

THE WORK OF TEACHING.

"ONE OF THE NOBLEST PROFESSIONS."

MR. G. H. REID IN PRAISE OF TEACHERS.

The students of the Sydney Teachers' Training College appeared in public for their first "commemoration" on Saturday morning (says The Sydney Daily Telegraph).

When Mr. G. H. Reid, who was to deliver the first annual address, came in he requested that two choruses should be sung before the speeches began. This having been done, he walked over to the edge of the platform for his address with a pleasant smile, and was hailed with shouts of welcome and the singing of "He's a jolly good fellow." As he began to speak there was a good deal of interruption from the more boisterous spirits, at which Mr. Reid was moved to protest, pleading that he had been travelling since, he believed, 6 o'clock on the previous morning—an announcement received by the youths with incredulous "Ohs!" "At any rate," said he, "I have been travelling for 24 hours, in order to keep faith with you to-day." There was at this much cheering, and the implied rebuke told, for the noise practically ceased.

—The Combat Against Ignorance.—

Mr. Reid, explaining that he was about to read his address, said that in doing so he was following the example set 25 years ago by one of the greatest classical scholars of the world, and one of the greatest orators he had ever heard, Professor Badham—(applause)—whom he as Minister for Public Instruction, had asked to open the high schools of Sydney. After a reference to the extensive range of the work of education undertaken by the State, Mr. Reid said that the students of the Training College, even in their peaceful sphere—("Ohs")—had an enemy to vanquish. Over the destiny of humanity ignorance had cast its spell, and even in this twentieth century of the Christian era ruled with scarcely diminished powers. The most gifted ancestry, with the longest line of intellectual ancestry, looked first upon life and light with eyes that saw not, and reasoning powers devoid of reasoning. The tiny limbs might belong to an infant Hercules, the spark of soul might be the beginning of Shakspeare's genius; but the darkness of ignorance, in the sense of no knowledge, surrounded the child at its cradle. It was the privilege of the teachers to help the judgment and to guide the wayward steps of those little souls to their larger destinies.

—Necessities of the Schools.—

There were three great necessities in our public schools, if they were to realize their highest pitch of usefulness. There must be regular attendance, there must be discipline, always thorough and always kind—("Ohs" from the back of the hall)—and there must be earnestness, alike in teacher and pupil. Then they would be scarcely fitted for their mission to the young in these public schools if they had not a belief in humanity; and if they had a belief in humanity, they must surely have a belief in God. Following whatever path of religious life they liked, attending this church or that, or none at all, they must feel that behind these majestic and well-ordered wonders of the material universe, behind all these infinite sagacities of function which existed in each of the mysteries of living things, there must, was, and ever is, and must be, a living Creator. (Applause.) The teachers were commissioned to train in the schools the vast army or climbers of the ladders of life. They saw strange contrasts in these climbers. Some that shaped the best fell to the ground, others who seemed to share the worst went to the top. Some could climb some ladders, and others not at all. Some minds that would have excelled in literature had been buried in agriculture; some minds, reformed by classics, would have excelled in science. (Hear, hear.) Some men who would have made grand landmen had been sent to sea, and some men who would have made magnificent sailors had been compelled to live and die on shore.

—Knowledge, Ambition, and Good Conduct.—

But there are a few ladders which children at school could be taught to climb, which would help them to climb all the

other ladders. The first was that of knowledge. Some people unhappily thought that knowledge consisted of words, and that when once these words were committed to memory the child had learned all that the words could teach. Yet the child might have learned nothing at all. It might repeat the words faithfully, just as the phonograph did, and know as little about them as the phonograph. Knowledge consisted not of words, but of ideas. It was when the pupil understood what the words really meant that he had acquired knowledge from them—something more than the sound they made in the ears and the forms they presented to the eyes. The second ladder was that of ambition. How to turn this desire to excel into channels of learning and wisdom was one of the gravest problems of education, and to have done so was one of the highest triumphs of teaching. The best and safest of all the ladders to success was good conduct.

—Higher than any other Secular Profession.—

The profession of teaching was surely one of the noblest. (Hear, hear.) Yet it had never been honoured as it deserved. (Shouts of approval.) In the public esteem it came a long way after the other esteemed professions, but it really stood higher than any other secular profession in the world. (Renewed applause.) To those to whom adventure, or speculation, or wealth, was the goal of highest desires, the profession of teacher offered no inducement. (Hear, hear.) Its rewards never rose above a moderate level, if they ever rose to a fair level. The most distinguished services could never hope for the payment they deserved. The life of the pupil teacher, the student in the training college, and the teacher was one of incessant strain—the strain of learning, of teaching, and of behaviour. (Laughter.) No one in the whole army of instructors ever got a step up without hard work, if they could ever get to the top without being AI in point of fact as well as IA in point of rank. (Laughter and applause.) There was no room in the ranks, except on occasions such as at present, for Bohemianism—(laughter)—or inaccuracy, or self-indulgence. Politicians might make mistakes that no one could be sure of; doctors might make mistakes that could be buried—(laughter)—but what examiner ever shut his eyes to the mistakes of the teachers? If the teachers had in their own hearts, the love of knowledge for its own sake, the love of children for their own sake, they were to be envied above all other workers. If, on the other hand, they had not these qualities, they were above all other workers the most to be pitied. His first and last and best advice was that they should cherish the love of knowledge, the love of teaching, and the love of children. If they did there might be one—and only one—field of human effort, more full of happiness and usefulness than that upon which they had entered.

