

Register 25th September 1899

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The Register.

ADELAIDE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1899.

THE TEACHERS' CONFERENCE.

The Teachers' Union has a full agenda-paper for its annual conference, which will be opened to-day. At the last reunion of the British Teachers' Guild the new President, Professor Bryce, remarked that teachers as a rule were somewhat tired of what he termed "the politics of education," and many of the South Australian teachers have good reason to agree with this sentiment. The Union was established primarily to enable the teachers, as a distinct and important section of the people, to express their ideas on matters closely affecting their welfare; and if it should allow itself to be gradually drawn under the tutelage of the education and other administrative authorities, or even to be suspected of any partisanship in politics, much of its power for usefulness would be lost. That would not be the way to elicit from the members of the organization frankly stated opinions, or to lead to the formulation of plans and suggestions bearing upon the existing educational regime. At the conference now to be inaugurated the discussion of the eighteen motions of which notice has been given would be enough to occupy all the available time; but, as it is, the delivery of addresses by outsiders will

practically monopolize the larger share of attention. If both departments of the programme can be attended to, well and good; but business should have the first place. The special feature of this year's session will doubtless be the consideration of the new relations proposed between the University and the teachers under the Education Department. The Minister has in Parliament outlined the main characteristics of the scheme, and he will probably give further particulars to the conference. Professor Bragg, who has recently made an extended tour with the object of collecting information relating to the subject, is also announced to deliver an address, and he will be able to throw some light on the kind of assistance which the University classes are intended to afford to the training students.

A speech was recently given at Harvard College in America on the question of bringing the Universities into closer touch with the teachers. The speaker was a gentleman evidently well versed in his subject, particularly as it affected the scheme now in force at Cambridge; and he pointed out that the ordinary University methods are not exactly suited to the kind of work entailed in the training of teachers. In fact, at Cambridge the lectures have been entirely inadequate to the special purpose for which they were intended, and some new system must be devised. It has become too much a habit with some of those who lecture in the classic halls of learning to simply talk at the students without endeavouring to come into close contact with them, and to thus ascertain and remove the difficulties which they may have encountered in the effort to master the details of subjects. There is reason for questioning whether it would be wise for the Government to altogether relinquish its hold upon the training of the teachers or to abolish the Training College. We had hoped that in the scheme finally formulated means would be provided to enable teachers, when they had reached the age at which University work would be of full benefit to them, to devote themselves entirely for a couple of years to study, without having the cares of teaching upon their minds. The proposal which the Minister has indicated, however, arranges this leisure for study at the end of the primary school course instead of at the close of the pupil teachership. The result will be that teachers will enjoy no collegiate course, properly so called. Whether this is the best arrangement that could have been made is a question which should be carefully considered by the teachers as well as by the heads of the department and by the University authorities.

One important entry on the agenda-paper concerns the unnecessarily severe examination tests set by the majority of the Inspectors in arithmetic to be worked by young pupils. This is a matter which for years "The Register" has gone before the public,

and the officers of the Education Department should devote special attention to it. The present code demands the exercise of powers of reasoning which in ordinary healthy children are not generally acquired until school has been left behind. The calculations required, not only for working on slates or paper, but also in mental arithmetic, are frequently beyond the grasp of the juvenile mind. To a few children they may be easy, and those who do them may pride themselves upon the fact, acquiring from the results of the school examinations in arithmetic an exalted notion of their cleverness which the experience of subsequent years may completely falsify. Nothing is more fallacious in education than to mistake precocity for evidence of future promise and extraordinary capacity; but the system of making arithmetic the "piece de resistance" of every annual examination has a distinct tendency to foster this error. Then some of the reading lessons which the children are expected to fully understand are beyond their comprehension, and ought to be replaced by others of a simpler nature.

These matters closely affect the daily life and work of the teachers, but they should also have a special interest for parents. The strain of needless anxiety is introduced into the minds of both teachers and pupils when the standard of examination in particular subjects is inordinately high. In addition to such matters as these, some consideration will be demanded by others financially affecting the educational staff. The Superannuation Fund requires just now a good deal of tact and judgment, and efforts are being made to secure a full attendance of members of the Union so that the subject may be adequately discussed. Proposals for the establishment of a Sick Fund are also under consideration. Evidently from a pecuniary point of view some of the teachers are finding the "manual training" system rather a serious drain upon them, as it involves the payment of money for materials and the making up of losses through default of parents who will not contribute anything. There is much truth in Professor Bryce's remark that the mere physical side of study ought not to oust from their places in the schools those lessons which impart a literary taste and an interest in humanity. Many a teacher who is obliged to make a great deal of fuss about the preparations for a lesson in manual training feels that relatively he could do the children far more good by telling them a story. These and other topics ought to be discussed in a manner which will show that the teachers recognise that after all they are the best authorities upon the working of the education system; and that they are able and willing to give full expression to their opinions in the interests of the public.

