

*"Opinions of Experts."*

5. A certain amount of "evidence" has, however, been tendered by the League, purporting to assert the "success" of the system of State "religious instruction" prevailing in New South Wales and certain other parts of Australia. A study of this "evidence" soon reveals what a mockery, what a ludicrous delusion it is, as "proof" of the "success" of the system referred to.

6. The "evidence" in question appears in an official League publication entitled "Opinions of Experts." In it are expressed ninety-eight opinions. An ex-Governor of New South Wales is responsible for one, Ministers of Education and Inspectors (past or present) for eighteen, and school-teachers seventy-nine, of whom sixty come from New South Wales, the balance from Queensland, Tasmania, and Western Australia. The pamphlet opens with a letter from Mr. P. Board (now Director of Education, New South Wales). It is dated the 11th October, 1906, and appears as a reply to some unnamed "Right Rev. Sir," but the bulk of it has been lifted bodily from page 149 of an "Interim Report of the Commission of Primary Education, New South Wales," under date 1903. A lamentable feature of that official letter is the amazing manner in which the Commissioners' report has been garbled in the interests of the "system." Take, for instance, that part of Mr. Board's letter where he quotes from the report of one of their most experienced Inspectors. This Inspector wrote of the "benefits" derived from the New South Wales system in cases where the teachers dwell "with judicious force and impressiveness" upon "points of religion and morals." The evident implication was that no "benefits" accrued where this was not done by the teacher. The Inspector adds, "I believe that in about 50 per cent. of our schools these lessons have been so treated." Mr. Board suppresses this, and with it the implied official statement that, from the viewpoint of religion, the system of State "religious instruction" in New South Wales is not a "success," but a 50-per-cent. failure.

7. The reports quoted in the League's "Opinions of Experts" date from 1891 to 1912, and there are eight which bear no date. The majority—sixty-five—are dated 1908. Thirteen date from 1891 to 1907. There are sixty-five replies from teachers in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, and Western Australia. The total number of State teachers in these States is 10,572 (Official Year-book for 1913). Thus only six teachers in every thousand in those States advanced any opinion upon the school systems there. The question was put as to whether the clergy visits to the schools caused friction. Out of the sixty-five teachers forty-three said "No"; the remainder (perhaps discreetly) did not reply. Only six to eight of the sixty-five asserted that the clergy visits were attended with good results; the remainder are (also perhaps discreetly) silent hereon. Six to eight teachers out of 10,572! And twelve teachers acknowledge their practice of giving religious instruction to children of various faiths (among whom Catholics are sometimes included) in the same class. Two circumstances tended, especially in New South Wales, to render frank expression of opinion by the teachers somewhat difficult: (a) The prohibition of criticism of the education system and its administration; and (b) the fact that the then Under-Secretary of Education in New South Wales, the Senior Inspector, and other high-placed officials were strong religionists of one particular faith, and ardent supporters of the New South Wales system of "religious instruction in State schools." Latest reports from Sydney indicate that there is only one Catholic Inspector in the whole of New South Wales. The collectively vast private-education systems there are intense evidence of dissatisfaction with the State system. According to the New South Wales Year-book for 1908 (p. 81 and following) one-third of the children in the cities attend private schools, one-fourth in the country towns, and only one-fourteenth in the rural districts, proving that it is only by its vast resources that the State system is able to retain its children. The intense dissatisfaction of Catholics with the State system in New South Wales is eloquently testified by the following facts: During the period 1883-1913, inclusive, their enrolment in the State schools increased by only 8,173; in the same period their enrolment in Catholic schools increased by 38,953 (from 11,556 to 50,509).

8. One of the outstanding features of the New South Wales system is the marked neglect of the legal opportunities offered to the clergy to visit the schools for "special religious instruction." This evidence of widespread unwillingness of the clergy to make sacrifices for the children is referred to with dismal regularity in the annual Year-Books, and in the departmental reports and in the Press. Statistically the clergy utilize, collectively, about one-tenth of their possible opportunities. They have been rated by Mr. Carmichael, Minister of Public Instruction (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6th May, 1913); by Mr. Perry, Minister of Public Instruction; by a circular in which the Education Department found it necessary to remind the clergy that they had the right of entry. In their third annual report, and again in their thirty-first (1910), the Committee on Special Religious Instruction in Public Schools, in connection with the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, said, "The Committee are reluctantly compelled to avow their conviction that, unless a more lively and persistent interest in this work shall be shown by members of Synod in recess as well as in session, and by members of the Church at large, the work itself must languish, perhaps even be finally abandoned." The thirty-first report adds: "More than ever is now required from the Churches, for less is being done by the State. The time formerly given by the State teachers to general religious instruction is now to a large extent devoted to the teaching of history, civics, and morals" (Fifteenth Synod of the Diocese of Sydney, second session, 1910, p. 95). Much more evidence to the same general effect might easily be quoted. But the experience of New South Wales and of New Zealand demonstrate this: that the great bulk of the League clergy will refuse to undertake the work of the religious instruction in the schools under any system, whether it be the religious system prevailing in Australia or the secular system prevailing in New Zealand, and that system must indeed be, from the religious point of view, a rank failure when it will not move even great bodies of ministers of religion to make greater sacrifices for the cause of the little ones for whom Christ the Saviour shed His blood.