—An Indispensable Need.—

If education consisted only in the power to read well and count well, and write grammatically, teaching would be easy enough; but the task of instruction rose far above that, and reached forward into the domain of reasoning and understanding, guidance, and sympathy. Every child's mind, as every child's body, was a problem of health or un-soundness, safety or danger. If the school was to attain its highest point of usefulness there must be a real, living bond of sympathy, love, and respect between teachers and scholars. This vital indispensable need of a public school could not be supplied by any book. The only possible way of testing this quality of the teacher was by the results in actual teaching. (Applause.) As to the human soul they must remember that in every human tenement that lived there was a mysterious and sovereign inhabitant which had at least one of the attributes of the Almighty because it was alike beyond analysis and perception. If one small fraction of the time devoted by men of science to the investigation of the properties of matter had been devoted to the investigation of the properties of the mind education problems would have been materially simplified. Mr. Reid thus enumerated qualities of common conduct which he said it was the duty of the teachers to impress upon their pupils—love of knowledge, the desire to excel, truthfulness, candour, diligence, earnestness, courtesy, patience, perseverance, good temper, generosity, courage, chivalry, obedience, patriotism, respect for age, reverence for parents, veneration for the Creator. In concluding he urged upon them the gravity and transcendent importance of the duty resting upon them to give the children the best of all teaching, good examples in all things.

TEACHER AND PUPIL

The Examinations.

It was suggested some time ago that in order to bring all the city schools into line with the Continuation School the examinations should be postponed till the end of the year, so that sixth class scholars passing the test could all be drafted into the Continuation School at the beginning of next year. So far the headmasters have not received any intimation on the matter, and as parents are making enquiries they are anxious to know what are the departmental intentions. It is stated that in some of the schools the delay in examinations will be the cause of a good deal of inconvenience unless the headmasters are permitted to promote juniors before the annual examination. In one school the juniors are being admitted at such a rate that if the examination is postponed for four or five months there will be about 250 children in a room built to accommodate only 100. Already quite a large number of juniors are receiving their instruction in the open-air in fine weather, but when rain comes they have to be taken into the school, with the result that the room is uncomfortably crowded.

Discontent in New Zealand.

According to the New Zealand "Journal of Education" a feeling of discontent exists throughout the teaching service of the Dominion, despite the fact that during the past decade many important and necessary reforms have been made. "The cause of this unsatisfactory state of affairs," says the "Journal," "is not far to seek. Though many changes have taken place, the 'inequitable and iniquitous' method of computing teachers' salaries still remains, and there is absolutely no system in connection with appointments and promotions. The present Minister of Education has done all he can, by means of regulations, to provide against reductions taking place owing to falling attendance; but so long as he or some other controlling authority lacks power to transfer members of the teaching staff from one position to another, the present injustices will continue. If we are to have a minimum salary, then we must have a minimum attendance which shall constitute a school. No country can afford to pay £120 or £150 a year for the education of four or five children. How then is this salary problem to be solved? Again and again the New Zealand Educational Institute has approved of the principle of classifying schools and positions, and of allotting a minimum salary, rising by annual increments, to a fixed maximum within each class. If, instead of 13 educational districts, New Zealand were divided into four, and these enlarged bodies had the right to appoint and transfer the teachers in their service, the suggested scheme might prove practicable, and if, under the present or the proposed form of administration, a satisfactory method of computing teachers' salaries is not possible, then the sooner a better system of administration is substituted the better for education within the Dominion."

School Desks.

In many of the South Australian schools, and especially in Adelaide and suburbs, attention is being given to the suitability of school desks in order to accommodate them to the size of the children. This question was under discussion in Melbourne recently, when it was suggested that the adoption of the German system would be a wise course. In German schools each classroom has desks of various sizes, numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on. On the wall is a measuring standard, and opposite the different heights is placed the number of the desk that a child of that height should occupy. The advocates of this system claim that it could very easily be applied when the relation of the height of a child to the desks had been calculated, and that all the teacher would have to do would be to allot the children to the proper desks.

Abolition of Examinations.

The last annual report of the Wellington (New Zealand) inspectors strongly urges the abolition of all examinations. The experts write:—"The educational systems of America and Germany are continually being held up as patterns of excellence, and if in these countries the step from the secondary school to the University even is free from the examination incubus, surely in our case the child under 14 years of age can be passed from his elementary to his secondary course without having to undergo any special test. If the inspector and the teacher, with their personal knowledge of a child's work and capacity, are not competent to decide on his fitness or otherwise for a secondary course, then they are certainly not competent to direct