

of England is fully represented on them all, with the exception of Dunedin, where, I understand, the Bishop of that diocese still wishes for what all the rest have given up as impossible—that is, denominational teaching. The Presbyterians and the Wesleyans are in all the associations. These three denominations represent about 70 per cent. of the population of New Zealand. Other Protestant bodies, with a considerable number of Roman Catholics who wish for something of this kind in our public schools, make up 80 per cent. of the population, allowing for individuals in all these denominations who demur, as there are always some who disagree. Then, with regard to the facts which have been elicited, and which appear in the appendix to the statement laid on the table, it will be seen that, both as regards the religious denominations and the percentage of population, our estimate has been fully borne out. Nearly all religious denominations are represented in the statistics of Palmerston North; nearly two-thirds of the Roman Catholics there wish for the change, so that those who wish for this change at Palmerston North represent 88 per cent. of the population there. This canvass was carefully taken by a paid canvasser—a person of responsibility. Nelson City was carefully canvassed by volunteers; and, although many were not reached, yet there is a considerable majority who wish for this change: those who made the canvass state that there were not more than from 10 to 15 per cent. who objected; so that again bears out the view that we represent a very large majority of the people of New Zealand. In similar cases that were tried in Wellington, as in Aurora Terrace, where I live, there were sixty-five for and eight against; and in Wadestown there were ninety-nine for and eleven against. At Wadestown there were about twenty who were not asked because they were Roman Catholics; some of these said afterwards they were sorry they were not asked. If they had been asked they would have gladly signed. The total number of signatures that have come in is, I think, about eighteen thousand. I wish to impress on the Committee that this does not represent the total number of people who wish for the change. It is merely an indication of the widely spread feeling; and probably the proportion of the population over the whole colony would be nearly the same as in Palmerston North. I should state that in all other cases the canvass was taken very hurriedly and imperfectly; only a small number of persons could be reached. Wellington has not been canvassed. We have only the signatures of the members of three or four congregations. Many people have thought that a “monster” petition next session would be more effective than petitions sent in at the advanced stage of the present session of Parliament. The conclusion we arrive at is that three-fourths of the people desire the change that is now proposed; probably eight-tenths. Then, I should like to say why they wish for this change. They believe that the Word of God is the only sure foundation for the formation of good moral character, and that to exclude it from the schools is cruel and unjust, alike to the parents and the children, and a danger to the State. We ask that this particular book may be introduced, because experience shows that it is suited to our purpose, containing as it does the foundations of our scriptural belief. It has been accepted by all these various bodies of christian people, because it does not obtrude any contested or debatable matter. The Douay version has been largely used to make it more acceptable to the Roman Catholics. I have heard some objections raised to the proposed change, and would be glad if the Committee would allow me to make the following answers to them:—

1. *Parents should teach Religion to their Children.*—This is undoubtedly best; but many parents do not; many cannot teach their children. The disability is increased by increased knowledge acquired at school by the children, who soon think they know more than their parents, and so become disobedient, having no religious teaching to counteract this tendency.

2. *Are not Sunday Schools sufficient?*—No; because in many country districts there are none. In town districts many children do not attend them. Thus many young people grow up without any knowledge of God or his Word. Besides, Sunday-school lasts one hour once a week. The attendance is voluntary, and the teachers are untrained. All this compares badly with the daily, compulsory, secular schooling, with trained teachers and all appliances; and the children naturally conclude that secular learning is all-important, and religion unimportant; whereas we hold that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

3. *The Bible read without Explanation is useless.*—We do not admit this. Doubtless, a fully qualified and earnest teacher would help the children much by explanation. But the Scriptures chosen for the lessons are within the powers of the understanding of children; the questions to be asked, and the few explanatory notes given, insure that the children do understand what is read. The system removes the danger of denominational or erroneous teaching; and teachers having no special theological training can still usefully teach the Scripture lessons. We are well assured that even this simple reading of the Word of God will have a very beneficial effect, and the lessons will remain in the memory and influence the lives of the young people as they grow up.

4. *It will lead to bad feeling amongst the Children; those who do not attend Scripture Lessons jeering at the others, and vice versa.*—This has not been found to be the case in practice. It is not a new thing to have Scripture lessons in schools, with a conscience clause, but has stood the test of experience in England, in the United States of America, in New South Wales, and elsewhere. Should such conduct ever occur, teachers must repress it.

5. *Why should not the Clergy teach Religion before or after School-hours; as now permitted by law?*—Because in very few places have the clergy sufficient leisure to enable them to do this without neglecting their other work; also, if not carefully arranged, it must evidently lead to denominational teaching; also very few children can be gathered together out of school-hours, and they are wanted at home, or they are already tired with lessons, or they prefer play; and in any case discipline is very imperfect. It has been tried most fully in Nelson, and found most unsatisfactory. It is to be noted that, excepting Palmerston North, from Nelson come the most numerous petitions in proportion to population for the change asked for.

6. *Are the Teachers fit?*—If their own consciences do not declare them unfit, and if their