

1895.

## NEW ZEALAND.

## PUBLIC PETITIONS M TO Z COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF) ON THE PETITION OF JOHN EVANS AND 667 OTHERS, AND SEVENTY-FIVE SIMILAR PETITIONS, AS PER ATTACHED SCHEDULE, TOGETHER WITH MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND APPENDIX.

*Report brought up 24th October, 1895, and ordered to be printed, together with Minutes of Evidence.*

## REPORT.

The Committee has the honour to report as follows:—

1. That seventy-six petitions, representing 15,498 signatories, from all the provincial districts of the colony, dealing with the introduction of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books into the State schools have been referred to the Committee.

2. That the petitions pray generally—(a) That the Education Act should be amended to effect the purpose of the petitioners; (b) that the religious instruction required should be given by the State teachers; (c) that the text-books should be the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books; (d) that conscience clauses should be inserted to meet the views of teachers and pupils objecting to the instruction; (e) that a Bill dealing with the subject should be introduced this session.

3. That, with a view of supplying information of a reliable nature to your honourable House, the Committee invited leading members of the various religious denominations in Wellington, gentlemen interested in education, and office-bearers of societies for promoting the reading of Scripture in the State schools, to attend and give evidence on the subject.

4. That, as a result of the invitations, the following gentlemen appeared and gave evidence before the Committee: The Right Rev. Dr. Wallis, Bishop of Wellington; the Rev. W. Baumber, representing the Wesleyans of New Zealand; the Rev. J. Guy, representing the Primitive Methodists; the Rev. R. Glasson, representing the Congregational Union of New Zealand; the Rev. James Paterson, representing the Presbyterians of New Zealand; the Rev. Van Staveren, representing the Jewish Church in New Zealand; Mr. Grundy, Headmaster, Clyde Quay Public School, representing the New Zealand Educational Institute; Mr. Clement Watson, Headmaster, Te Aro Public School, also representing the New Zealand Educational Institute; Major-General Schaw, C.B., representing the Wellington Scripture Text-book Society; and Mr. Robert Lee, Chief Inspector to the Wellington Education Board. In addition to the examination of these witnesses, communications have passed between the Committee and Archbishop Redwood, of the Roman Catholic Church, and the evidence and correspondence is attached hereto for the information of the members of your honourable House.

5. (1.) The witnesses were almost unanimous in repudiating any charge against our educational system of being devoid of moral training for the young; several spoke in warm commendation of the ethics inculcated, and the charge of the system being a godless one was repudiated by all who did not limit the definition of "godless" to the absence of Biblical extracts. (2.) Valuable though conflicting evidence will be found regarding the benefits anticipated from the mere reading of passages of Scripture without comment: to allow the teachers to explain passages would inevitably lead to sectarianism. At the present time religious instruction may be given outside of school-hours, and has been tried with varying success. (3.) The evidence of the Rev. Van Staveren clearly proves that the members of the Jewish persuasion would view the introduction of the text-books with grave disapprobation. The telegram received from Archbishop Redwood is as follows: "Catholic sentiment opposed to plan *re* Bible-reading as solution of educational difficulty." The majority of the other religious denominations represented considered that the introduction of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books would strengthen the claims of the Roman Catholics for State aid for their denominational schools.

6. The evidence also goes to show that the reading of the Irish National Scripture Lesson-books would act prejudicially to teachers, in that the religious views of candidates would be debated when appointments were being made, it being only natural that parents should desire to have the supervision of Scripture-reading in the hands of those with whose particular views they concur.

That, after having carefully considered the evidence placed before them, the Committee has no recommendation to make.

24th October, 1895.

R. MEREDITH, Chairman.