

Register 2nd Aug^d 07.

EDUCATION PROBLEM.

SOMETHING ABOUT VICTORIAN METHODS.

CHAT WITH THE HON. T. FINK.

The Hon. Theodore Fink, who is well known for his connection with the University of Melbourne and other departments of education, arrived in Adelaide on Thursday to attend the University dinner to be held on Saturday evening. During his 10 years' term as member of the Victorian House of Assembly Mr. Fink acted as President of the royal commission on technical education, and an elaborate report was presented not only as to organizing the system of technical instruction, but dealing with other branches of education. The most important recommendations have been given effect to, and it is to them that the reform of the department, the introduction of manual and practical training, and the appointment of a Director of Education have been largely due. On the conclusion of the commission in 1901 the University of Melbourne, having been defrauded of £20,000, and successive reductions in the Government grant having partially arrested the progress of the institution, a royal commission was appointed, with Mr. Fink as President, to report not only on the finances, but on the government and teaching work. The most important branch of the work aimed at improving secondary education, and the due co-ordination of school work with that of the University, so that the schools should be influenced by the best methods. The recommendations have been, or are being, largely adopted. The Government acted upon the suggestion of the commission respecting the financial question, increased the annual endowment to £20,000 (the grant had dwindled to £12,000), and provided capital sums for necessary equipment. As a result the university has been able to make considerable additions to its permanent staff of professors and lecturers, and is now more flourishing and progressive and in closer touch with the community than ever before. The constitution was altered to include in the executive body the Ministers of Education, Agriculture, and Mines, and the various faculties were modernized by the addition of representatives of departments such as railways, commerce, and industry. In 1903 Mr. Fink, in a farewell speech in Parliament, attacked the policy of the Irvine Government on the proposal to exclude young children from schools and exact fees from scholars over 13 years of age in the interests of retrenchment, which resulted in its revocation. The next Parliament paid him the compliment of summoning him to the floor of the House to receive its thanks.

—Registration of Teachers.—

Though out of Parliament, Mr. Fink's services have since been largely enlisted in educational matters. The outcome of one of the recommendations of the commission was the passing of a measure for the registration of teachers. "Under this Act, which came into operation last year," Mr. Fink explained to a representative of The Register in an interview at the South Australian Hotel, "teachers in practice had to register in order to continue their calling. The board includes the Director of Education as President, representatives of the University, of the department, and of the secondary and technical schools (I represent the technical schools), and prescribes courses of training, both scholastic and practical, for future candidates for the teaching profession. The schools, too, are registered and classified as sub-primary (kindergarten), primary, and secondary. Teachers are graded in the same divisions. The board has already classified 7,000 teachers and all the schools. Provision has been made by regulations now enforced by law for the professional training of teachers and their admission until 1910, and for a severer course for those who seek admission after that date.

—The Apprentice Question.—

"Last year I was selected to preside over a conference on the apprenticeship question, which emanated from a request by the Chamber of Manufactures to the Government that employers and employes should confer on the matter. It was declared that the absence of a proper system of training apprentices seriously threatened the progress of industry, and that it was imperative that the system should be placed on a sound basis. The employers and Trades Hall Party each nominated five representatives. Unlike most conferences between such bodies, they adopted important conclusions unanimously, the report on which has just been circulated. Immediate legislation is pronounced to be necessary to inaugurate a system of apprenticeship, and in order to efficiently administer it a permanent tribunal, to be known as the Apprentice Commission, is recommended. The principles of a general apprenticeship law are laid down, the provisions of which are to be applicable to all apprentices. These principles will be a welcome substitute for the Masters and Servants Act, which is a bare statement of the common law. The permanent commission, consisting of a President and an equal number of representatives from the Chamber of Manufactures, the Trades Hall, University, Working Men's College, and the Director of Education, will administer the law. As the details of each particular trade can only be settled in the light of knowledge of the conditions peculiar to it, special committees can be appointed, to consist of representatives of employers and employes, who, with the permanent commission, are to have power to determine the terms and conditions of apprenticeship of the trade in question. These will embrace the definite departments to be recognised as the subject of apprenticeship, the term, wages, and obligations of either party, the technical or other education required, classes to be attended, hours, examinations, number of apprentices, and other matters. The object of the first-named is to prevent the minute subdivision and the growing evil of youths spending the whole of their apprenticeship time in learning, perhaps, a mechanical part of a trade quite insufficient to give them a hold as wage earners. Important decisions provide for the abolition of the improver system and for technical education for apprentices in the subjects prescribed by the trade committees, the extension of instruction by continuation or other schools from the end of the primary school to the period when it is lawful for an apprentice to enter a factory, so that, to use a striking expression of Sir John Madden—"The boy is not allowed after leaving school to continue to matriculate at street corners as at present." The resolutions regarding the limitation of the number of apprentices and the transfer of the question of wages from the contentious arena of the Wages Boards to the representative committees are significant features. It has been suggested that the permanent committee should register and review the number of apprentices from time to time in each trade and report where the number exceeds that which can be effectively trained. It is considered from the favourable attitude of the authorities that legislation will be framed on the lines indicated."