

MODERN EDUCATION

ADDRESS BY MR. BRYCE.

The Right Hon. James Bryce, upon whom a viscountcy was conferred at the New Year (says the "Daily Telegraph" of January 3), yesterday opened the Conference of Educational Associations at the University of London, and in the course of his inaugural address made an earnest plea for the teaching of the Bible in the schools. He also put before the delegates many suggestions of topics which deserved consideration, asking them, in conclusion, why English youths employed abroad showed less interest in their work than their foreign competitors. This question he did not answer, but he left it to his hearers as a matter deserving careful thought.

Some idea of the importance of the conference may be gained from the fact that at it are represented numerous influential educational bodies, among them being the Art Teachers' Guild, the Association of Assistant Mistresses, Science Teachers, University Women Teachers, and Teachers of Domestic Subjects, the College of Preceptors, the Child Study Froebel, Montessori, Royal Drawing, and Simplified Spelling Societies, the Geographical, Modern Language, Private Schools and Training College Associations, the National Association of Manual Training, Teachers in Technical Institutes, the Teachers' Guild, and the School Nature Study, National Home Reading and Parents' National Education Unions. The sessions are to extend over the whole of next week, and the speakers will include Dr. W. G. Sleight, D. J. Scott Keltie (secretary of the Royal Geographical Society), Sir John Cockburn, Professor Gilbert Murray, Professor Rippmann, Sir George Fordham (chairman Cambridgeshire County Council), Lieutenant-General Sir R. S. S. Baden-Powell, Sir John McClure, Dr. James Kerr (medical research officer, London County Council), Dr. Michael Sadler (Vice-Chancellor Leeds University), Lady Campbell, Mr. A. C. Benson, and Sir James Crichton Browne. The subjects for discussion range from proposals for the reconstitution of the University of London to the standardisation of English speech and the "Art of the Essayist."

Dr. Herringham (Vice-Chancellor of the University of London) presided at the opening meeting, and was supported by the Principal (Sir Henry A. Miers), Lord Reay, Sir P. Magnus, Sir John Cockburn, Professor Rippmann, Mrs. Henry Busk (honorary treasurer), Mr. W. Loring (chairman of committee), and Mr. F. Fairman (conference secretary).

Introducing Mr. Bryce, the chairman said he had begun to wonder in what way a man should be announced, and, incidentally, where he would go to, on whom a peerage had been bestowed to which as yet no title had been attached. (Laughter.) He had asked the chief speaker of that afternoon himself, and he had told him that his position was indeed precarious, and that if poison were put in his tea that day the probability was that he would never reach that world where they lay beside their nectar, but would be relegated to those dim regions where commoners whirled away eternity. (Laughter.) He had to announce the speaker by his old name, Mr. James Bryce. (Cheers.)

Educational Progress.

Mr. Bryce expressed his diffidence at addressing that conference, as, owing to his long absence from the country, he had little knowledge of what had been going on in the world of education during the last six or seven years. His own connection with education went back to 1865, when he was an assistant-commissioner to the English Schools Enquiry, and down to 1906 he watched pretty closely the phases of growth in English education. In the last half-century more changes had passed upon English education than in any century from the days of King Alfred. Half a century ago elementary education was not universal; still less was it compulsory, and secondary education was not deemed a matter of State concern. The education of girls might hardly be said to have existed. There was a certain number of girls' private schools, conducted by ladies of great zeal and many fine moral qualities, who, however, were seldom fitted for the work by any special preparation, and not always even by knowledge. He saw represented before him a large number of societies which covered almost every field of educa-

tional effort. Each contributed something to the common stock, and it was one of the most hopeful features that, although so much was being done on separate lines, the special ideas which were being evolved were for the general advantage. (Hear, hear.)

Two societies of women teachers witnessed to the growth of what was practically a new profession for women—secondary school teaching. He could not help believing that there still existed a much wider sphere in the work of education for women than we had yet seen in England. (Cheers.) The Parents' Educational Union interested itself in the provision of moral instruction. He urged them to continue to lay great stress on that aim. Surely it would be a great pity if the teacher were debarred from imparting moral principles to the children under his charge. He thought also that the teacher should be permitted to place his moral precepts on the basis of duty to the Deity, and he did not think one out of a thousand teachers would ever misuse such an opportunity. (Hear, hear.)

