

PRIMARY EDUCATION.

Eloquent testimony is afforded by the reports for 1911 of the Minister of Education and officials of the Education Department of the anxiety of the authorities to keep South Australia abreast of the times regarding the instruction and training of her children; but satisfactory evidence is not forthcoming that the efforts made to attain this end are fully appreciated by parents and guardians. School machinery is elaborate and costly, and Parliament was never before so willing to spend money on its improvement; yet the national schools were barely so well attended last year as during 1910; and, notwithstanding the large increase in the population, there was a disquieting decline in the number of pupils during the last decade. In 1901 the children under instruction numbered 63,183; the average attendance was 43,789; total cost, £149,795; and cost for each child instructed, £2 7/4. Last year 53,494 individual pupils were on the registers; the average attendance was 37,427; total cost, £184,033; and cost for each child, £3 8/9. Census returns show curious results. In the State last year there were as compared with 1901, 7,680 more children under six years of age; but children of the "compulsory" period (between seven and 13 years) were apparently 7,388 fewer, the totals being 46,829 in 1911, and 54,217 in 1901. According to the latest census 49,412 boys and girls received State school education last year, 10,634 attended private schools, and 1,579 obtained instruction in their homes. These figures vary considerably from the records of the Education Department, and leave a large number of children unaccounted for. They strengthen the case for an amendment of the law to provide for effective supervision of private schools, with the view of ensuring that the pupils attend regularly and are properly educated.

In relation to the Government schools little difficulty is experienced in operating the compulsory clauses of the Act. For the whole year there were only 46 prosecutions for breaches of the law. At the annual examinations 38,114 children were presented against 38,927 in 1910. The decline may be attributed to an epidemic of measles throughout the State, which hampered the work of teaching and for a while lessened the attendances. Out of 5,009 children in the fourth class, 2,133 passed the standard fixed for exemption from further attendance; and of 3,894 examined in the fifth class, 1,924 obtained certificates. The high schools are making fair headway, and the numbers in attendance largely increased; but for the 40 scholarships designed to help country children to attend district high schools, the competition was poor. For all other scholarships offered there were satisfactory entries; "so that there does not appear to be any disinclination on the part of parents to avail themselves of the opportunities offered for higher education." The efficiency of the high schools is attested by the gratifying numbers of certificates awarded to entrants from them at the University Public Examinations. The changes introduced at the Training College are said to be working well. The valuable academic instruction offered by the University is supplemented by systematic training in the theory and practice of teaching. Distinct courses are

provided for those who intend to be infant and primary school teachers, and additional instruction is given to those who will become teachers in high schools. Such splendid opportunities for intellectual equipment as are now provided for them should increase public confidence in the State teachers as a class, and induce a more general recognition of the fact that—in the words of an educational expert—"only a State organization in touch with all the various phases of the nation's life can synthesise with foresight and accuracy the educational needs of the various types of scholars."

The report of the Director of Education is characterised by the zeal, intelligence, and enthusiasm which he has constantly brought to the discharge of his onerous duties. Mr. Williams cherishes the loftiest ideals concerning the scope of the education which should be imparted to young South Australians. To attain the best ends, he would have the boys and girls in the schools for a much longer period than the law now prescribes as requisite. Authorities mostly agree that, as the critical period of adolescence coincides with the greatest physical and mental changes, it is a grievous mistake then to release children from educational supervision. If this doctrine were strictly followed in South Australia, many thousands of young people now earning their livelihood in industrial occupations would be at school. Obviously, the proposal would necessitate the overhauling and revision of the present primary system, and the establishment on an extensive scale of secondary and technical training institutions. Such a revolutionary change as would make the State responsible for the teaching of trades and handicrafts to lads, and the training of girls in housekeeping and other duties, would entail enormous expense to the taxpayers, and be a more or less risky experiment. Much may be said on

behalf of raising the compulsory school-going age to 14 years; and a provision that, even then, the child shall not be permitted to leave school unless he or she is about to engage in suitable employment. Much good might result from an arrangement by which manufacturing and other industries would be kept in direct sympathetic touch with the State schools and the Education Department, with the view to assisting boys to follow their natural bent in employment and obtain a sound practical knowledge of a skilled industry. In London and other great British cities the apprenticeship system has given place to technical schools, but serious complaints are often heard concerning the inability of the latter to produce competent workmen, having a knowledge of prices and other details of information incidental to proficiency. In South Australia such schools could not be expected, for many years at least, to prove as satisfactory as training under the eyes of an employer and skilled mechanics. In any case, the pastoral, agricultural, and other rural workers, whose sons and daughters have mostly to engage in labour at an early age, could not fairly be required to contribute to the support in populous centres of a costly educational system for the special benefit of young people who, if they were in the country districts, would be busily occupied in rural tasks.

