

**"IS IT WELL WITH THE CHILD?"**

**THE EDUCATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN**

**WHAT LED THE COMMISSION TO MAKE ITS RECOMMENDATIONS.**

"The Education Commission" was the subject of an address delivered by Mr. T. Ryan before members of the Hindmarsh U.L.P. Educational League yesterday afternoon. Mr. Ryan said:—

"Quite in keeping with the day and the occasion of our gathering is a text which I wish to submit from II. Kings fourth chapter and 26th verse, in which we read, 'Is it well with the child?' And she (his mother) answered, 'It is well.' This enquiry, although nearly 2000 years old, is still exercising the minds and attention of the world's wisest and best. And an attempt has been made, even if only an attempt, to give an answer. This has generally been in the way of educational legislation, and it is a tribute to the progressive spirit of our people that our educational laws and Acts are more often found in the crucible than those governing any of the great departments of life. In our own State members of the commission found many gaps and needs, the first I think being the need of a national conception of education, and the recognition that there can be no national system of education unless it be one which will be for reducing the numbers of our children and our people who are on the bottom rungs of the ladder, and one in which the higher advantages and best prizes will be determined by the efficiency of the child rather than the purchasing power of the parent, and this can only be possible where there is a complete system of co-ordination right along the educational line. Of course we were quickly impressed with the fact that this would mean expenditure, and that we in South Australia must be prepared to spend as much per head as our neighbors; in fact, more, owing to the sparseness of our population and the indisputable fact that for years and years it has been a State policy to eliminate or strangle private scholastic institutions rather than co-operate with them, as is done in almost all the other States. The figures of expenditure do not describe in full our backwardness; they are, however, as follow:—

Actual Cost per Head of Population for 1912.

N.S.W.	Vic.	Qld.	S.A.	W.A.
19-7½	17-1	17-8	13-9	22

"Then in other States a good deal more is done in providing school materials. We found that much of the work in the primary schools was carried on under such conditions as could not make for the welfare of the children. We found many cases where, instead of teachers having classes of from 30 to 40 scholars, there were 70, 80, and 90, and those in crowded rooms where the sanitary arrangements were simply vile, such a thing as a common room for students and teachers being practically unknown, and not one single school in the whole of South Australia with the facilities of a swimming bath—one of the essentials of successful education. We realised that these conditions were not well for the child, and so we recommended an alteration, making 50 children the maximum number for any male teacher to instruct and 40 for female teachers.

"We readily recognised the great need of kindergarten work and appreciated the voluntary efforts which had been made by those managing the free kindergarten, and recommended a yearly grant to those people so employed.

"We were further brought face to face with the great need of medical inspection and medical supervision. We had ample demonstration that a badly lighted school could only produce deformed and inefficiently equipped children. None of these conditions could be considered as being well for the child, and so the recommendation was instantly made for the appointment of a medical inspector and nurse. So far only one doctor and one nurse have been appointed, but the doctor was able to say up to the date that we had examined her that she has examined a large number of children, and that from 23 to 24 per cent. of the children were suffering from defects unattended likely to interfere with their educational progress. We have here one doctor and one nurse, while New South

Wales has 12 doctors, Victoria three doctors, Tasmania four doctors, Queensland eight and a number of dentists. There can be no doubt that our medical staff will have to be considerably augmented, due regard being given to the dental profession.

"We found that the lavatory accommodation in many of the schools is inadequate, that the seats have no backs in many cases, and the hygienic conditions of the schools have been utterly neglected; that in many schools it was a scramble for a child to reach a wash-basin, while dreadful to think of a school of 500 using six towels which were changed only once a week. No wonder our advocacy of swimming baths?

"It is well to remember that at the present time there are many thousands of children who are not covered by the State primary or secondary schools. It was a revelation to find that one-sixth of the children of all ages are being educated in private schools, and any system of education to be adopted in the future cannot afford to ignore, nor have we the right to ignore, these children or their parents or their teachers. They must be part and parcel of a great scheme, and it must be admitted that up to the present no section of the community has greater cause to complain than those who make themselves responsible for the up-keep of these schools. The system has, in effect, said to the parents of South Australia that 'Unless you are prepared to accept every penny spent on your education by this State you shall have none.' Now there are always people in the community who will use private educational institutions at either the beginning or ending of their children's educational careers, many people saying, 'My child is very young. I will send him to a private school so that he may become used to school conditions.' Others, again, will say, 'Now that my boy has gone through the splendid primary schools of the State I will let him go to one of the various denominational colleges for a while.' And how have we dealt with those people? We have said to them, 'This State is providing yearly 48 scholarships, 40 of these must be exclusively reserved for State school attendants, eight of these will not be re-

