

*Natural and Other Rights.*

4. Legal rights may, at times, be moral wrongs; but, besides legal rights, there are also natural rights. These are so called because they belong to the nature of things. They existed before organized human society, before Parliaments, before electoral rolls. Such, for instance, are your natural rights to live and breathe (where not forfeited by crime), your natural rights to fair wages for fair work, to enjoy the proper fruit of your labour, and so on. But you have also the following, among other, natural rights: The right to obey the moral law; the right to practise and teach to your children the religion which you believe to be the true one; the right to freedom from compulsion to take part in biblical or religious teaching or religious worship which you believe to be erroneous; and, generally, you have a natural right to freedom from being coerced into doing anything which your conscience, even if in inculpable error, tells you is not morally allowable.

5. These rights arise out of the natural law. They receive their perfection from God's revealed law. Thus, for instance, St. Paul makes it clear that it is morally wrong to do (or to lure, bribe, or force others to do) that which conscience forbids (Rom. xiv, 14, 22). In connection with this text the Anglican Archbishop Whately (in his "Lessons on Morals") and the great Anglican Thomas Arnold (in his "Christian Life") declared that it is "sinful" and degrading to conscience for a teacher to teach against his conscience, or to teach what he does not believe, and that it is doubly sinful to tempt him to do so. Catholic principles and Catholic disciplinary laws, already specified, forbid Catholic teachers to conduct such a scheme of State biblical and "general religious instruction" as is proposed by the League and in the Bill now before the House. For like reasons Catholics cannot, in conscience, bear any part whatsoever of the cost of preparing that scheme or putting it into operation. In these matters we stand on the inviolable rights of the personal religious conscience forbidding us to do that which that religious conscience declares to us to be not morally allowable.

6. This inviolability of the personal religious conscience was strongly affirmed by the Bible in Schools League, 1904. They said, "We have concluded that the majority must rule when the common good is in question, provided always that the majority does not coerce the minority to violate its conscience, for it can never be for the common good that conscience should be violated" (*Otago Daily Times*, 25th May, 1904). This declaration was signed by, among others, the Rev. Dr. Gibb and the present Bishop of Wellington. It is a universally accepted Christian moral principle. It is a doctrine of true statesmanship. Parliaments or electoral majorities may violate these sacred religious liberties and rights of conscience. They have the *physical power*: they have not the *moral right*. Parliament is the guardian and trustee of these God-given rights of religion and conscience. It is its solemn duty to protect objecting Protestant and other taxpayers, teachers, and parents from the bitter wrongs which the League and the present Bill would inflict upon them. This is, in effect, a measure to put up our religious rights and liberties for sale by auction to the highest bidder of votes.

*Minorities must suffer.*

7. The present Bill is an acceptance of the exploded theory that "minorities must suffer"—nay, that they must suffer in those intimate personal relations between the individual and the Creator which are outside the domain of Parliaments or electoral majorities. It is more than significant that this old and tyrannous theory has found, time and again, a voice among the responsible officials of the Bible in the State Schools League. It was, for instance, stated, in practically the terms quoted above, by the Rev. Mr. Clarkson, an official League lecturer (*Poverty Bay Herald*, 5th June, 1913). It was set forth, in other terms, by the League's organizer (Canon Garland) when he called upon the Government to introduce a Referendum Bill, and thereby adopt certain "theological views" of one section of the people and reject certain "theological views" of another (and minority) section of the people (*Dominion*, 27th May, 1914). The principle of the oppression of minorities was expressed in bitter speech by another League official, Rev. Gray Dixon, when he declared in a published letter that this is an "anti-Romish State" (*Otago Daily Times*, 20th May, 1913), and that religious minorities should "not expect more than toleration" for their opinions (*Otago Daily Times*, 28th November, 1913). And yet, again, Dean Fitchett (a member of the League executive) declared that he "did not see what a Roman Catholic Bishop had to say in the matter" of the League scheme, which he misdescribed as being merely a scheme to "educate their children in their own way" (*Otago Daily Times*, 14th June, 1913). The present Referendum Bill is but another form of expression of the general League idea that minorities must suffer, even in their intimate personal consciences.

8. That, however, is the old, discarded cry of a discredited utilitarianism. Democracy raises the opposite cry: "Minorities must be safeguarded." Lord Acton is the historian of political democracy. In a lecture "On the Study of History," at Cambridge University in June, 1895, he declared that the "crown" of liberty was this: "The security of the weaker groups, and the liberty of conscience which, effectually secured, secures the rest." Mr. Sidney Webb is the historian of industrial democracy. He declares that the most important business of the twentieth century is "to provide not only for minorities, but for even quite small minorities." The Hon. Mr. Allen reminded the New Zealand Parliament on the 29th August, 1894, that "a large proportion of the multitude will be irresponsible" in the case of a referendum; that a reference to them would result in "tyranny and despotism" (*Hansard*, Vol. 85, p. 281). And if in purely secular politics such "tyranny and despotism" might take place, how much more if vexed questions of conscience were submitted to electors inflamed, in all probability, by appeals to the worst forms of sectarian rancour! We have already had ample premonition of this in the following constant and lamentable features of the League campaign; its vehement