

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 24TH JULY, 1914.

Statement of the Right Reverend HENRY WILLIAM CLEARY, Bishop of Auckland. (No. 1.)

1. I am here to-day to give evidence in connection with a certain petition now before both Houses of the Parliament of New Zealand. The petition in question is that of the Catholic Archbishop and Bishops and clergy of New Zealand, and of the Catholic Federated Societies representing the Catholic lay electors of New Zealand.

2. The matter of our petition deals with the request of an organization styled the "Bible in State Schools League" for legislation to enable a plebiscite (misnamed a "referendum") to be taken on a proposal to introduce a certain type of "religious instruction" into the public schools of this Dominion. Your petitioners have (among other things) declared "that support for the aforesaid plebiscite has been sought by grave and persistent misrepresentations." The nature of these misrepresentations has been broadly indicated in the petition. And your petitioners add, "In regard to the general subject of this our petition, and, especially in regard to the above-mentioned misrepresentations and false statements, your petitioners request your honourable House to direct its Petition Committee to take evidence which the Right. Rev. Henry W. Cleary, Bishop of Auckland, is prepared to tender on our behalf." A Bill is now before Parliament embodying the demand of that League, in its latest form, and the evidence which I propose to tender will refer, in its entirety, to that Bill, or to the statements or considerations which led to its introduction, or by which it has been commended or is likely to be commended to your honourable House.

3. The chief reason assigned for the introduction of this "referendum" Bill is this: that it is alleged to have been petitioned for by some 140,000 electors of New Zealand. And we gather from a remark of the Right Hon. the Prime Minister that, in point of fact, the Bill was apparently introduced on that account. For some unexplained reason, this alleged petition of the Bible in State Schools League has not yet been presented to Parliament. This leads to the following anomalous position: The allegation of such a petition is pressed upon Parliament as a ground for a radical alteration in our law—namely, a proposal for (in effect) ballot-box legislation over the head of Parliament. It seems to me to have been the plain duty of the League seeking such an important legislative change to place their alleged petition before Parliament. Then, if Parliament deemed it advisable, an opportunity could have been afforded to the League to give evidence in support of its claim, and to opponents to scrutinize the League's petition. As matters stand, it seems to me that the opponents of the particular change demanded are, in effect, called upon to justify their opposition to it. In other words, the proposed alteration of the law seems to be treated as if it were in possession, and the existing law is to be treated as if it were merely the claimant for possession. We Catholics can never accept as satisfactory to us a purely secular system of public instruction; but we recognize at the same time that it is in possession; and if, as regards the results of the non-presentation of the League's petition, the situation be the topsy-turvy one just now described by me, I must be taken as strongly protesting against it on behalf of those whom I represent here to-day.

### I. THE LEAGUE AND THE BILL.

1. The Bill now before the House embodies (as stated) the latest phase of the missing petition of the organization which (for some mysterious reason) styles itself "The Bible in State Schools League." As a matter of fact, the Anglican Bishop of Wellington (a member of the executive of that League) styles the ballot-paper in the Bill, "our question, and ours only" (*Auckland Star*, 8th July, 1914). "The Bible" is defined as "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." But the Bible in State Schools League does not want "The Bible" in State schools, but only scraps or fragments, or (as the Bill says) selections from it. Moreover, the League's petition and the provisions of the Bill are an admission of what follows:—

- (a.) That those biblical scraps or selections are to be prepared by the Government;
- (b.) That the electors of the Dominion are not to be allowed an opportunity of seeing and criticizing them before voting upon them;
- (c.) That the proposed Government biblical fragments are to be of such a nature that many people will, on grounds of conscience, object to them—hence the conscience clause for pupils (but not for taxpayers or teachers);
- (d.) That the Government fragments from "the Bible" are to be compiled by the State, printed, bound, stored, and distributed by the State, and taught by the State, at the cost of *all* the people of the State;
- (e.) That conscientiously objecting teachers must teach them, or take the consequences of refusal;
- (f.) That conscientiously objecting parents must submit to have their children taught it unless specially and individually exempted; and no exemptions will be given unless the parents adopt the humiliating resort of protesting against it—presumably in writing, as in Australia.

2. Stated briefly, the privilege of State-picked, State-taught, State-endowed extracts from "the Bible" is to be strictly reserved to one privileged party—namely, the party whose conscience