

Besides taking oral evidence, the Commissioners devoted the whole of one day and the greater part of another day to inspecting the High Schools, so as to make themselves personally familiar with the practical work of the schools and the general arrangements for the accommodation of the pupils.

A certain amount of difficulty has been experienced in conducting the inquiry, owing to the want of precision in the representations made to your Excellency, and in the complaints brought forward. No definite statement of facts was before the Commissioners either in the Commission or in the memorial presented to your Excellency, and consequently a considerable portion of the evidence was taken rather for the purpose of ascertaining the exact points of the controversy than for enabling the Commissioners to decide upon them. Taking the questions referred to them in the order adopted in the Commission, the Commissioners proceed, firstly, to report upon the action of the Board towards the Rector.

The specific complaint against the Board may be summed up briefly as follows:—One of the masters (Mr. A. T. Smith) of the Boys' High School, early in July of the present year, having been selected as one of the football team in a match with the other cities of the colony, applied to Mr. Norrie for three weeks' leave of absence for the purpose of proceeding on this tour. Mr. Norrie acceded to this application, but at the same time requested Mr. Smith to inform Mr. Hislop, the Secretary of the Education Board, of the fact. It seems a question, perhaps not a very material one, whether this instruction was meant as an admission on the part of Mr. Norrie that he had no independent power of giving leave of absence without the concurrence of the Board, or whether it was a mere act of courtesy. Mr. Smith appears to have looked upon it in the latter sense. However, on going to Mr. Hislop's office for the purpose of reporting his intended absence, Mr. Smith was unable to meet him, and on the following day Mr. Hislop left for Wellington; but Mr. Smith did not think it necessary to inform Mr. Norrie of his failure to see the Secretary.

In Mr. Hislop's absence Mr. P. G. Pryde was appointed Acting Secretary, and, when the name of Mr. Smith appeared in the list of passengers for Auckland, he received instructions from two members of the Board to write to Mr. Norrie and ask whether the Mr. Smith mentioned in that list was the commercial master of the High School. The date of this letter was August 10. Mr. Norrie replied that it was; whereupon Mr. Pryde wrote again, as "by instructions," without stating who had instructed him, to inquire whether Mr. Smith had obtained leave of absence, and if so, from whom. Mr. Norrie replied that, before giving the information required, he wished to know by whose instruction Mr. Pryde acted in the matter. Mr. Pryde, in acknowledging this letter, merely said that it should be laid before the Board.

A special meeting of the Board was held on 15th August, at which Mr. Norrie's last letter, dated 13th August, was considered, and at that meeting a resolution was passed in the following terms:— "That Mr. Norrie be informed that the Education Board considers the contents of his letter of the 13th instant to be wanting in courtesy both to the Education Board and its Secretary; and that Mr. Norrie be again requested to furnish the information desired."

It is to be observed, in reference to this meeting of the Board, in the first place, that it was a special meeting, and as such, under the existing Act, could only "be convened by seven days' previous notice, to be given and published as the Board shall direct." Secondly, it does not appear that the Board has given any directions, as contemplated by the Act, for convening special meetings. Thirdly, this special meeting, inasmuch as it was held only two days after the occurrence considered at it, could not have been convened for the purpose of considering that occurrence. Fourthly, the reporters for the newspapers, who are generally in attendance at the meetings of the Board, seem not to have known beforehand of this particular meeting, consequently no report appears to have been given of it in the newspapers, and the first intimation to Mr. Norrie of the censure passed upon him was through the Acting-Secretary's letter.

It will probably be desirable, in order properly to judge of the Rector's position, and to estimate the influences at work in bringing about the present unsatisfactory state of affairs, to direct attention to some incidents in the previous history of the institution with which he is connected, and particularly to his previous relations with the Education Board and the Provincial Government. It appears that, on the resignation of his office as Rector by Mr. Norrie's predecessor, the Superintendent, acting on a resolution of the Provincial Council adopted on the previous vacancy, sent instructions to the Home Agent of the province, directing him, with as little delay as possible, to select and send out a gentleman properly qualified to fill the post. After considering the applications, which appear to have been numerous, the Home Agent selected Mr. Norrie, who had produced very satisfactory testimonials from gentlemen belonging to distinguished educational establishments in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

It may be here remarked that a variety of methods appears to have been adopted at different times for filling the post of Rector of the High School. In the year 1862 it was determined by the provincial authorities to remodel the Dunedin High School. In its earlier stages this institution appears to have been but little, if at all, superior to some of the existing district schools. It was proposed, therefore, on the occasion of the Rector vacating his office, to establish an institution to be called the High School of Otago, and to appoint to it masters qualified to impart instruction in those branches of knowledge the acquirement of which constitutes a liberal education. With this object in view, the selection of a thoroughly competent staff was intrusted to three gentlemen who were considered authorities in educational matters in the United Kingdom: the Provost of Eton, the Rector of the Edinburgh High School, and the Rector of the Edinburgh Academy. It appears that the first two Rectors were appointed by this machinery. The third Rector was selected in a different way, viz., "by advertisement or otherwise in the colonies;" failing which, the Home Agent was to "be instructed to select one without delay."—[Interim report presented to Provincial Council, 12th May, 1868, and agreed to.] Under the former of these methods Mr. Norrie's predecessor was appointed. Mr. Norrie himself was selected, as already mentioned, by the latter of these methods, namely—through the Home Agent. The terms of Mr. Norrie's appointment were somewhat different from those under which the former Rectors had been appointed. His