

October 30th 1913.

PROMOTION BY TEACHERS.

"One of the earlier recommendations of the Commission was that the inspectors should be relieved of the duty of examining school children for promotion, and that this work be carried out by the teachers of all schools simultaneously. This recommendation has already been given effect to, and I have no doubt that it will work as satisfactorily in South Australia as it has in the other States. The Commission felt that a teacher who is in daily contact with a child, and is daily testing its work under normal conditions, is better able to judge of the child's fitness for promotion than an inspector on one brief interview, when the real capabilities of the child might not be apparent.

MEDICAL INSPECTION OF CHILDREN

"I am proud to have been associated with the inauguration in South Australia of a system of medical inspection of school children, which was the direct result of the Commission's recommendation. Some of the members of the Commission met Dr. Gertrude Halley in Sydney, and we had evidence of the good work she had done there, as well as in Tasmania and Victoria. I think we can congratulate ourselves that we have secured the services of a lady so well qualified for her work, and one who has already shown that her appointment was fully justified. I am glad to know that the Government realises the value of this work, and that it intends to give Dr. Halley extra assistance, so that a much greater number of children and parents can have the benefit of medical inspection and advice.

INSPECTION OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

"In South Australia we have no system of inspection by the Government of private schools, either with respect to the attendance of the children or the efficiency of the teaching, and if we are to have an effective compulsory education law the private school should not be overlooked. The man whose children are enrolled at a State school may be, and occasionally is, fined for not sending them to school the required number of days, but what is done to the parent whose child is enrolled at a private school and fails to attend regularly? Again, who knows whether the education received at a private school is of the same standard as that which the State provides in its schools? According to the census figures for 1911 there were 49,413 children attending State schools, and 10,634 attending private schools. The Commission desired to have some guarantee that those 10,000 children are regularly attending efficient schools, and on this point no one in South Australia at the present time has any knowledge. At the same time the members of the Commission believe that the bulk of the private schools are efficient schools, and that the principals of them would desire to have the certificate of the Education Department.

SYSTEM OF ITINERANT TEACHERS.

"Another class of children, to the question of whose education the Commission gave earnest consideration, are those in the sparsely settled portions of the State. The Queensland system of itinerant teachers, which to some extent is also followed in New South Wales, appealed to the Commission as the best means of reaching isolated families." At this stage half-past six approached, and Mr. Coneybeer obtained leave to continue his remarks.

EDUCATION COMMISSION.

Adjourned debate on the motion of Mr. CONEYBEER—"That the report of the Royal Commission on Education be adopted by this House."

Mr. CONEYBEER said, in continuing his remarks on this motion, he did not want to devote more time in dealing with the advantages of education and with what other countries are doing. The advantages to a country of a complete system of education for its boys and girls were recognised by all. There was not one of them who did not now regret that he had not made better use of the educational opportunities he had had. And many would regret, as he did, that the opportunities afforded them when they were young had not been what they were to-day, and what they would be under the education scheme which had been formulated by the Commission. It was because he knew that members had those regrets that he had the greatest confidence that they would do their utmost to give the future generations what they themselves had been denied. In that connection he had been pleased to hear the remarks of the Premier with respect to the Education Department in the course of his Budget speech. He had always believed that the Premier, who was the son of a South Australian school teacher, had the cause of education at heart, and he appealed to him to allow every opportunity for the recommendations of the Commission to be considered this session so that any suggestions for improvements which members might make might be embodied in the Bill which was to be brought in next year. He deprecated any attempt to make the improvement of their education system a party question. All parties must agree that it was the bounden duty of the State to endeavor to provide as good a system of education as any other country had, and if that was not financially possible they must be prepared to make sacrifices to attain as near as possible to the ideal. The Commission had been subjected to some criticism because they had paid more than one visit to the other States. When the Commission had been first appointed they had been authorised to make enquiries with respect to higher education and the University of Adelaide, and on the first visit to Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland the evidence had been accordingly restricted to those subjects. Later on, when the scope of the Commission had been extended to all branches of education, it had been necessary to ascertain what the other States were doing in primary, technical, and agricultural education, and the extent to which the information obtained in the other States had been used in remodelling their own system was sufficient justification for the expense that had been incurred. At the same time they had not slavishly copied the other States. They had chosen what they considered the best ideas, and incorporated some of their own which in the opinion of the Commission, would place their system ahead of anything in the Commonwealth. The practice of comparing the work of public departments in South Australia with those of the other States was not peculiar to the Education Commission. Almost every Commission which was considering a question of national importance secured the benefit of the bigger experience of the eastern States, and many reforms connected with public works, railways, the public ownership of wharfs, water conservation, and irrigation schemes—such, for instance, as the use of wooden pipes—had been the direct result of information obtained in Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland. An educational expert of wide experience had said of the Education Commission's report that, for thoroughness and breadth of conception of the requirements of the present day, it was the best report on education ever presented in Australia. There might be slight differences of opinion as to details, but the report as a whole had the unanimous support of the members of the Commission and of the public, including many high educational authorities. The report provided for a system of education from the kindergarten to the University. It dealt with four branches of education—primary, secondary, technical and agricultural, and University education—and it provided for State control right up to the doors of the University. At present, children were required to attend the primary schools for six years, between the ages of 7 and 13, the minimum attendance allowed by the Act being four days a week, or 35 days per quarter. Under the Bill which he had introduced in 1910 it had been proposed to make the compulsory age from 6 to 14, as was the law in all the other States, and to require attendance on every day that the school was open, which was also the law in most of the other States. The Commission, however, after full consideration, had decided not to accede to the very strong recommendation that had been made to alter the present law. The officers of the Education Department

