

believe that the introduction of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books will lead up to State interference with religion. Otherwise, what is the meaning of it; what is to come out of it? As soon as it is introduced you come to the question of interpretation. How are you going to interpret it? You cannot fix it, for the personal equation is sure to come in. The man who interprets the book will interpret it in his own way. This is one of the strongest objections against the introduction of such a book into the public schools. Some interpretation will be certain, and whoever interprets will have a large number of persons to sympathize with him. I believe that if the Bible or Bible lessons are to be read in the schools it ought to be interpreted in harmony with the most advanced and the best Biblical criticism of the present day. In other words, I regard the introduction of this book as detrimental to the religious life of the children without interpreting it in harmony with sound principles of Biblical criticism. As soon as you touch that question you get into religious differences. Those who feel much interest in the teacher will say that no man ought to be subject to religious tests: your School Committees will establish such tests. There will be at first some mild form of religious test, while others will declare that they do not desire to see old religious tests revived again: they will say, "We fought them throughout English history; had we not done so they would have broken the power of the people and crippled our liberties." Then, we think that the Roman Catholics have a right to be considered. These people have no just complaint at the present time, because we are supposed to provide instruction for everybody that chooses to come to the public schools. The basis of our public-school system is that we do not interfere with their religious prejudices or opinions. If this book is introduced, the Roman Catholics will have a very fair claim on the State for a grant in aid of their own denominational schools. I think so for this reason: the Roman Catholics of this colony have never been in favour of introducing this book. It is a somewhat significant thing that they say nothing about it at the present time, either for or against. They are waiting for other people to say what they have to say about it. They have no just complaint now, but if this is granted they will argue that it is a Protestant measure, and claim grants in aid of their own schools; and I cannot see how we could justly refuse them. Those who are not Christians—they have a right to be considered. This movement is in reality one step in the direction of the establishment of a State church. Many of the arguments that are used in support of this could be used with equal force and propriety in support of a State church. Now, it is true that the tendency of modern nations is away from the old individualistic standpoint. The absolute Socialist would extend the jurisdiction of the State to every sphere of life, and leave no room for the individual to turn himself about in. Now, while modern society is coming to see that in the spheres of industry, &c., there must be greater organization, and in the last resort even a certain amount of force, in the spheres of opinion, thought, religion, &c., there must be absolute freedom. Men must be allowed perfect freedom in the spheres of religion, politics, art, science, &c. Now, the introduction of religious teaching into the schools means sectarian teaching, and that means the death of freedom. I think it is very significant that there is not one denomination or body of Christians who are unanimously in favour of the introduction of this religious teaching in our public schools; that ought to be borne in mind. Gentlemen have been asked to come before this Committee. They came, representing their several denominations. The Presbyterians are divided on this subject. Only a short time ago they carried a resolution against it. I am not sure whether it was passed by a large or a small majority. A slight majority might be in favour of it now; but it is clear they are divided upon it, I think about equally. The Episcopalians are not united upon it. The large Methodist bodies are not unanimous upon it; they are divided. Our own body is to a certain extent divided, I am sorry to say. A good deal has been made of the fact that one or two of our ministers have departed from the true faith on this question. But they are beginning to see the mistake they have made, and they are anxious to get back to the true fold. This has been confessed to me. I can only say that when a man begins to try to use other men's money to extend his own opinions there is a distinct falling-off somewhere. Among our own people there have been but a few who have departed from the true faith in this respect. But there are only a few. Most of us feel that the only safe course for us to follow at the present time is to leave things as they are, and not to support what is now proposed. We feel strongly that the introduction of this text-book into the schools will eventually lead to the breaking-up of our national system. We are exceedingly anxious to train up the young people of these new lands, such as New Zealand is, to be "nationalist," and not to break them up into religious sects. We wish to keep our public schools as free as possible, and open to all.

49. *Mr. Willis.*] Do you consider that religious interference will be a danger to the national system of education which is represented by the State in this colony?—Yes.

50. Do you consider it dangerous for majorities to use their power, in favour of religious opinions, in such a matter as this?—Yes, decidedly; it would be not only dangerous but wrong for a majority to use its power to force Roman Catholic opinions on others, or to compel other people to contribute to and support theirs.

51. Do you consider that Bible-reading is of any use without interpretation, and that it would lead to bitterness and suspicion?—I would not put it that way, because I do believe that reading the Bible without any instruction from others may be very useful and helpful; but I think that the Bible cannot be read as a text-book in our schools without interpretation; and when interpretation is given it would be coloured necessarily by the person who gives it.

52. Does it lead to bitterness; I am using your own words?—The word "bitterness," as used by me, had reference to the whole thing; I did not use the word "bitterness" in reference to the school itself, but that bitterness would be imported into the whole question as regards the election of committees, the appointment of teachers, &c.

53. Do you think that in the election of committees there would be contention for the supremacy of some particular denomination?—I think it is very likely; that is my opinion.

54. Do you think that the introduction of this book will strengthen the Roman Catholics in their demand for denominational assistance?—Decidedly.