

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 16th OCTOBER, 1895. (Mr. MEREDITH, Chairman.)

Rev. J. GUY examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] I understand you are a Minister of the Primitive Methodist Church, and that you appear before the Committee to make a statement in reference to the introduction of the "Irish National Scripture Lesson-books" into the State schools of the colony?—Yes.

2. Will you be good enough to proceed?—First of all, I would like to put myself clearly before the Committee: I would like to know, therefore, whether I am asked to appear here to give my own personal opinion about the books, or the opinion, so far as I know it, of the Primitive Methodist Church?

3. I think that of the Church with which you are associated. We have no objection to your opinion as a representative man; but we understand that you are here more particularly to represent the Church of which you are a minister?—I may state, for the information of the Committee, that the question has not been before our annual Conference in any official way, so that our Church has not given an expression of its opinion on the subject; but, in our last Conference, our retiring President during his address spoke against interfering with the present system of education. I can quote his words if the Committee desire that I should do so.

4. If his words are of authority with your denomination I think it would be an advantage if you were to quote his words?—The remarks were received with applause in the Conference, and have not been altered since. I took an extract from his address—the annual address delivered by the retiring President of the Primitive Methodist Conference, held in January of the present year: "It is a common thing to pass resolutions at church assemblies requesting that the Bible be introduced into our public schools. In my opinion, we should be careful as to what change we would effect in our present system. We do not want denominational or sectarian schools supported by Government. We have little sympathy with the cry of 'godless schools' echoed so frequently in certain quarters. Our schools are not godless." These remarks were, as I have said, received with applause, and they have not been controverted in any way since, either in the ordinary newspapers or in the pages of our church paper. I may state that in reference to this question we are divided as a Church. Although no vote has been taken in the Conference, we know that some of our ministers and laymen are in favour of introducing religious instruction into the State schools. A large number of our leading ministers and laymen, however, are in favour of things remaining as they are. The reasons for this are, as often quoted: (1.) The undesirability of in any way interfering with the integrity of the present educational system. (2.) The undesirability of bringing religious differences into school life. (3.) The undesirability of applying anything approaching to religious tests to teachers who may come before the Boards for employment in the schools under their charge. I do not know whether the Committee would care to have the opinion of one of our leading laymen on this question, which opinion was publicly given upon the occasion of the commencement of the agitation in favour of introducing the Irish Scripture Lesson-books, in the year 1893: "Extract from an article on 'Bible-reading in our Common Schools,' published in the *New Zealand Primitive Methodist* for July, 1893, by Mr. David Goldie, of Auckland: 'We trust, therefore, that our Nonconformist ministers will act with caution, and not allow themselves to become the mere catspaws of certain sections of the Christian Church, who are apparently anxious to use them to further their own interests and to destroy our present excellent system of education.'"

5. Would you take these opinions as the views of a large body of the Primitive Methodist Church in New Zealand?—Yes. When I was asked to enter this movement which is being carried on in this City of Wellington, I attended the first meeting, but did not feel free to go on to the Committee appointed, as I had not read the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books, and therefore I abstained from going on the Committee that was then appointed. I have only had in my hands three copies of the book. Although I have expressed a certain sympathy with the introduction of elementary Scripture teaching into the State schools, this Irish text-book does not come up to my ideal. If anything were to be done in this direction, I thought it might be done by historical sketches introducing the facts from the Old and New Testaments. I am strongly of opinion that anything in the nature of religious education cannot be given in the public schools of the colony, for that involves religious tests. With a view to find out the feeling of the churches in my care, in Wellington, I called the officials together and laid the question before them. They resolved that, as the Conference had not dealt with the question of religious education, they would not go into it. That is about the attitude of the local Primitive Methodist Churches in Wellington at the present time.

6. *Mr. McNab.*] What is the numerical strength, the number of adherents, of your Church in the colony?—Between 6,000 and 7,000.

7. Do you think that the introduction of these Scripture Lesson-books would tend to introduce denominationalism into the schools?—That is our opinion.

8. Do you think that if this text-book were introduced there would be any tendency, in the selection of teachers, to cause the School Committees to inquire what the teacher's religious views were?—I think so.