

FRIDAY, 9TH OCTOBER, 1914.

Professor THOMAS ALEXANDER HUNTER examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Victoria College.

2. The Committee would be glad to hear what you have to say on the question of the Bible-in-schools petitions?—I have a statement from the National Schools Defence League which I desire to read to the Committee:—

SUMMARY OF THE CASE IN FAVOUR OF THE PETITION OF THE NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL SCHOOLS DEFENCE LEAGUE FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PRESENT FREE, SECULAR, COMPULSORY SYSTEM OF EDUCATION, AND AGAINST THE PROPOSALS OF THE BIBLE IN SCHOOLS LEAGUE.

We wish to put on record the fact that we had expected, in view of the importance of the issues involved, that the fullest possible inquiry would have been held. The present national system of education has had possession of the field for nearly forty years, and has conferred the greatest benefits on the people of this Dominion. The National Schools Defence League is not in any way opposed to religious education, but it represents tens of thousands of electors who feel that, if the present attack on the schools is successful, the day of peaceful, progressive educational work in the Dominion is over, and that instead of being united in the interests of the common welfare of the children the people will be sundered into sectarian factions fighting for their denominational interests. As it has been said that the New Zealand National School Defence League is a small minority of atheists and agnostics, we desire to put on record the names of the central executive: President—Mr. A. R. Atkinson; vice-presidents—Hon. George Fowlds, Messrs. R. McNab, T. M. Wilford, M.P., W. Hindmarsh, M.P., D. McLaren, Mrs. A. R. Atkinson, Mrs. S. Anderson, the Revs. Howard Elliott, Steele Craik (Auckland), Revs. T. A. Williams, I. Sarginson, W. J. Ashford, Saunders, C. Dallaston, J. H. Hinton, J. F. Jones, N. Kennedy (Dunedin), Rev. A. North (Napier), Rev. I. Archer (Invercargill), Rev. H. Cotton (Otaki), Rev. W. A. Evans, Rev. Dr. Hughes, Pastor Meyers (Wellington), Rev. E. H. Taylor (Thames), Rev. Van Staveren (Wellington), Messrs. H. Hill (Inspector of Schools, Napier), Robert Lee (Wellington), J. S. Tennant (Principal, Training College), W. Foster, D. Bedingfield, G. MacMorran, W. T. Grundy, J. C. Webb, J. Bary, C. Watson, H. A. Parkinson, D. Polson (Wellington), J. Caughley, E. U. Just (Christchurch), Miss Meyers, Miss England, and Miss Helyer (Wellington), Messrs. Mark Cohen (Dunedin), J. J. Ramsay (Alexandra), I. Hutcheson, R. Fletcher (Wellington), Mr. W. J. Speight (Auckland), Mr. F. P. Wilson, Professors Mac-Millan Brown, Chilton, and Hight (Christchurch), Professors Kirk, Laby, Von Zedlitz, and Hunter (Wellington); hon. secretary—Professor Mackenzie; hon. treasurer—Mr. C. J. Cooke.

This is a great crisis in the history of education in this country; it is an attempt to put back the hands of the educational clock for half a century, and consequently it would be well if all the citizens who wish to give evidence on this important issue could have been given every facility for so doing. The Defence League cannot agree that, as it is its petition that is before this Committee, it shall be given only two witnesses, while our opponents, the Bible in Schools League, have by the procedure adopted not only been relieved of the necessity of petitioning in favour of the revolutionary proposals they make, but have also been allowed to be represented by four witnesses at this inquiry. These are matters, however, that are not in our power to alter: they lie in the hands of this Committee and of Parliament. We shall endeavour to put the case for our petition as fully but as concisely as we can; but no two men can be expected to voice all the various objections of the different sections of the great mass of the people who are opposed to the platform of the Bible-in-schools party. Had we had opportunity for so doing we should have called witnesses from the following sections of the community:—

- (1.) Those who have had actual experience of the working of the New South Wales system that this country is now asked to adopt. Many of these witnesses live in New Zealand, and could easily appear before the Committee. These witnesses include Professor Laby, Rev. D. C. Bates, Mrs. D. C. Bates, Inspector Hill (Hawke's Bay), Rev. Job, Messrs. Fisher (teacher, Blenheim), Cummings, Loten, Morris (ex-Australian teachers), Rev. Howard Elliott, and many others. In order that there might be no doubt in the minds of this Committee as to the failure of the New South Wales system of religious instruction in schools the Defence League was considering the proposal to bring witnesses from New South Wales itself.
- (2.) Witnesses, lay and clerical, from within the combine of Churches that are agitating for this change. Many Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists are strongly opposed to the proposals of the Bible in Schools League. Among the Anglican clergy we may mention such men as the Revs. Mr. Hobday and D. C. Bates, who have spoken strongly against the proposals, and to these may be added many more who remain silent merely because of a mistaken sense of loyalty to their Church. Many Presbyterian ministers are strongly opposed to the proposed scheme. These include such representative men as Rev. Dr. Erwin, Rev. Messrs. W. Hewitson, J. Chisholm, A. Cameron, J. H. Mackenzie (Nelson), J. M. Saunders, A. A. Murray, Walter McLean, F. W. Robertson, J. Miller Dodds, and others. A similar dissent is found among Methodists—Revs. Knowles Smith, Cotton, Cossum, Richards, Seamer, Ranston, Joughin, and others. In all these Churches the great mass of the laity is either apathetic or strongly opposed to the scheme.
- (3.) Witnesses from the numerous denominations that have refused by overwhelming majorities to have anything to do with the scheme—Roman Catholic, Congrega-