

THE TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

JULY 1924.

The ideal society, educationally speaking, would be that in which the grants available for the training of the young ideas were proportioned, not to the financial resources of the State, but to the highest requirements of education. The vision of enthusiasts—of small classes being taught by generously-paid teachers in roomy and perfectly equipped buildings—would then be realised. Unfortunately, such an ideal state of affairs is unattainable under existing conditions. The education vote has to be considered in relation to other urgent needs of the State, and to the taxpaying capacity of the people. But to-day it can be said that education is no longer the Cinderella of the official departments, to be stinted at the whim of Ministers, and treated as if it were the least of governmental activities. There exists in the community an educational conscience, which is becoming increasingly alive to the importance of education in the national economy. A sound public opinion is the best basis for legislative and administrative action, and the South Australian teachers, through their association, have striven year in and year out to create such an opinion in behalf of educational progress. They have made their appeal, not only on the ground of self-interest, though their activities have necessarily been concerned largely with bread-and-butter questions, but on the higher basis of the public weal. Even when the financial pinch was most severely felt, the annual conferences did not resolve themselves entirely into agitations for improved conditions. Now that the demands of the teachers for more liberal treatment have been satisfied in part at least, the association is freer than at any other time in its history to devote its attention to educational reform as distinct from questions of professional status. The address of the retiring President (Mr. W. Bennett), at the twenty-sixth annual conference yesterday, indicated several directions in which the conditions of the teachers might be further improved, but it was concerned also with the larger problems of education, and animated by a high sense of the nobility of the teaching vocation and the responsibilities of the teacher to the children who will be the citizens of tomorrow.

"Do we," as Mr. Bennett pertinently asked, "in our schools give sufficient training in the rights and duties of a citizen?" At one time such a question would have been deemed entirely irrelevant, and even absurd. The business of education, the enquirer would have been told, is to teach the pupil to read and write and figure—"the mere tools of true education," as Mr. Bennett aptly describes these requirements—and has nothing to do with the use to which he may afterwards put his attainments. Nowadays the tendency is to lay stress upon character-building as a guiding aim of education, and to desire that a grounding in citizenship and its responsibilities shall form part of the equipment of the new generation. The only safe corollary to an enfranchised democracy is a truly educated democracy. Teachers are necessarily impressed by the waste involved in so many children leaving school at the age of 14, receiving no further training in civic duties until their enfranchisement, and often not even taking up useful employment. "As a general rule," in Mr. Bennett's view, "no boy should be allowed to leave school until he had some employment to go to." Almost as great as the evil of juvenile unemployment, however, is that of the "blind alley" occupation. The existing industrial system, with its tendency to prescribe high wages for unskilled labour, increases the natural temptation to boys to earn good money immediately on leaving school, at the expense of advancement in later life. We must look to the greater development of the technical schools to correct this very real peril to the youth of the State and to the State itself. As the retiring President, the Teachers' Union points out, the growth of the activities of the Education Department in this and other directions and the increasing complexity of educational problems, make heavier calls upon the public school teachers, who are entitled to seek from the State adequate rewards for their exacting and inestimably important labours, and to expect the sympathetic support and co-operation of the public.

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TEACHERS' ANNUAL CONVENTION.

RETIRING PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

Appeal For Better Conditions.

The annual conference of the South Australian Public Teachers' Union was opened at the Flinders Street Baptist Lecture Hall on Monday morning. The Retiring President (Mr. W. Bennett) took the chair, and there was a representative assembly.

The opening address was delivered by the Director of Education (Mr. W. T. McCoy). He said he was very pleased to read the reports of the different branches of the Union, especially those in the country, which indicated satisfactory progress. He congratulated the teachers in the outback parts of the State for the work they had accomplished under somewhat difficult conditions. As to a comparison of their system of teaching with those in other countries, it was difficult to speak in general, but from his observations he was probably in a better position to say in what direction the system in Australia should be developed. In American schools, for instance, the children were taught first of all to become American citizens. In a Canadian school one could not fail to appreciate a similar tendency. While they were taught loyalty to the Empire, they could not get away from the idea that they were Canadians. The thing that impressed him chiefly while abroad was the loyalty of the British people. When in England he saw many evidences of that. An Englishman when passing the Cenotaph was easily distinguished by the fact that he raised his hat. People in the dominions soon learned that mark of respect.

