

were better left out?—Yes; in my opinion religion can only be taught effectively by a religious man.

35. That is the only way that religious teaching would be acceptable to you?—Were it introduced the State would only be embarrassed with the attempt to give religious teaching in the schools. Bible-teaching means comment, as a member of the Committee has said.

36. *The Chairman.*] Have you any experience among the young people; if so, is it your opinion that Sunday-schools, Bible-classes, Endeavour Societies, domestic influences, are not sufficient to meet religious requirements?—Yes, I think they are, or should be, sufficient to meet the religious requirements of the colony.

37. According to your knowledge, has the agitation for the introduction of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books been got up by the clergy or by the people of the Church generally?—Any communications I have received have been from the clergy: that is, outside my own church.

38. Is it your opinion that the introduction of the Irish Scripture Lesson-books would be a fair compromise, acceptable alike to the Roman Catholic and Protestant bodies?—I have no grounds on which I could give an opinion upon that.

39. Have you availed yourself, as a clergyman of the Primitive Methodist Church, of the opportunity that is given under the present Education Act, to give religious instruction in the State schools?—No.

Rev. H. VAN STAVEREN examined.

40. *The Chairman.*] The Committee understand that you are the Clergyman of the Jewish congregation in the City of Wellington?—Yes.

41. You are also Chairman of a City School Committee?—Yes; of the Terrace School—there are 560 children there.

42. You are aware that a number of petitions have reached this House, and are now before this Committee, having reference to the introduction of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books into our State schools?—I am aware of that fact.

43. The Committee will be pleased to hear any statement you have to make on that subject.—I can give you, as well as my own opinion, the opinion of the Committee of the Terrace School, whose mouthpiece I was when representation was made to the Minister of Education by certain School Committees that this book should be introduced into our schools; I was deputed by the Committee of the Terrace School to oppose it as far as I possibly could. Moreover, the Headmaster of that school, and the teachers whom we consulted, all of whom are Protestant and Presbyterian (Protestant, at all events), and they with unanimous voice came to the conclusion that it would be pernicious to encourage religious instruction in the State schools of this colony either by Bible-reading or the introduction of this Irish National Scripture Lesson-book; that is, so far as our Terrace School is concerned, with which I am connected; without a single exception we all say it would be pernicious to the school. As far as the Jewish Church is concerned, of which I am the head in New Zealand, I can say that our unanimous opinion is that it would be a blot on our educational system were we to introduce into so good a system this Irish text-book, which, as you must be aware, would simply leave a “skim-milk” impression on the minds of intelligent children. I have gone through it, and can come to no other conclusion than this: that it would be a real shame to introduce it, for the effect can only be to return to a state of things that where children have sat side by side for many years this denominational element comes in, and they will say to each other, “I cannot sit here and listen to that book read;” while some would say, “I cannot come to school because my parents desire that I should not be there while it is read; and others that they must, as soon as they can, get away from the control of teachers who would impregnate their minds; and most of them would say, “I cannot accept this skim-milk system of this insipid book as a doctrine for my future life.” This book teaches a few morals and a few stories that are supposed to convey morals to the minds of children; but the law—the laws for the government of our lives—which should be immutable and eternal, are shut out of view altogether. How are masters or teachers in schools able to teach anything without interpretation? They might quote many Hebrew words from the Old Testament, or the New (for we have a New Testament too), or from the Greek, or from the Bible in the vernacular; but those beautiful passages, which are at the root of human life, are they to be left without interpretation? How can you teach them without interpretation? If you desire religious instruction in the schools you cannot have it without interpretation. To introduce this Irish National Scripture Lesson-book will simply mean that we will again have denominationalism, which I think all the members sent from the country to Parliament should be very much against. We do not desire to revert to the old system of denominationalism. That would simply mean that the Education Act, under which an admirable system of education has grown up, will have to be amended to give place to such a book as this. I need not tell you that, so far as the Jewish Church is concerned, we do not care much whether this book is introduced or not, for we will simply take our children away, as the Catholics would do, and, like them, agitate as much as possible to get a grant in aid of our own denominational schools, which would be no more than right. Why should I send my children to a school where doctrines are taught which I do not believe in? Why should my children, if they have the capacity to become teachers, be deprived of the opportunity of teaching that is now given in the public schools? Would they not have to say, “There is no use my trying to get into employment of that kind for I cannot be a teacher?” The excellent teaching now given in the schools will be impaired. Why should we have to put up with doctrines which other people desire to inculcate? This proposal is entirely pernicious, and I trust that honourable members of this House, who have been sent here by the constituencies, will oppose it as far as possible. I believe it is only a few people in New Zealand, and not the majority of the people of New Zealand, who desire to introduce a new system.