avored six years as the compulsory commencing age, but the evidence of the medical witnesses was against them. At the same time, while the commencing age remained at 7, children under that age were not prevented from attending the schools. As a matter of fact, a large proportion of the children attending the schools at present were under 7 years of age. The Commission had also considered the question of establishing State kindergartens, but had decided not to recommend it. They preferred to leave the kindergarten work to private effort; and, in that connection, they had been much impressed with the excellent work being done by the Kindergarten Union, which at present received a grant of £500 from the Government. The Commission resolved to recommend that the payment of the grant to the union should be continued. The Commission had been strongly urged by the late Director to insist on every-day attendance, but on making enquiries in the other States where that practice was in vogue the Commission had come to the conclusion that very little would be gained by it. In 1912 from 81 to 87 per cent. of the children had attended the required number of days, and satisfactory reasons had been given for the absence of from 12 to 18 per cent. of the children, so that the actual cases of neglect amounted to less than one per cent. Practically the same results were secured in the other States under the every-day attendance conditions. While the Commission had agreed to require the attendance at primary schools of only children between 7 and 13 years of age, they had decided to make attendance at secondary schools compulsory within a radius of three miles up to the age of 14 years. With that aspect of the question, which was an innovation so far as Australia was concerned, he would deal more fully later on. The principal suggestions for reforms in the primary schools had come from the teachers, who had been invited by the committee of the South Australian School Teachers' Union to make suggestions, which had been put before the Commission by the president (Mr. V. J. Pavia). Those suggestions, by the way, related more to the teachers than to the children. The teachers had complained that the conditions under which they worked, the size of the classes, and the length of the school day involved considerable strain on them, and had made a number of suggestions for reducing the curriculum, asking that in future the curriculum framed by the department should be reviewed by a curriculum board on which they would be represented. They had also expressed dissatisfaction with the system of classification of teachers by a committee of three inspectors, and had asked for the appointment of a teachers' classification board, on which they would have representation, and an appeal board to deal with objections to the decisions of the classification board. Other requests had been made for increases of salaries, especially for the headmasters of very large schools, and for long leave. The Commission had given sympathetic consideration to all the requests made by the teachers, not only because they wished to act justly towards them, but because they realised that the success of the education system depended on having a competent, contented, and loyal teaching staff. With regard to the question of strain, they carefully compared the conditions under which the teachers worked in South Australia and in the other States, and they believed that when effect was given to the recommendations of the Commission the teachers would have little cause to complain of the strain put upon them other than that which was inseparable from the teaching of children. The request for increased salaries had been approved and given effect to at a cost of about £13,000 per annum, and that had been given to those most in need of it and most deserving of it, namely, those teachers who were previously receiving less than £250 per annum, and the headmasters of schools with an attendance of 800 and over. The request for a classification board, including a representative of the teachers, had been approved, and there will be an appeal board consisting of a person or persons not in the employ of the Education Department. The length of the school day was practically the same in all the States, but the classes in South Australia, especially in the metropolitan area, were, as a rule, larger than those in the other States. They had recommended that the maximum number of children for a male teacher should be 50, and for a female teacher 40. In