

Professor VON ZEDLITZ examined. (No. 5.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Whom do you represent?—I represent the Professorial Board of Victoria College.

2. Do you wish to make a statement to the Committee?—Yes; but before coming to the statement I wish to make, gentlemen, I would like to deal with two points raised by Sir Robert Stout, and to say that we have all heard to-day the words of a man who honestly and sincerely desires to benefit the University of New Zealand. I think we can realize that from every word he said, and also that he is pitifully unable to realize that we too are aiming at exactly the same thing, and that it is only the question of means by which that end can be attained that is at issue between us. As for the suggestion of Sir Robert Stout that if a Commission is to issue it should be one that inquires into the work of the professors in the various colleges and how they are carrying out that work, that is what we most hope from the Commission. We do not like to come forward and say that our work is sufficiently important to have an expensive Royal Commission to inquire into it. Our point is that under the existing constitution and system we cannot do the work properly, and that we want to get some system to enable us to do it properly. There must be an inquiry into the way we do it, and we would not like to bother the Committee with that until they can find out that it is not being properly done. In regard to the second point, about the small number of students taking science, Sir Robert did not put forward the main reason for that, which I am perfectly certain is the reason, and that is that the majority of the students are encouraged to aim at a degree, and to aim at a degree as apart from education proper, and that the other subjects, mainly the arts subjects in this case, have been brought to such a low level by the policy of the Senate in their standards that it is a very much easier way to get the degree without taking science, and it is just on that account that we protest against the low level of other subjects. We protest that the other subjects ought to be raised to a higher level, and if all the subjects were raised to a similar level it would be easy enough to make it possible for the students to take the science subjects without feeling they were handicapped in pursuit of a degree by them. Of course, there is another point, as Sir Robert Stout truly said—that the method of science rather than the result is the essential thing; and what we would like would be to help to apply that method in the teaching of all the subjects in the University. That is going a step further, because then our students would get what Sir Robert Stout was anxious they should get—that is, some scientific spirit. They would get that not only in the science classes but in the other classes which they attended in the University. That is the whole point we are working for—to teach the subjects in the way we like. The statement I propose to make to-day, I am afraid, contains a terrible amount of ego. I do not see that it is avoidable, and it seems to me it is really the quickest way. My statement is really directed to a question asked by Mr. McCallum. Mr. McCallum expressed a wish to get at what is “at the back of our minds” in carrying on this agitation. I believe it would save time if I try to follow out that suggestion, if the Committee will excuse the free use of the first person. I can only speak for myself, but in the belief that what I say applies to my colleagues as well. Our motives are mixed ones, as in most human beings. Putting the most creditable side first, I believe the changes we propose tend to improve the training of teachers and other professional men, and so to increase the usefulness of the University. Secondly, there are the students. From my first arrival in New Zealand I have thought highly of our students as a class, and felt that they were not receiving fair treatment. It is true they are usually ill prepared for university work, but they are intelligent and singularly willing and teachable. We have all that is indispensable in the way of staffs, buildings, equipment, and money to give them good teaching and good value on a less ambitious scale than the present unreal programme pretends to reach. So far as I know nothing but the well-meaning ignorance of the University authorities blocks the road, and in its effect on students I think this is a pity and a shame. This motive weighs heavily with me. It is generally supposed that we professors are thirsting to get control of examinations and curricula. I can assure you that I would only be too thankful to let other people do all the examining and all the work of University government if there is any other way in which students can get justice. I would give up every other demand if you devise a scheme by which students are free to study and I am free to teach, according to methods considered right in the rest of the world, and to give up my present methods, which have long been abandoned elsewhere as mistaken. If you think I am free to do so now I could probably convince you that I am not; in any case I am begging persistently for a Royal Commission to inquire into the degree of freedom we possess, and I should have reason to dread such an inquiry if I were teaching on wrong lines and could help myself. This injustice to students is why, when I hear the standards and achievements of the University of New Zealand praised, it seems cowardly to keep an ironical silence. The reform movement actually broke out because of some extravagant language about the standard of our degrees in a local newspaper editorial, and because half a dozen Victoria College professors, each of whom had thought that his own subject was specially handicapped, found on comparing notes that they were all in much the same position. This is not depreciation; it is appreciation of the qualities and possibilities of our students. And it is only fair to add that in writing and speaking to outsiders, if they are interested in our system, I can honestly assure them that, as Mr. Sidey knows, the results of the system are by no means always bad. To outsiders, who would naturally look down upon our University, I can say that quite a lot of good work is being done considering all things. The third motive we have is more of the mixed order. It is pride or vanity—professional and personal vanity. You can easily realize that, in respect to the subject I teach, I live in almost absolute intellectual isolation. In Europe and America there are many hundreds of my fellow-teachers and many thousands of people interested. There are well-stocked libraries and about eighty technical periodicals. Here I rarely speak to any one about my work. Not a soul knows or cares whether I spend my day in