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H U M B U G .

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STATE-AID TO RELIGION.

(See Cartoon.)

THE vexed question of State-aid to Religion seems nigh settlement. The opinion of the Country appears plainly adverse to any division of loaves and fishes, unless such division be equitable. The dissatisfaction with which the rumour of a speedy withdrawal of Government assistance was received by many of the clergy, only confirms us in our belief that such withdrawal is advisable. We are not among those who sneer at Religion; on the contrary, we have the deepest respect for good men, no matter of what creed, and hold that to advance the interests of Religion is to advance the interests of the State. But we do not believe that such advancement will be effected by subsidising any particular sect; and in the eyes of all unprejudiced people, Protestants and Catholics are as much sectaries as are Wesleyans, Baptists, or Independents.

The establishment of a State Church has always been attended with misfortune, because neither the personal argument of a penal code, nor the persuasive eloquence of a whole Bench of Bishops, can control a man's religious opinions. We think that, apart from the obvious injustice of taxing Presbyterians to support the Bishop and Dean, and the Dean himself to support a Roman Catholic priesthood, the existence of State aid at all, tends to the establishment of a State Church; and we are convinced that any attempt to foist upon us the old mockery of salvation by formulæ, would meet with instant opposition. We desire no State Church, with its sleek multitude of stalled oxen; we desire no unseemly bickering over the crumbs that are flung from the Government table. We look for freedom of speech, thought, and religious opinion; and the most persistent enemy to that triple right of a free people has ever been the subsidised religion of the country. By what rule would a Government like ours—elected on the broad principle of manhood suffrage—compel any man to support a particular form of Christianity? If the Church of England, or any other Church, has been so badly built that its walls need to be shored up with the props of Government moneys, it is better that it should cumber the earth no longer; and if the Roman Catholics cannot be brought to believe in the necessities of their priesthood, let their priesthood accept the sign of the times, and go their ways into more faithful flocks. We see no reason why an unsympathetic multitude of sects, each waving its own banner and shrieking out its own peculiar dogma, should be indirectly compelled to assist either body.

We are aware that many of the sects refuse to accept immediate Government charity, but we believe that there are but few who do not make their religion a plea for exceptional treatment in such worldly transactions as the buying of corner allotments, or the securing of Crown grants. All have an equal hankering after Egyptian flesh-pots; all possess an infinite capacity for the reception of loaves and fishes. If the State supports one, we maintain that it should support all; and the bare suggestion of such a proceeding is sufficient to induce a shudder. We have neither space nor memory to enumerate the varieties of acclimatised religions—their name is legion—but, unless we abolish State aid altogether, we shall be compelled to admit the claims of each. From all the winds under Heaven, the opposing creeds will gather together like young ravens; sectarianism, terrible as an army with banners, will precipitate itself upon the spoil, and an innumerable multitude of famishing faiths will besiege the Treasury doors. To provide for such a multitude would be impossible. We admit that the donation of loaves and fishes is of established respectability, but our loaves and fishes are so few and small that they would scarce serve to stay the stomachs of the foremost of the crowd. Let us look at the matter in a practical light: Either give an equal amount of substantial aid to each particular sect, or abolish the system of relief altogether. We think that the general opinion will be in favour of abolition.

M.C.

NEW READING OF SHAKSPEARE.

Among the many new readings with which Herr Bandmann has delighted the critical world of London, the *Spectator* gives the palm for originality and true poetic feeling to the following. In Hamlet's soliloquy after the retirement of the players, in which the distracted Prince almost imagines that his father's ghost is but some terrible device of the infernal powers, the following passage occurs:—

“ The spirit I have seen may be a devil,
For the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape,
And out of my weakness and my melancholy,
In that he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me—I'll have grounds
More relative than this! The play,” etc.

The Herr renders the last two lines thus:—

“ Abuses me too!—Damme I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play,” etc.

There is no necessity for us to point out the force of the exclamation to an Australian public. The *Spectator* says that “the effect upon a London audience was electrical—the pit rose at him.”

M.C.

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