It is much to be regretted that no adequate provision has yet been made for the accommodation of the students in training. In addition to the 80 students attending the University Training College, we shall have in the future 30 or 40 young men and women undergoing training to qualify for taking charge of our small country schools. The accommodation we have at present is at best a makeshift. Work of an entirely satisfactory nature is impossible under such conditions. The training of the teachers, and the conditions under which it is carried out, are so important that the question of providing a suitable building for the purpose may be considered as one of the most urgent needs of the department.

-Diploma of Education-

An important innovation has been made by the University authorities in the institution of a University diploma in education. To obtain the diploma candidates must be graduates in arts or in science, and must have special qualifications in some one branch of knowledge. They have, in addition, to give evidence of a broad grasp of educational problems generally, and of those connected with secondary schools in particular, and must also prove their efficiency in the actual work of teaching. The standard set is a high one, but it presents no insuperable difficulties to the capable student who has some share of the gift of teaching.

-Scholarships-

Under existing regulations provision is made for the following scholarships:—(a) Eight public exhibitions (four for boys and four for girls), open to any girls and boys who have been bona-fide residents of the State of South Australia for at least two years immediately preceding December 31 of the year in which the competitive examination is held. They are tenable for three years at any approved school of college, and provide free tuition and books, with an allowance of £22 per annum in those cases where the home of the candidate is distant from the school at which he or she elects to attend. At the examination held in December, 1911, 28 boys and 14 girls presented themselves. (b) Forty exhibitions, tenable for three years at the Adelaide High School or any district high school, are offered for competition among children under 13 years of age, who have been attending a primary school under Government control. A maintenance allowance of £22 per annum is given in addition to free tuition. The examination for deciding these scholarships is the fifth-class standard of the public schools, with the addition of a small textbook on health and hygiene. These scholarships are intended to help those children whose homes are distant from a district high school to obtain the advantages offered by those schools. At the examination in 1911, 34 boys and 20 girls presented themselves. It is not easy to account for this comparatively small number of entrants. Free tuition in a secondary school for three years, with an allowance of £86, should, one would think, tempt parents to giveable boys an opportunity to pursue their studies up to the age of 16. For all other scholarships offered the competition was eminently satisfactory, so that there does not appear to be any disinclination on the part of parents to avail themselves of the opportunities offered for higher education. (c) Senior Exhibitions.—There are eight of these, each worth £40 per annum, and four others of the value of £20, all tenable for two years at the Adelaide High School. They are open to all pupils attending any high school under Government control, and are awarded on the results of the Senior Public Examination of the University. The winners are afforded an opportunity to prepare for the competition for Government bursaries which provide a course of four or five years' duration at the University. (d) Government Bursaries.—Up to December 31, 1911, 10 of these were offered annually. Five were reserved for pupils of the Adelaide High School. The remaining five were open for competition among any young people who had been resident in South Australia for at least one year prior to the deciding examination. The bursaries were tenable at the Adelaide University for four years, and admitted successful candidates to the Schools of Arts, Science, Medicine, or Law. They carried an annual value of £25. From January 1, 1912, the number will be increased to 12, of which six will be reserved for pupils of the Public High Schools of the State. The monetary value will be only under ordinary circumstances will be only £20 per annum, but University fees will be paid by the department. In addition to the courses previously available, successful candidates may take up music at the Elder Conservatorium. The term will be five years for the medical course and four years for all other bursaries. The award of these bursaries is decided by the result of the Higher Public Examinations of the Adelaide University. (e) University Studentships (for evening students).—One hundred and eighty pounds per annum is voted to assist students who are unable to attend the University during the day. The value of each studentship is limited to £10 in the case of science students and £7 for those taking arts.