

100. *Mr. Collins.*] Do you think that the imputation put upon the schools that they are "godless" is justified; are there any just grounds for it?—No; we provide against that in the syllabus by lessons inculcating morals, such as obedience to parents and other matters of that kind. These lessons are illustrated and taught right through the course of the year; it is done in my own school; these points are attended to in most of our State schools.

101. *Mr. Willis.*] With regard to the school-books, do you not consider that they exhort to good conduct, moral and religious?—Yes; they give a good tone to the character of the teaching.

102. You think that should do away with the charge that there is nothing of a religious character in the teaching?—Yes.

103. There is no ground for any imputation that they are of an irreligious character?—No.

Mr. CLEMENT WATSON examined.

104. *The Chairman.*] You are the Headmaster of Te Aro State School?—Yes.

105. What is the number of scholars?—About 600.

106. How many years have you been a public-school teacher?—About twenty.

107. How many years have you spent in New Zealand?—All of that.

108. Do you appear to give evidence conjointly with Mr. Grundy in connection with the New Zealand Educational Institute?—Yes.

109. Also as the Headmaster of one of the largest of our city schools?—Yes.

110. The Committee will be happy to hear what you have to say as to the probable effects of the introduction of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-book as a text-book into the State schools.—You would like me to make some sort of statement. I will be as brief as I can. I have made a few notes of my own thoughts upon the subject. In the first place, I have to express my fears as to the danger of meddling at all with our present educational system, which, I think, all will admit is doing admirable work. It is in no way interfering with religious work or movement of any kind. There is nothing atheistic or opposed to religion in it. Some people, and many of the clergy, seem to assume that we have usurped their functions. I can only say we are doing what was never done before—we are teaching everybody. I think that if this book is introduced into the schools public instruction will be beset with all the difficulties that beset State education from the first. If I am asked what is likely to be the result I can only say that it is likely to lead to further demands, and that those who urge this movement hope that it will lead to something further—that is, to denominational education. Introducing this book is a step in that direction. I think that the advocates of it believe that. That is my first objection to the introduction of this book into our State schools. My next objection, my strongest objection, is that, assuming the book to be introduced into our schools, it will fail of its object; but not before much injury shall have been done to the present system of education. This is not religious instruction of any kind; it is only a reading-book. If you want to teach religion that can only be done by the individual who is called to that duty, and enters upon that duty with a whole heart and a strong conviction. That is the only kind of religious instruction that can have any effect. You must not be afraid of offending people; you know you have a certain thing to do; you are impelled to teach, and teach you must. That is the heart and conviction which the man who would give religious instruction with effect must have. But this is a cold-blooded and perfunctory business; you have to read the book and not to comment on it: in fact, you do nothing. What must be the effect of that upon the mind of the child? I think that the introduction of this book will have an effect the opposite of that which its advocates expect. Instead of the Bible being looked upon with reverence it will simply become like any other school-book. Without interpretation or comment the average boy will look upon it as a fable, and when he leaves the school will regard it in that aspect; it will be nugatory entirely. There are hundreds of examples to test the probable effect of religious teaching such as is proposed by the introduction of this book into the schools. What is the result of the teaching of a minister of religion if his work is done in a perfunctory way? We know what that is. Personally I feel sure that the only religious teaching that "takes hold" of children is the religious instruction that is received at the mother's knee, or from a religious or spiritual adviser supported and approved by both parents. These are the only kinds of religious instruction likely to sink into the mind and influence the conduct of daily life. I am sure that the kind of instruction proposed by the introduction of this book will do no good at all. There has been an expression of opinion that the teachers ought to accept this book. I would point out to the Committee that the skill of the teacher is valueless in this matter. The effect of religious teaching depends, as I have said, upon conviction and the earnestness with which you get to work. We ordinary teachers are simply a kind of craftsmen as it were. It is argued that parents do not teach their children, and therefore something must be done. If you do what is now proposed you will not have the teacher in the place of the parent. The position in regard to religious instruction will be worse than it is now. The teacher is precluded from interpretation, and still you will say that the parents are the proper persons to teach religion to their young children. But the parent will say, "All that is done in the school, and I am relieved of all responsibility." That is a very serious aspect of this question. The State cannot possibly take the place of the parent or the true religious instructor. Then, I believe, it will introduce into the schools endless bitterness into the business connected with the control of the schools. You will have on the occasion of every Committee election, each sect trying to get a majority on the Committee for the express purpose of swaying the kind of instruction to be given. The teachers will be dragged into that, and so it will break up the harmony that now exists. You will find a school at this side of the town that gets to be regarded as Presbyterian, and at the other side Wesleyan, and the one in the centre Anglican. The discipline of the schools will be impaired by external influences. That will be a deplorable state of things. Surely it is an immense advantage now that the children of all parents of every class and denomination can sit together on the same school-benches without