

1892.
NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATION: SCHOOL FOR DEAF-MUTES.

REPORT OF RICHMOND BEETHAM, ESQ., UPON HIS INQUIRY INTO MATTERS AFFECTING THE DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL AND MR. H. E. CROFTS, TOGETHER WITH MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND APPENDIX.

Laid on the Table by leave of the House.

Christchurch, 20th August, 1892.

To His Excellency the Earl of Glasgow, Governor of the Colony of New Zealand.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of a Commission under Your Excellency's hand directing me to inquire into a certain charge or statement made by the Director of the School for Deaf-mutes at Sumner, with reference to the alleged practice of Herbert Edwin Crofts of borrowing money from the parents of pupils and others, and also into certain charges made by Herbert Edwin Crofts against the Director of the said school, and to report thereon to your Excellency.

I have the honour to report that I opened the Commission at Sumner on the 16th August instant, Mr. Van Asch, the Director of the School, and Mr. Crofts being present. The evidence taken during the inquiry, and the exhibits produced, are attached to this report.

In dealing with the statement of the Director "that Mr. Crofts had made a practice of borrowing money from the parents of pupils and others in connection with the institution," I found that the statement is fully borne out by the evidence, and by the admissions of Mr. Crofts. Mr. Crofts appears to have been for some years in an impecunious condition, and has borrowed money wherever he could get it. He has borrowed from the Director of the Institution, from Mr. Robert K. Simpson, the parent of a pupil; from Mr. Allan, one of the masters; from Mr. Stevens, one of the masters; from a Mr. Moorhouse; and small sums from Miss Buckingham, a mistress in the institution. A large proportion of the money so borrowed is still owing.

With reference to the charges made by Mr. Crofts against the Director, Mr. Van Asch, I will take them in the order in which they are made:—

No. 1, "Having lent money to the parents of a child in the institution, and so run the risk of unpleasant complications arising:" There is no evidence to show that the Director has lent money to the parents of any child in the institution. It is quite clear that he has not done so.

No. 2, "Overworking the boys:" I am of opinion that the boys have not been overworked.

No. 3, "Having engaged the boys in domestic work to the neglect of their education:" There is no evidence of this. The mode of education of a deaf-mute cannot be gauged by that of ordinary children. Their minds being in the first instance an absolute blank, every little thing they do is a part of their education, domestic work amongst other things; and the evidence of the parents of the children shows that they do not object to such work in reason. I notice, however, that the children are at stated periods set to scrub the floors, and it is alleged by Mr. Crofts that some of them had swollen knees in consequence. I am satisfied that is not the case, but I would suggest that a sufficient number of servants should be kept to relieve the children from work of that description.

No. 4, "Having used undue severity in chastising the children, and allowed his daughter to do the same:" There was a good deal of evidence taken on this point. The two masters, Mr. Allan and Mr. Stevens, seemed to be of the opinion that on two occasions Mr. Van Asch has corrected two boys more severely than he should have done. Though this opinion is undoubtedly of some weight, I think that the chastisement was not so severe as to call for censure on the Director. The punishment was inflicted in one case for a very serious offence: and in the other case the boy—McWatters—is a very bad-tempered and unruly pupil; he would require a very firm hand if discipline is to be maintained in the school. There is no evidence that Miss Van Asch has unduly chastised any of the pupils.

No. 5, "Having allowed the members of his own family to torment one of the boys residing in the Home to such a degree that the boy wrote to his father asking that he might be taken from the Home and placed with the other boys at the Boys' Home:" How Mr. Crofts could have permitted himself to make such a charge as this—one so utterly without foundation—I am at a loss to con-