The Australian Spirit.
The Director said that they should foster Australian spirit among their children, while at the same time keeping before them the spirit of loyalty to the Empire. There were suitable opportunities when teachers could impress upon the scholars the value of that respect and loyalty. In every country he visited he found that young children received special attention, but nowhere did he observe a better kindergarten system than they had in Adelaide. The English primary schools, on the average, were as good as the local schools. But there were schools available for children of 13 years who were going to enter different trades, and that was an admirable idea. In South Australia they did not have a special junior technical or domestic school for that age, with the exception of one recently opened at Thebarton. The teachers were well educated, also well paid. The care of mental defectives was a fine feature, and there were also medical and dental inspection periodically. The buildings, as a whole, would make one weep. As a contrast the schools in Sweden were wonderful. At one school he visited in Switzerland the school hours were 7 a.m. until 3 p.m., with an hour for lunch. In Great Britain he saw dozens of classes containing 60 pupils, but they were aiming at 40. Teachers were promoted without a proper assessment of the teachers' skill. If they happened to get a good teacher it might be because of his social popularity, or the influence of an inspector. The country schools would not compare with those in South Australia. Mural decorations were much the same as theirs. Canadian schools were, in that respect, a long way ahead of those in Australia. In some schools they had works of art costing up to £100 apiece. Their attention to mental defectives and crippled children was wonderful. They were still badly handicapped in South Australia. The buildings were not suitable, and they lacked facilities for developing the corporate spirit among the teachers. They were proud of their kindergarten, and primary schools, but in many respects they were far behind the other States. The Director said that during his travels he had never met a more earnest, hardworking, or efficient body of teachers than they possessed in South Australia, within the limits prescribed. Local teachers were also very careful of their personal appearance. There was the only State in the Commonwealth that had no residential college for teachers. He desired to see elementary agricultural and domestic art taught in all schools.

The thanks of the conference was conveyed to the Director for his address.

Aims and Objects.

In a comprehensive address on "The aims and objects of the union," Mr. Bennett said that while they included the assertion of the reasonable rights of teachers, and the endeavour to secure such conditions of service as they believed to be fair and just, their great object was the progress of education in their State.

Beside their children all other cherished possessions sink into insignificance.

He presented a vivid picture of the conditions at school in countries which educationally took the lead, which he then contrasted

with those in South Australia, where the equipment was insufficient and inadequate, and a condition which tended to generate physical defects among the children, and depicted the teachers' incomes in the various states of the Commonwealth.

The school, provided the teacher, should be as far as possible from the commercial policies of business, i.e., making a profit from the efforts of one class of people, and leaving another class of people to suffer.

It should be sufficiently large to admit of decent classrooms.

The buildings should be suitable for the purpose.

There should be room for each class, and at least one of these should be specially equipped for infants. It would be well if in all schools above class VI, provision could be made for Montessori teaching. Books should be modern and provided with large type.

There should be separate lecture rooms for both men and women, and these should be large enough for use in summer.

In every large school there should be a suitable office for the master of the household—a place where there were ready access with an office at all times.

Backward Children and Girls.

The treatment of backward children mentioned Mr. Bennett, had been discussed at a recent conference of the Education Society, and public interest had been awakened by the recommendations of the Advisory Council on Education.

These recommendations would be taken for making provision for the neglected classes.

The public opinion was generally in favour of giving aid for the backwardness of backward children.

No human institution over much per-

The Advertiser

ADLADE WEDNESDAY,

JULY 1, 1924.

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS.

No human institution over much per-

fection, but that is no reason for dis-

couraging the idealists who persistently strive to attain it. On the contrary unless aspiration is pushed high, and there is "driving dissatisfaction" with the obviously imperfect, it is impossible to look for the continuous improvement which is the sure sign of progressive life and development both in societies and individuals. The educational influences in our midst—happy and representative among those whose work in life is the training of the young—are not unreasonably Utopian. Their work may exceed their grasp, but the immediate aims or practical programme on which they are concentrating for the present are not beyond accomplishment by a community that can be induced to take a serious and an adequate view of the importance of education. As was pointed out at the Teachers' Conference on Monday both by the Director of Education and the retiring president of the Union, the glaring defects in the South Australian State school system are not inevitable and incurable. Similar deficiencies have been corrected in other countries with the need of a thoroughly efficient plan of training the young for the duties and responsibilities of citizenship is no greater than our own, and whose financial resources are perhaps no better able to bear the burden of cost. Government has, of course, many and varied claims made upon its scanty revenues for public services, but what department of its activities can submit demands more important than those of education? Making men and women fit to undertake the grave obligations of democracy is at least as necessary as the construction of roads and railways, or even the provision of material defence. Education supplies the intellectual armament by which the victories of peace are won, and it is peace, not war, that is the normal condition of a civilised society. Mr. Bennett, not without reason, asks that education shall be envisaged in a true and just perspective. The South Australian community spends over 10 per cent. more on its amusements than the total cost of educating its children in schools alone; it spends a larger sum than on the training of its young to be intelligent, well-informed, and law-abiding citizens. Do not such facts reveal a deficient sense of relative values that gives the educational idealist encouragement for his increasing efforts impress on the people the necessity of higher standards?

