

Waiapu Church Gazette.

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Bible in State Schools League

We print below a report from the Christchurch "Press" of an address delivered by Canon Garland, the Organiser of the Bible in State Schools' League, to a large gathering of the Mothers' Union at Bishopscourt, Christchurch. We entirely agree that this question of the re-introduction of the Bible into the State Schools should be decided by a referendum at an early date. The Government seem, at present, hardly to realise the quiet strength of the movement. It is for all who have the interest of the League at heart to consistently press forward its just claims.

In his introductory remarks, Canon Garland commented on the great power possessed by the members of the Mothers' Union (now numbering some 4000 throughout the Dominion) in influencing the moral and religious training of the children of the community. All the initial steps in civilisation were due to women, and also all advance in religion and morality. No Christian religion would exist to-day if it were not for women, and therefore it was only to be expected that such an organisation as the Mothers' Union should be concerned in all that went for the uplifting and the advance of the race.

A GENERAL DESIRE.

It was obvious, continued the speaker, that a very general desire existed for some form of religious teaching in State Schools. The Bible in State Schools' League comprised the Anglican, the Presbyterian, and Methodist Churches. They were asking that religious instruction should be restored to our educational system, and restored by a particular method. But not only did the League ask for something to be done. The Roman Catholic Church also desired a change, and asked for more than the League did. This was a testimony, and a sound one, that there was dissatisfaction in all quarters with the present system owing to its exclusion of religious teaching.

Those who desired no change were practically negligible in number. The Churches constituting the

League formed about 75 per cent. of the population. The Roman Catholic Church represented another 14 per cent. and the Baptist Church was asking for the Nelson system. It was perfectly clear that 90 per cent. of the people of the Dominion had, through their Church authorities, asked that some kind of religious instruction should be restored to our Schools. This was a very significant fact, and the question arose as to what system should be used. One proposal made by a small section of the community was that the Nelson system should be adopted. The League, however, would not accept the Nelson system upon any terms whatever. There might have been a chance in years gone by of this system proving a solution, but the obstacles and difficulties placed in its way were so great that the Churches constituting the League deliberately said that they would not have it as a permanent solution of the problem. The League stood firmly for the principles of the Australian system, though not asking for all the details which varied in different States.

FAILURE OF THE NELSON SYSTEM.

That the Nelson system had proved a failure was asserted by Canon Garland. In support he offered a valuable series of figures. A lady in Nelson interested in the question wrote to every school in the Education Board district—numbering 112. Replies were received from 103, and of these, 97 head teachers said there was no religious instruction in their schools. This meant that in the very home of the Nelson system, in the place where it had been most boomed and advocated, only six schools had it in operation. And then the Secretary of the Nelson Education Board said in writing that his Board had at no time given permission for religious instruction to be given in schools, as the Act provided that all instruction must be entirely secular. This meant that the school buildings were used only. The school itself received no instruction, but only those children who cared to remain after hours.

What were the facts of the case? The supporters of the Nelson system claimed that 16,060 children were reached by the system in New Zealand—that was nine per cent of the pupils after some sixteen years' operation of the method. Now in

Queensland the religious instruction system had been in work, and how did the results compare in its first two years? At the end of the first year's work (1911) the average for the eleven months was 16,748 children under instruction from their ministers. This gave 16 per cent. of the children in Queensland, at the end of the first year. In the second year 23,720 children received instruction, or a percentage of 26 on the net enrolment. This was nearly three times the percentage achieved in New Zealand after 16 years under the Nelson system. Queensland, in addition, gave every child the opportunity of reading Bible lessons, while New Zealand gave no such privilege. Another set of figures showed that in 1912, 39.5 per cent. of the children in daily attendance in Queensland had been visited by their own ministers. This meant that approaching one half were brought into direct personal contact with their own ministers during school hours. This was the system, said Canon Garland, with emphasis, which was desired for New Zealand. If those results could be achieved in Queensland, which was six times the area of New Zealand and only half its population, what could be done here?

ALLEGED INJUSTICE TO ROMAN CATHOLICS.

Upon the aspect of alleged injustice to the Roman Catholic Church, Canon Garland said he would repeat what he had said before:—If he considered this movement was doing an injustice to the Roman Catholic Church, he would have nothing to do with it. He could not see where any injustice could be done for this reason: They asked that the Schools should be open to Roman Catholic priests and sisters to go in and teach their own children in the same manner as it would be open to the Methodist or Anglican clergymen to do the same. Where was the injustice in that? The Roman Catholic clergy could not go into the Schools now, but if the League succeeded then the doors of those Schools now shut to the Roman Catholics would be open to them as the result of the work of the League. That they availed themselves of the privileges when it was won was shown by the fact that in New South Wales in a record of seven years the Roman Catholic clergy paid an average of 1000