

FRIDAY, 10TH AUGUST, 1883.

Rev. RAINSFORD BAVIN, examined.

420. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Mr. Bavin, you have expressed a wish to give evidence here on the grievance of the Catholics and others in regard to the education system of the colony?—I was not aware of the specific nature of the investigation. I understood, in a general sense, that it was on certain proposed amendments of the Education Act.

421. What is your position in the Wesleyan Methodist Church?—I am chief pastor in this city, and for the present year I am President of the Wesleyan Conference of New Zealand.

422. Have your body presented any petition to Parliament in regard to the Education Act?—Not that I am aware of.

423. What is the number of Wesleyans under your charge?—There are three churches in the city with sitting accommodation for 1,100, 250, and 150; that is the actual sitting accommodation.

424. How many do your body number in the colony?—About 40,000 according to the census returns.

425. Have you any special schools of your own?—Only one in the colony.

426. Do the children of your denomination attend the State schools?—Yes, generally speaking.

427. Have you any religious objection to their attending these schools?—None whatever; on the contrary, speaking as pastor to my own members, I encourage them to attend. I think it is a very admirable system.

428. How many children are there at this one school you spoke of?—Not more than fifty; it is only a small infants' school, existing under very peculiar circumstances.

429. Are you aware that the Catholics have a conscientious objection to availing themselves of the State system?—I am.

430. Are you in the habit of visiting the State schools?—Yes. For many years past I have been more or less associated with the public system. In Nelson I was a member of the School Committee for two years, and, as such, I visited the schools. At Wanganui I was Chairman of the Grammar School Committee; and I have held an appointment for some years under the Minister of Education as Inspector of teachers in one particular department. On these accounts I have had pretty full opportunities of familiarizing myself with the public schools of the colony.

431. Are you aware that the Catholics have schools solely at their own expense?—Yes.

432. Have you visited any of them?—No.

433. In visiting the State schools, have you found many Catholic children in them?—I am not able to answer that question.

434. Have you examined any children in the public schools as to their religious knowledge?—No.

435. Can you tell the number of schools the Catholics have at their own expense?—I have no means of knowing beyond having observed generally that in every important centre they have their own schools, and usually, I believe, efficient schools.

436. Are you aware that there are children of other denominations attending them?—Yes.

437. Are there any Methodists at these schools?—Very few indeed.

438. Do you find that parents of your denomination have any great objection to their children attending the Catholic schools?—They have.

439. Upon what principle?—I am prepared to say they have conscientious objections.

440. Can you state that the Catholic schools are under the supervision of the Government?—By no means, as far as my information goes.

441. Do you think they have any objection to it?—I am not able to answer that question.

442. Do you approve the State system of secular education?—I do not approve of the operations of the present Act in so far as the course of instruction provided under it must be purely secular. I should like to be permitted to say that in making that statement in no sense do I claim to represent the Wesleyan Church. I am quite aware that, both as regards ministers and people, we are divided on the question. A good many very excellent ministers and members approve the present system, secular and compulsory as it is, while on the other hand I am prepared to state that a great number—I am not prepared to state the proportions—of ministers and members are aggrieved at the operations of the present Act, with myself, for this twofold reason: first, that there is no recognition whatever of the Divine Being; secondly, that the Bible is a proscribed book.

443. Do you approve of the Bible being read in all schools daily?—I do, provided that it shall be guarded by a strong conscience-clause, and that the power is left in the hands of the local Committees. I state this because I know there are some of the day-school teachers in whose hands I, for one, would be very sorry indeed to see the reading of the Bible permitted. They are pronounced sceptics, and for that reason, taking the thing as it is just now, I should prefer Bible-reading being permissive, the power being left in the hands of the local Committees.

444. Do you object to the principle of laymen reading the Scriptures?—Not at all. I say this because I do not want one who avowedly disbelieves in a God or the Bible to be called upon to read the Bible in the day-school.

445. Then, you condemn the Government for appointing teachers not in any way suited for that office?—I think it is a misfortune and a wrong that persons who are known to be sceptics should be appointed to that office. I do not think any great proportion are of that class, but, seeing there are some, I should be prepared to say, without disturbing the existing order of things, let the question of Bible-reading be left in the hands of the local Committees. That is the view I hold.

446. Do you approve of denominational education?—I am not prepared to reply to that question in the affirmative. I scarcely know what it means. If it means, Do I wish to see the present national system broken up? I say, No; certainly not. But I think the withholding of the Bible from the day-schools is imperilling the present system in New Zealand, for which I have fought for years past. I think allowing the Bible to be read would be a valuable means of