served for private schools, but private schools will be able to compete,' and the results show that in 1910 49 prizes were allotted by the State, 48 of which were won by scholars of our Government schools. In 1911 46 were awarded and 46 were taken by the scholars of our Government schools. In 1912 48 were available and 46 were retained by the children of State schools, or the State school children really had the opportunity of competing for 133 prizes, while the children attending private schools, numbering one-sixth of the children of school-going age were only eligible to compete for 24, and, further, the children were protected from competition for 120 of these prizes, while children attending private schools were protected in none, but were limited in the struggle for success to the 24 prizes given. The mistake that has been made, and is being made, by the best friends of the education system is that we have allowed our vision to be blurred, and we have looked at this question too much in the past as to how it will benefit or affect this State school or that denominational school. If we would have it well with the child, then let us eliminate the question of school and teacher, and remember the prize belongs to the child, that it is the centre of interest, that it is the State's duty to assist the children with ability entirely without regard to the school from which they come or where they may desire to go. I have always objected out of regard to the child of the worker to this circumscribing of educational prizes, and as a democrat I say, because the public funds from which the scholarships are given are contributed by all of the taxpayers, it appears to be a mere question of common justice that the benefits conferred by such scholarships should not be limited to the pupils of any particular school, and that every boy and girl in this community shall stand on a com-

mon footing. Further than that, I think that should the non-State scholars of this community be able through scholarships to draw on the exchequer to the extent of, say, 20,000 a year it could only be done by doing the work for which the State would have to pay £80,000, and if my neighbor instead of taking £45 from the State for the education of his child is satisfied to take £15, then I realise that there is at least an additional £30 left for the children who, like my own, can look for no other than the State system. I know bogies that have been raised in the past—let us hope not to be raised in the future. On the one hand the denominationalists tell us we are raising a breed of godless children, and on the other hand we are warned of the bogies of sectarianism. Let us worry about neither. 'The commission said, 'This system shall be mended.' Scholarships must at least be double, some being reserved

exclusively for private schools and safeguarded from invasion for that number in proportion to their attendants.

"This was the only subject upon which the commission did not come to a unanimous decision. I cannot help thinking it was our greatest mistake. Still it is a great advance on existing conditions, though I am hopeful that I will live to see the time when a more democratic and just system of equal rights will prevail for children as well as adults.

"The following figures will show that the question of private schools had to be seriously considered:—

	From 7 to 13 years of age.	Total irrespective of age.
Attending State schools ..	36,585	49,412
Attending private schools ..	6,047	10,634
Educated at home ..	831	1,579
School not stated ..	918	1,413
University ..	—	587
Totals ..	44,381	63,425

"Perhaps the greatest need for the development of a community like ours is the development of technical education. Here our State has lamentably failed. Although somewhat new in South Australia, though well known in other parts of the world, was the establishment of a trade school as an answer to our question, 'Is it well with the child?' Oh, the tragedies of life that have been enacted by fond mothers and fathers in their attempt to make doctors, lawyers, and clerks of their sons, and music teachers of their daughters instead of making them tradesmen and tradeswomen, may I say? There has recently come an answer that men and women are most likely to be well when they are useful rather than when they are wealthy, or even well dressed, and the establishment of these schools for the teaching of trade education and manual work is one of the great revolutions of modern times. When a jack-knife and a piece of wood will show a boy the accuracy of his work more clearly than many lectures. His life will stare him in the face, and the higher moral educators hold that manual training is the best means of developing an upright character. Straight testing, perseverance, order, and method once clear in physical operations are readily translated into the mental plane. Mental imagery is enriched and the resources of the mind are laid open by manual training. We actually saw boys in their trade school leading their classes who in their primary work were best known for both indolence and truancy.

"The education system of the future which the commission recommends will promote the extension of domestic arts, cooking, and household duties. There is no doubt but that these trade schools—one of which we hope will be established near Thebarton—are going to supply a great need in the education system—as great, if not a greater, need than the high school movement is filling. It will bring to the aid of the community a more experienced and highly cultured class of mechanics; and, after all, man's greatest need is trained man.

"For the benefit of those who foolishly think that the present high schools are