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### Boys' Bible Class.

The Bible Class Camp this year will be held at Timaru. The tentative dates are from December 27 to January 5, the charge being £1 for ten days. For campers north of Wellington it will be only 10s. All information can be obtained from the Dominion Secretary, Mr. Trevor Williams, College House, Christchurch.

### Correspondence.

To the Editors,

"N.Z. Churchman."

Sirs,—When Canon Wilford thought it necessary to fill two columns of the July issue of the "N.Z. Churchman" with autobiographical details, he tacitly acknowledged the need of some apology for the lame and impotent conclusion of his letter—his statement of the grounds of his opposition to the policy of the Religious Exercises in Schools Bill. The plea that Canon Wilford's own work of 22 years will be undone if the Bill becomes law will not persuade any large body of New Zealand Churchmen to revolt against the action of their leaders. Moreover, if they will read the provisions of the Bill, which have stood unchanged for three years, they will find that it does not contemplate the undoing of anything which has been hitherto accomplished in the long fight for religion in our schools. Clause 6 provides that "if at any school it has been the practice prior to the commencement of this Act to conduct religious exercises in a form other than that prescribed herein, the controlling authority of the school may authorize the continuance of the first-named exercises in lieu of those prescribed by this Act."

Let us look at the facts. Because various Christian bodies could not agree 49 years ago as to the manner of introducing religion into the schools of the community, it was decided (against the wishes of the majority of the people) to exclude religion altogether. Who have been responsible, in the final analysis, for barring God out of the schools and banning the Bible? Our education has remained "godless" because Christian people have never before reached substantial agreement about what they want and ought to have. At last there is a policy which by its fairness and

reasonableness has commended itself to the leaders of our own and other religious bodies, who represent between 70 and 80 per cent. of the population. The Bill has won the approval of parents and others throughout the Dominion. If it becomes law, then in every school in the land, great or small, in town or backblocks, the Name of God will be honoured, something of His law and His love will be told in the words of Holy Scripture, and the children will be led to lift up their hearts to God in a simple act of worship. Canon Wilford reminds us that "by not teaching a truth, you do by that very fact teach that it is not a necessary truth." This very thing has been done for half a century in our schools: the total exclusion of religion has tended to create in the minds of the children, at their most impressionable age, a positive presumption against religion. Few will be found to deny that the provisions of this Bill would confer great religious benefit upon the children. When Canon Wilford opposes this reform in the supposed interests of the Church, he incurs a grave responsibility, hardly justified by his arguments. He condemns the Bill because it would "rob the Church of the first work its Founder gave," and would "separate the Bible from the Church at enormous risk." Let us examine facts again. The Bible lessons are to be contained in a "manual compiled by the Education Department after consultation with the representatives of the Christian Churches." [This clause appears to be the justification for Canon Wilford's phrase (which has been prominent in recent Roman Catholic attacks on the Bill) "a new kind of State religion."] What more could the State do than call in the accredited leaders of the various religious bodies as experts? Let us suppose that they decide (as well they may) to adopt the "Children's Bible" and the "Little Children's Bible," edited by Dr. Nairne, Dr. Glover, and "Q," for similar schools in England. What "enormous risk" could attend the introduction of those books into our schools? But, presumably the risk is incurred by allowing the State school teacher to fill a place which should be exclusively reserved for the recognized minister of religion or his deputy! Is there not the same risk in allowing the mother to read the Bible to her little ones at home? Would Canon Wilford view such action with apprehension and alarm? In all civilized countries to-day education is regarded as one of the most important functions of government. We may approve it or not; but the fact is that the

State, through its schools, is taking ever more complete possession of the child. The influence of the teacher is a factor in the development of the children, second only to the influence of the parents. Many teachers realize the great truth that there is no agent to be compared with religion for moulding and strengthening the character of the growing child. Is it Canon Wilford's contention that the teacher must nevertheless be deprived of this weapon? Are we required by Catholic principle to keep the Bible out of the hand of the teachers? Of course Canon Wilford, having said so much, is compelled to say more; and he does not shrink from branding the great mass of teachers as irreligious men and women, who would "not understand what they were handling, have not found God, have no faith, do not know what prayer means." It is difficult to find words to characterize such reckless language. Are our teachers irreligious beyond the average of the community?

There are few parochial clergymen who have not a fair proportion of State school teachers among their communicants and workers. As for the picture of teachers who "reject the faith" yet take part in religious exercises "in which they do not believe" rather than "take shelter under a conscience clause"—let the conscience clause speak for itself. The teacher need only "notify the Board or other controlling authority of the school in writing that he has conscientious objection" to the exercises and he becomes automatically exempt. The Bill contemplates the case in which all the teachers will notify conscientious objection. There is complete freedom of the teacher. Religious persecution in New Zealand is unthinkable to-day. Does any Christian parent wish his children to be taught religion by those who reject it? Canon Wilford finds the Bill "unfair to the teachers"; but his own scheme would compel any teacher who desired to bring a religious influence to bear on the children, to do so as the accredited representative of some denomination for the children of that denomination. That might certainly prejudice "both his popularity in the district and his chance of being appointed to another district."

The Church is not seeking to shirk her duty to the children: she is welcoming the chance of being able to do it better. Of course we do not believe that the religious exercises can be substituted for the religious training that the Church must provide for her children. But we believe that these exercises will in many cases provide