Mr. McCoy was sent abroad to observe and study the developments of education in other countries. He was trusted as an enquirer, and therefore, his report should command as it certainly deserves respect. When such authority availing himself familiar with all the facts tells us plainly that South Australia has still a long way to go to catch up even to the rear of the educational movement in other lands, th-

Teacher Registration and Training.

Mr. Bennett added that teachers would never be recognised as professional workers until all were registered, and a board of registration and examination appointed.

Such a system would prove an additional attraction to suitable young persons to enter upon professional training.

Touching upon the question of teacher training, he said that the "A" course for students should give to those of the one-year course a fitness for practical work much in advance of any previous effort.

It would be an advantage to determine whether in the case of the "B" course, the candidates were suited by refinement and enthusiasm for the nobility of their calling.

He suggested that their efforts should be directed so that they might be qualified to deal with domestic economy, music, rhythmic drill, agriculture, and/or wood-work.

Country teachers would appreciate any action which would make monitors more available in the smaller schools.

In the matter of school residences he pleaded for at least as suitable home accommodation as was granted to officers of other departments, and he expressed his gratitude to the Government for the finer type of houses built for teachers during recent years.

He was also grateful for the improvements which had been made in school residences. Much more, however, remained to be done.

A Tribunal of Appeal.

In reference to leave of absence, Mr. Bennett suggested that a permanent reviewing staff should be appointed, and that the amount of sick leave should not be based upon length of service.

He also pointed out the need for recreation leave.

He stressed the unfairness of the present system of appeal to the department.

A separate tribunal should be established.

This board would have control of the salaries and conditions of teachers.

He referred to the proposed Public Service Tribunal, and said teachers were glad that the Government intended to establish a tribunal and was willing to consider the union's suggestions.

The present situation was hopeful.

Referring to a recent case where a teacher was charged with a certain offence and acquitted, Mr. Bennett said he recommended the union to make representations to the Government that as teachers, while fulfilling the enormous duties of their calling, were laid especially open to attacks upon their character, it was their right to have the resources of the Department of Justice employed to defend them; and second, to make better provision in the union's legal defence fund for the protection of teachers.

These things were a manifest duty for the protection of a profession which laid heavy demands upon those who followed it, and upon whose honour and integrity the welfare of the State greatly depended.

The amount set aside for superannuation should be increased.

The Adolescent.

"The problem of the adolescent," the speaker added, "is very important.

Most children leave school when they have barely mastered the rudiments of the ability to read and write and have not had sufficient exercise in the use of these, the mere tools of true education.

Of all the wastes of our present civilization, this of the dawning powers of intellect and capacity is the saddest.

Our training should be at once more comprehensive and more varied.

We have made a good beginning with our apprentices' schools and technical schools.

Every one interested in education must be pleased to see signs of greater interest in the technical education of our youths.

On leaving the elementary school.

With a growth of the activities of the department in such directions as technical schools, home science schools, and arts and crafts schools, anomalies with regard to equipment, promotions, vacancies, and remuneration have crept in.

Statistics show that South Australia spends over 20 per cent. more on amusements than the whole cost of educating its children.

The great aim of all true teachers is the building up of character.

Much may be done by precept and direction, but infinitely more by example.

Initiation, both conscious and unconscious, plays a great part in the development of the child's character.

"As is the teacher, so is the class," is among the truisms of educational maxims.

Citizenship.

Concluding, Mr. Bennett said: "Do our schools give sufficient training in the rights and duties of a citizen?

If our children were going out from the primary school to secondary schools, then the work of training for citizenship might well be continued, but, as things are, the fact is that the children leave our schools at the age of 14, and receive very little training thereafter.

As far as their educational careers are concerned, we may regard the years from 14 to 20 as blank.

With the exception of the franchise, the only influence that of sheepishly blazed with patriotism.

There is only one true government, an government, but such a government

possibly only a salaried people, with knowledge, not merely of the rights, but of their responsibilities.

The children will be the rulers of the future.

A patriotic, demanding, creative, and courageous people, a people demanding greater opportunities and a more generous civilization than was demanded by the problems of the past.

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MR. W. BENNETT,
Retiring President of the Public Teachers' Union.

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