

religious teachers. It is for the Committee to give or withhold the use at their discretion. Efforts are now made in several district of this diocese to give religious instruction in the school outside school-hours, but those efforts do not fully meet the difficulties which the clergy are trying to cope with, for these reasons: Ministers very often are not fitted to interest and keep under control a large school; a man cannot conduct the discipline of a school unless he has had some training for the purpose; then the minister, if he goes to the school in the afternoon, finds the children fagged already with a hard day's work.

138. *The Chairman.*] Is it not possible to make an arrangement for the school to be available before school begins in the morning, or between the hours of opening and closing in the afternoon; could not some arrangement be made by the clergy of your diocese?—One clergyman does give instruction in the church before school begins.

139. But in the schoolroom, before school begins?—I suppose it would be possible, but the children would have to come earlier.

140. It has been arranged. I know where the Committee and the parents of the children were agreeable that a clergyman or other christian man of any denomination may come during the school-hours and impart religious instruction. Archdeacon Dudley, of Rangiora, was in the habit, for several years, of giving religious instruction from half-past eleven o'clock every Friday forenoon until half-past twelve o'clock. The parents of the children appreciated that gentleman's services. Now, I ask, why may not other clergymen follow his example?—In some places the clergy do take advantage of the provisions of the Act after school-hours, that is, after four o'clock; in other places an attempt has been made to give religious instruction before school begins. Objection, I fancy, would be made to "middle" day because it would cut short the children's time for recreation. At such an hour the children might be disinclined to attend, unless the clergyman was clever at teaching, and successful in interesting them.

141. It appears from a return laid on the table of the House that the clergy of all denominations take advantage of this provision only to the extent of 7 per cent. of the whole of the public schools of the colony?—The difficulties experienced by those who made such efforts were that many children would find it hard to come early in the morning; and in the afternoon that they would come to the lesson fagged after school duties; that in the middle of the day their hour of recreation would be cut short.

*The Chairman:* My object in asking these questions is to show that under the present Education Act it is possible for clergymen to impart religious instruction in the State schools if School Committees and parents and clergymen agree to make the necessary arrangements.

TUESDAY, 22ND OCTOBER, 1895.

Mr. ROBERT LEE, Chief Inspector of Schools for the Wellington District, examined.

*The Chairman* intimated that he would be glad to have any statement that Mr. Lee might like to make.

*Mr. Lee:* Have you any definite lines upon which to go, as I have not come prepared with any set speech.

*The Chairman:* Here are copies of the Irish National School-books. And you can speak to the general question?

*Witness:* I have not seen them lately, and I should like to look at them. [After doing so:] Do you wish to ask me any questions on any particular points?

142. *The Chairman.*] Will you just make a statement of the desirability and the probable effects of the introduction of the Irish National School-books into the public schools of the colony?—I may say, Sir, that, viewing the matter from all points, and considering the difficulties presented by the introduction of the religious element into the schools, I do not think it would be attended with the good results which are anticipated by those who are anxious to bring it forward. It would have the effect, I am afraid, of denominationalising the schools. It would, I fear, be a source of more or less difficulty on the one side, and on the other side of divisions and strife and contention. I think, as time went on, the several Committees would aim at placing in charge of the schools men of religious persuasion similar to that held by the majority of any particular Committee. I think, too, that although our teachers are now chosen for their capacity as teachers, for their intellectual education, and also for their fitness and aptness to teach, the time would come when they would be selected merely for their religious opinions. Then, again, there are so many sects of religion, and so many various renderings of Scripture and its translation generally, which would come before the teachers and their pupils, that I think it is probable it would lead to contention of one kind or another. It seems to me the business of the State is to deal with secular matters, with the training of intellectual powers, and that it is hardly the business of the State to also deal with the religious thought of the day. As to the reading of either the Bible or any given book, such as this Irish Lesson-book, as to the mere perfunctory reading of it in the schools, I think that would be attended with little gain, even from the standpoint of those who desire it. Unless some explanation were given by the teacher it would have very little value. I do not hold in any way with the interference of the clergy in the State schools, and I think this is only the thin end of the wedge to get it in. At present we have very great difficulty in getting the children to provide themselves with more than one reading-book, and this means the introduction of another not contemplated. That, however, is but a small matter; but looking at the whole question, as one has done from time to time, I can only say that the introduction of religious teaching into the schools is an element of discord, and has a tendency to import into our State schools system matter which is best taught by the clergy, or by those who have a special calling for the work. Our school-teachers at present are of no particular denomination, and we do not know or ask what