

produced by requiring the parents to pay fees for the children in the higher standards, and what effect by permitting the Committees to receive money contributions to keep up schools. I group these questions together, because they all relate to the cost of the system, and appear to indicate a desire not to interfere with the system.

The easiest question to answer is the last. "The Education Act, 1877," reckons as part of "The Board Fund" "moneys which the Board may receive from donations, subscriptions, or otherwise" (section 42); and as part of "The School Fund" "donations, subscriptions, &c. (section 80). In the annual report of the Minister of Education a statement is made every year of the income of the Boards from all sources. In the last report (p. ix.) is a statement for the year 1886. The "local receipts" of the Boards amounted to £2,438 13s. 11d. Page 5 of the Appendix gives the whole income, and specifies the amount received from local sources for each of the nine years from 1877 to 1885. In the same report it is stated (page xi.) that the Committees received at least £4,500 from sources independent of the Boards, and the data (which are unfortunately incomplete) are given on p. 6 (Table No. 6) of the Appendix. Similar information will be found in the reports for the three years immediately preceding. The effect of such local contributions is to add to the income of the Boards and the Committees, and not to reduce the capitation allowance. I have no means of estimating the degree in which the disposition to make voluntary contributions towards the maintenance of schools would be stimulated by a reduction of the statutory capitation allowance from the Government. It appears to me, however, that the character of the system would be materially altered by throwing any considerable part of the cost upon voluntary contributors.

I think, too, that the character of the system would be altered by imposing fees for the Fifth and Sixth Standards. The Education Act provides for the institution of district high schools, in which "all the branches of a liberal education, comprising Latin and Greek classics, French, and other modern languages, mathematics, and such other branches of science as the advancement of the colony and the increase of the population may from time to time require, may be taught;" and it is enacted that "for such higher education fees shall be paid." But in section 84, which prescribes a course of primary instruction, in which none of the subjects before named as being subjects of higher education or branches of a liberal education are included, it is expressly enacted that "no fees shall be payable at any public school except as hereinbefore provided in the case of district high schools." The Minister who carried the Bill through the House stated at length the reasons that induced the Government to hold that a system of national primary education ought to be a system without fees. The Bill contained a proposal for payment by the people not of fees, but of a capitation-tax of 10s. upon all children of school-age (between five and fifteen), whether attending school or not. This proposal was rejected by the House, with the result that the whole cost was thrown upon the consolidated revenue; and it is from this point of view that the system is commonly described as free. It might be called "free" if, though the child was received without specific payment, the parent paid a rate as a citizen and householder; but Parliament made it free in a wider sense, by refusing to allow even the levying of a capitation rate. To me, therefore, it appears that to demand fees would be contrary to the principles of the primary-education system of this colony.

As to the effect of the imposition of fees for instruction beyond the Fourth Standard. Upon the financial position of the Boards and upon the remuneration received by the teachers it is easier to speculate than to form an opinion. The number of children above the Fourth Standard is about $12\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. of the whole number on the rolls. Supposing that the regularity of attendance of these older children is neither better nor worse than that of the younger, there would be a saving to the Treasury of the capitation allowance on about 11,000 children. Of course, at £4 per head, this would be about £44,000, but less if the capitation allowance is reduced. The question now arises, how much of this amount lost to the Boards and to the teachers would be made up by fees? And, before this question can be answered, the answers to two others are necessary. How many of the 11,000 children would attend school if they had to pay for it, and what fees would they have to pay? My opinion is that very few would attend if they had to pay £4 a year each. Perhaps the Boards could obtain a greater revenue by fixing the fee as low as £2. My reasons for thinking that few would attend are these: First, although the Fourth Standard represents a very meagre and rudimentary education, which it has been thought right to secure for the children of the most careless and most thoughtless by means of the "compulsion" clauses, and below which a child under fourteen cannot be sent from an industrial school to service; yet, if the State assumes the position of refusing to go beyond this in supplying free education, many parents will think that anything beyond this is a kind of luxury which it would be a strange extravagance for them to indulge their children in. Second, long experience proves that, when the circumstances of families of the poorer classes become straitened the necessities of the present have first to be considered, and the school career of a fee-paying child having been interrupted for a few weeks or months through the pressure of temporary distress is often not resumed. Third, there are many people who do not take enough interest in the welfare of their children and of the State to send them with ordinary regularity to school when no fees are required, and such people are not likely to send them regularly, if at all, if they have to pay for them as well as send them. I have said that I can only speculate on the probable proportion of the £44,000 that could be received in the form of fees. As a matter of speculation I should put the proportion at considerably less than one-half. It would not be easy to fix the rate of payment. In a school of thirty children, with a master paid at from £120 to £150 a year, the parents could see that the cost for each child was from £4 to £5; but they might argue that the school had to be kept up whether they paid or not, and that, if they paid a fee of only £2, it would be better for the school than if they kept their children away. In a large school, where the average cost was less than £3, it would be hard to convince the parents that they ought to pay £4. I could point to one instance in which the older boys cost more than £4 each, and I do not think the parents would pay a full share in such a case. It is certain that, unless the fees amounted to a total equal to the total now paid as capitation allowance for the same number of children, the Boards would have less money to expend on salaries, and the teachers would suffer the loss,