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THE TEACHERS' UNION.

The fourth annual conference of the Public Teachers' Union was opened on Monday morning by his Excellency the Governor, who made a most interesting speech, and showed how practically he had devoted himself to the subject of education when he was a resident of the old country. The Minister of Education, who followed, expressed his keen sympathy with the teachers, and gave some additional particulars of the new system by which the training of teachers will be undertaken principally by the University. In the afternoon a garden party was given in Victoria Park by Sir Langdon Bonython, president of the Adelaide Teachers' Association. The Vice-Chancellor of the University received the teachers, and a number of other guests in the evening, and a musical programme was interpreted in the library of the University by students of the Elder Conservatorium, while lectures and experiments were given in the laboratories. The conference opens this morning under the presidency of Sir Langdon Bonython. Addresses will be delivered by Mr. Burgan and the Victorian delegates, and in the afternoon officers will be elected, and motions tabled. Dr. Borthwick will lecture on "The South Australian Health Act," with lantern illustrations, in the evening.

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURES.

FRENCH HISTORIANS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

The sixth of a series of lectures on French literature of the nineteenth century was delivered at the University by M. de Lamoignon on Monday afternoon, when the chief historians were dealt with. The lecturer prefaced his description of their writings by remarking that the freedom of speech which has been the result of the Revolution was one of the constant conquests of the era. Under the old régime of France there were several instances of historical writers suffering imprisonment and other restraints in consequence of references in uncomplimentary terms to tyrannical sovereigns. Augustin Thierry, the guide and master of the historians of the century, and the founder of the school of geographic historical writing, whose arduous study led to his total blindness for the last thirty years of his life, was first passed in review. His vivid pictures of the manners, customs, and passions of the age had all the animation and freshness of life. The best brought under notice was Guizot, the popular professor at the Sorbonne, and author of the "History of the English Revolution." In connection with this work a passage was quoted, in which he spoke of his task as that of tracing the courses which had given the English monarchy the healthy vitality which the French and other European nationalities were still seeking to develop. Guizot derived the origin of civilisation from what he deemed its four foundation elements—the Church, monarchy, nobility, and the commons—in his two great works, "The History of Civilization in Europe" and "The History of Civilization in France." From him the lecturer passed to Mignet, the historian of the great Revolution, and who was himself an ardent participator in the revolution of 1848. In delineating the great cataclysm, which commenced in 1789, Mignet showed the development of the struggle for liberty through successive growths of political feeling from the time of St. Louis to that of its unfortunate victim, Louis XVI. Mignet, besides being the author of many valuable historical essays, afterwards comprised in one chief-d'oeuvre, had at the time of his death in his ninetieth year amassed material for a history of the Reformation, which, however, had never been published in deference to his objection to appearing as the author of an unfinished work. Thierry and Michelet, men of marked contrast, between whom was found all the difference of the politician as compared with the poet, were the last two whose literary careers were depicted. The former was another historian of the Revolution, and few works had had such a success as his history of the Consulate and of the Empire. The appearance of each of its twenty volumes created quite a sensation in the literary world of the time, and the work won for him from the Academy the honorary title of National Historian, an honour rarely bestowed. The lecture closed with a graphic sketch of the genius of Michelet, the author of the most masterly history of France yet produced. He was one of the most original of historical writers, and the possessor of a style not without faults, but remarkably clear. He often introduced the humorous side of historical aspects. Throughout the lecture the outlines of the great historical geniuses passed in review were impressively depicted, and an instructive hour's discourse was attentively listened to.

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1899.

AN EDUCATIONAL CONGRESS.

Worthy of an occasion of great public interest were the addresses delivered yesterday at the opening of the Teachers' Conference. They could not fail to leave a deep impression not only of the value of education but of the need of extending the work of the schools and raising it to a still higher standard. The Governor's opening speech touched suggestively on several current topics. His Excellency displayed the character of an expert, but his sketch of the points to be looked for in a good school afforded ample evidence of keen observation and acute reflection. From so competent a source it is gratifying to receive acknowledgment of the admirable quality of the teaching under our South Australian system. Such appreciation of the labors of an estimable, hard-working, and not too-well-paid body of men and women encourages and stimulates. Nor does it lessen that perception of deficiencies, whether of system or individual, which is the pre-requisite of satisfactory progress and improvement. His Excellency's picturesque description of what a school manager in England expects or hopes to find when he visits an institution under his watchful care furnished incidentally a rule by which, applying it to our own schools, some of their weakest points are made plainly visible. Fortunately neither the Department nor the teachers are ignorant of what is lacking, or indifferent. When Lord Tennyson, for example, mentioned the English maximum of 40 in a class, the contrast with our own inadequate arrangements provoked a natural smile. The teachers realise only too painfully how much better they do at least this thing in the better-class schools of the mother country. Mr. Whillas, the President of the Union, struck a true note, and one that should command attention, when he enforced the danger of a too