, if any, given by teachers present, if any, to children present, if any, must not only be outside the school hours, but must be *undenominational* [Clause VII. (1)], a form of religious teaching which, in the majority of Welsh Board schools, has excluded all systematic Bible teaching. In many English Board schools *undenominationalism* means reading a chapter from the Bible *without any explanation*. In one Liverpool *undenominational* school it means no "Bible instruction" of any kind.

3. "Religious teaching of some special character" may be taught on two mornings of the week, *but not during school hours, nor by any of the school teachers, even if anxious to do so!* [Clause VII. (1)].

4. Efficiency of religious as well as of secular teaching is guaranteed (1) by the service of qualified teachers, and (2) by an annual examination.

5. At present all religious teaching is given the place of honour in the school curriculum, and is the favourite lesson of both teachers and scholars.

4. No provision is made for any religious examination, while no proofs or tests of the teachers' qualifications to give religious instruction will be allowed [Clause VII. (2)].

5. Under the clause giving "facilities," the religious instruction is dragged from its place of honour and put, like a punishment lesson, during play-time [Clause VI.]. The clause is likely, under the circumstances, to become a dead letter, and the last trace of Christian teaching in our schools is likely soon to be wiped out.

A Nonconformist, at his own request, visited our school last month at the time of religious instruction. He heard the teachers give lessons from the Old Testament, New Testament, and Catechism, and as he left declared it would be a thousand pities to expel such teaching from our elementary schools.

It seems clear to me that the Evangelical party would be false to its traditions if we accepted a Bill which relegated to an outside and inferior position the Word of God in the education of the children of the nation.

II.—In Favour of the Bill, with Amendments.

By THE REV. A. P. COX, M.A.

THE dispute about religious education is so hot that it is only possible to consider the question satisfactorily and hopefully by insisting on the fact that those who are opposed to it, as well as those who in part or entirely support it, must be credited with honourable intentions. Probably most of us agree on one point—we want the Bible properly taught in the elementary schools of the land.

Now, I venture to believe, though it is an opinion widely discredited by many in all schools of thought in the Church of England, that the Education Bill provides a possible basis of agreement, provided that certain amendments are accepted.

Religious teaching, whether the fundamental Christianity proposed in the Bill or the denominational teaching provided