

APPENDICES.

I.

EVIDENCE to be laid before the Public Petitions Committee M to Z of the House of Representatives of New Zealand, by Major-General Schaw, Secretary of the Wellington Scripture Lesson-book Committee.

THE petitions which have been presented, asking that the "Irish National School-book of Scripture Lessons" may be introduced into the public schools of the colony indicate a widely-spread feeling amongst the population, of discontent with the existing system of education, in so far as it excludes the Holy Scriptures from the subjects taught in the schools, and of their acceptance of these Scripture lesson-books as a suitable form in which the essential truths of Christianity may be taught to the young, without the introduction of any debatable points on which different denominations of Christians hold different views.

The objection entertained by a great proportion of the colonists to the existing purely secular education has been evidenced almost from the time of its inception, some eighteen years ago, by the frequently-recurring efforts which have been made to obtain some kind of Bible instruction for the children; but these efforts have hitherto been fruitless, because there has hitherto been no agreement amongst the various religious bodies as to the form and method of the religious instruction to be given.

The Roman Catholics have so strongly objected to purely secular education that in the larger towns they have withdrawn their children from the public schools, and have voluntarily taxed themselves to provide education based on their religion in their own schools.

The Church of England, while objecting also to a purely secular education, has made no sufficient effort to raise funds for similar voluntary schools, but until lately has contended for denominational schools subsidised by the State.

The Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Methodists, and other Protestant religious bodies have all advocated Bible-teaching in the State schools, but with variations as to the mode in which it should be given.

The purely secular system of education introduced by the Legislature was opposed to the real desire of the people, the great majority of whom always have desired that the Bible should in some way be the basis of the education system; but how this was to be done without introducing inter-denominational dissensions was the difficulty. Yet this difficulty had been solved in Ireland many years ago, when the heads of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian bodies conjointly drew up the "Irish National School-book of Scripture Lessons." These Scripture lessons, containing portions of the Bible specially adapted for the young, with questions, and notes explaining unusual words, &c., have been used for many years in the public schools of New South Wales with entire satisfaction.

It is on the common platform of the "Irish National School-book of Scripture Lessons," taught in the school hours by the regular teachers, that the Church of England, the Presbyterians, the Wesleyans, and the majority of the other Protestant Christian bodies are now at length united. (See annexed copies of resolutions.) They have formed themselves into associations in all the chief centres of the colony to obtain the common object of a Christian basis for the education of the children in the above-mentioned way. They represent about 80 per cent. of the population, as may be seen by referring to the religious census of 1893.

Most of the petitions now sent in to Parliament on this subject are the results of hurried, and therefore imperfect, canvasses, yet, in nearly every instance, it is reported that if more time and copies of the text-book had been available, many more signatures would have been obtained.

In some instances districts have been canvassed more fully, and in these the proportions of the electors for and against the scriptural lessons have corresponded with the religious statistics of 1893.

For instance, we would draw attention to the petition from Palmerston North, which was canvassed pretty fully, and where, out of 1,454 electors, 1,283 signed the petition, and only 171 refused. The analysis of this canvass (which is attached) is very significant, as it shows that the desire for scriptural education is not confined to a few denominations, but that nearly all agree in wishing for the introduction of the "Irish National School-book of Scripture Lessons." The fact that the Douay version, commonly used by the Roman Catholics, is adopted in many passages of the lesson-books, makes them acceptable to the Roman Catholics, who have largely signed the petitions. This, and other similar examples, seem to show that about three-quarters of the electors object to purely secular education, and that they accept the solution of the difficulty now proposed as to how scriptural teaching may be given without introducing denominationalism, or disturbing the free compulsory educational system now in force.

We would most strongly disclaim any desire to injure or interfere with the existing admirable system of national education. Our petition, if acceded to, will only place it on a sound basis, and make it more secure.

We sincerely hope that the entirely altered position in which this question now stands, owing to the union of the great Protestant Christian bodies in a common agreement, which has taken place since the subject was last brought before the Legislature, will lead Members of Parliament to view it not as a party question to be dealt with at the polling-booths, but as a happy solution of a perplexing problem which may now be given effect to without danger or difficulty or increased expense.