

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

OTAGO.

Rev. FRANK C. SIMMONS.—1.] I do not think that the inducement offered by scholarships to Australian Universities would be sufficient to accomplish the objects, which, in my opinion, make it desirable that scholarships should be established, and I think that scholarships should be not to any, but to those European Universities which are of the highest repute. The advantages to be derived from a University course, are not those alone which an accomplished staff of Professors secures. Those which a large concourse of students, representing the various elements of a complicated society, stimulating one another by intellectual rivalry, and by the great differences which they present, weakening narrow and sectional prejudices, are, to my mind, at least as great. The students at any University in a country as newly colonized as Australia, can never be very numerous, and must be drawn from one very homogenous section of society.

I am of opinion that the institution of scholarships for the purpose of sending boys from New Zealand schools to those European Universities which possess an established reputation, would have the effect of raising the tone of education throughout the Colony to a higher pitch than we can hope to see it take under existing circumstances.

The great difficulty which meets us now, is the early removal of our pupils. This is chiefly occasioned by the high rate of remuneration which any boy who possesses even a rudimentary education can command. We need some strong inducement to form a counterpoise to this attraction; and I hope and believe that this would be found in a system of scholarships, which would offer so valuable a prize as a Home University education to reward a prolonged course of study.

The most important result as far as the Colony is concerned, is not to be looked for in the two academicians a year, whom such a scheme might produce. Those who try and fail, will have been carried far beyond the point at which they would otherwise have stopped. They would form very shortly within the Colony, a standard of education, not only far higher than that which now exists, but with a tendency to rise higher every succeeding year. The mass will have to aim higher.

It has been argued, that there is nothing to secure the return to this Colony of the scholars whom the country will have educated. This is comparatively unimportant. The object should be less to produce an effect by educating a few men highly, than to use them as an instrument for acting on the mass.

2.] Something might doubtless be done by the machinery of exhibitions within the schools of the Colony; but it seems to me that concentrating the means devoted to education, so as to produce a few great prizes, would offer stronger inducements. Besides, I hardly think that a Colonial system of exhibitions could be carried out without remodelling the present Provincial systems of education, which is to say the least a work of time. It might be possible to establish a system of exhibitions to some one school in the Colony, to which promising lads from the various existing schools might be drafted; but I think any such system would greatly weaken the action of the existing schools upon the greater number. It might be advantageous to a few, but would be injurious to many more, for a school acts upon the general body of its pupils by the influence of the best boys in it, and by the traditions which they create and foster, more than by any other means. Exhibitions within the schools would doubtless do good, but less than the same means spent upon scholarships to Universities. It may be even doubted whether an examination at an earlier age than that fixed upon for the Scholarship Examination would not have a tendency to cause the withdrawal of unsuccessful candidates from education to remunerative employments and so defeat the object of the State, which is, I presume, to have the greatest possible number of educated citizens, even more than to have a few highly instructed.

3.] From a lengthened experience I am of opinion that the fairest method of examination is by paper work. This method seems, moreover, to be the only one that could be adopted in a country with many centres of population, and in which travelling is difficult and expensive. I should propose that the examiners should issue a series of papers, which should be placed in the hands of impartial and trustworthy persons in the various centres of population. That these persons should be responsible for the candidates having for each paper the time allotted to it by the examiners, and for their having no improper assistance. These persons should be furnished with the papers in sealed envelopes, open them in the presence of the candidates, distribute them, and at the appointed hour collect the answers, seal them up in the presence of the candidates, and forward them to the examiners. This method would place at the disposal of the Colony the services of the persons best qualified to act as examiners either in New Zealand or the neighbouring Australian Colonies.

The examiners should be appointed, I think, by a permanent Board in New Zealand. The only necessary qualification for an examiner, beside his commanding the confidence of the Board, would be that he had been engaged either at a School or University in tuition and examination.