

EUPHEMIA SIMPSON examined on oath. (No. 5.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are your position and qualifications?—I hold a C1 certificate, and I am in charge of Standard IV in the Newton East School, Auckland. I am President of the Women's Branch of the Auckland District Educational Institute, and I speak on behalf of the lady teachers in the primary schools. The Women's Branch of the Auckland District Educational Institute desires to ask this Commission to consider the question of improving the status of women in our schools. We are, and have been for some time, in communication with representative women in other districts, and there is no doubt whatever that a very deep and growing feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction prevails among the women in the education service throughout New Zealand—the southern women are indeed preparing a petition to Government on the subject—but particularly in Auckland and Otago, where the local Boards have persistently refused to admit the claims of women to any of the higher assistantships in schools of Grades 9 and 10, and have practically excluded them from the charge of schools of Grade 4. It is hardly necessary to point out that the widespread existence of deep discontent occasioned by these inequalities must militate against the efficiency of a large body of teachers—no group of men or women can do the best work while smarting under a keen sense of injustice. It is against human nature to expect it, and our schools must suffer as long as this feeling exists. It is not suggested that the work of the women in the schools is inferior to that of the men. They are required to take the same certificate and to work the same number of hours in any part of the school that the headmaster chooses, and yet, in spite of their ability and faithful service, able and experienced women have to suffer the humiliation of seeing young and comparatively incompetent men placed in positions above them, to the serious detriment of the schools for which they have worked so hard. The injustice does not cease when they retire, for they do so on a pension much less than that of the men who have only done equal work with them throughout their teaching career. Some of our women are leaving the service to take up other work, and, owing to the prevailing unrest and dissatisfaction, there is not the slightest doubt that others will do the same. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get teachers. A few years ago our local Board advertised in the daily papers requesting married women teachers to re-enter the service. The position has evidently not improved at all, for married teachers who have been out of the Board's employment for years have quite recently been invited to take up the work again, and uncertificated teachers have been sent to many schools, simply because no others were available. It is growing more and more difficult to recruit the ranks from girls of the right type, for the finest girls of to-day are not going to enter a profession where, no matter how talented they may be, they see nothing ahead but a hopeless blind alley as far as promotion is concerned. If they are to be kept in subordinate positions they prefer some less arduous occupation—one that does not make so many demands upon them, or entail so much self-sacrifice and brain-weariness. And, besides, there are other fields of industry where women of outstanding ability may earn very much more than they can ever hope to do at teaching, so that the inducements to enter this profession are becoming less and less. Then, again, owing to the fact that all the highest positions are held by men, the girls' side of the schools is becoming more and more neglected, and surely their training is at least as important as that of the boys. In some of our largest schools the Fifth and Sixth girls are taught entirely by men, while in most the Sixth class is in charge of a man. It can hardly be expected that many of the underpaid junior woman assistants will in the future qualify themselves to do such important and difficult work when they know it will bring no corresponding increase of salary; and yet the Sixth girls in every school should be under the constant charge and supervision of a competent woman. They are just entering into womanhood, and, from the very nature of things, no man is capable of controlling and directing their energies as wisely as a woman can. He can teach them square root and the use of the globes, but he can never have that sympathetic understanding of them which is such a vital factor in their education. It sounds incredible, I know, but there are men who actually cane the senior girls—not many, but some. It is a good thing I believe for men to take these girls' classes at regular intervals, for the man's influence helps to round out their character in other directions; they are the better for both influences, but the woman's should predominate, and under the present system it is almost completely absent. Again, as long as all the responsible positions in the schools are held by men, it seems obvious that the domestic training of girls can never take the important place it should occupy in our educational system. This matter vitally affects the general efficiency of our schools, for no system of education can be called efficient that has not some more or less direct bearing on the future career of the children. For all these reasons we consider that the efficiency of our education system would be greatly increased by giving women more responsible positions than they hold in our schools at the present time—that the principal woman assistant in the higher-grade schools should hold at least equal rank at equal salary with the second male assistant.

2. *Mr. Davidson.*] Have you ever considered the advisability of classifying male and female teachers separately, as is done in many other countries?—They are graded separately in Auckland.

3. I am not speaking of Auckland particularly, but a general grading for the whole Dominion?—You mean by that that the schools would ultimately become separated into boys' and girls' schools.

4. No, if you look at the scale of staffing and salaries you will find no distinction of sex whatever exists there?—That is so.

5. We will take the Victorian system. Under the scale of staffing and under the scale of salaries there is a separate classification of the sexes, and the positions and salaries of the first male assistant and first female assistant can be readily compared. Would it not be in the interests of the women if they could compare the salaries under such a system as that?—I do not exactly understand what you mean. The women in Victoria are not satisfied. They are agitating over