"It is with great regret," Mr. Bryce went on, "that one sees in these days that the knowledge of the Bible seems to be declining in all classes of the community, and I was struck with the same thing in the United States. Looked at from the educational side only, the loss to the children in consequence of growing up in ignorance of the Bible would be an incalculable one, and it would be a great misfortune to the country if generations of children grew up who did not know their Bible." (Hear, hear.)

Simplified Spelling.

As to the simplification of spelling, he had long been convinced that it must succeed some day, because reason was on its side. Perhaps spelling would be simplified a short time before the religious difficulty in the schools had been solved. (Laughter.) As a business proposition, such a reform would be worth a vast deal to British trade. English was beginning to be the language of commerce in Japan, as well as all over the Farther East.

Mr. Bryce proceeded to submit suggestions of topics that deserved their attention. England and Wales were almost entirely covered with elementary schools. What was now wanted was intensive cultivation—higher quality rather than quantity. Before more money was granted, except for salaries, let them take stock of the present situation and make sure that the present expenditure was wisely and economically applied, and whether there was not still a good deal of overlapping. The salaries of teachers were inadequate, and if the profession was to attract sufficient talent it must be better paid. (Cheers.) Sufficient attention was not given to secondary schools. To make the most of the strongest and finest minds 10 per cent. or less of the whole, and send them on to the university duly prepared by the secondary school, was the best investment a nation could make. What sort of subjects and what sort of teaching were best calculated to train men to think? Was there not a danger, that we might unduly multiply universities? (Hear, hear.) We must beware of lowering the standard of what a university ought to be. (Hear, hear.)

Behind all those questions lay the larger one—Why do not English boys care more for learning than they do? Education has been immensely extended in all its branches during these 50 years, and far better organised. But one who returned after a long absence found that there was disappointment with the results attained. He was told that the level of interest in "the things of the mind" had not in any class of the community risen as people expected 50 years ago that it would rise, in a way commensurate with the increased opportunities our schools now supplied.

Lack of Interest.

Wherever one travels abroad, observed the speaker—in Mexico, South America, in the Far East—one finds the heads of our firms complaining that the English youths who come out to them show less interest in their work than do their competitors from the European Continent. The latter take pains to master the economic facts of the country. They learn its language. They do not spend their time in amusement as soon as they quit the counting-house in the afternoon, but work at subjects profitable for their

business. This, more than anything else, is the reason why foreign competitors have been gaining upon us in many markets. Yet the English boy is certainly not inferior in intelligence or in character or talent to the boy of any other country. Why, then, does he not care more for his work in school and care more for knowledge after he has left school? The desire for knowledge is natural to all and especially to the young.

Discipline is less hard to-day than it used to be, and teaching is more rational. Why, then, do our young people show less zeal for knowledge than those of many other nations, and certainly less than the Chinese? Is it the fault of the schools or of the parents or is it because the passion for amusement is now exceptionally strong? Or have other competing interests—such as that portentously engrossing interest in athletic competitions, to which the constantly growing columns and page devoted to "sport" in our newspapers bear witness—grown so rank as to choke the love of knowledge? I do not attempt to answer these questions, but they need an answer. (Hear, hear.)

Instead of thinking of education as solely directed to enable people to make their way in the world may we not think of it as also teaching them how to enjoy the world? (Hear, hear.) The desire for pleasure is natural, universal, useful when flowing into the right channels. Life is not all work, and work is done best when sweetened by pleasure. May it not be the test of a good education that it should teach us how to enjoy the best pleasures, and among them to love knowledge, art, and Nature, giving us springs of joy that well up from within, springs that do not fail with that decline in bodily activity and that pressure of cares and occupations which advancing years bring, but supply refreshment and consolation through all the chances and changes of this mortal life? (Cheers.) Perhaps our schools are trying to accomplish rather too much at once, and we might go further if we went slower, and not always along dusty roads. Whether there is any ground for disappointment in the present situation it is not for me to say. I am content to summarise what others better informed have told me. And against their fears I will set the encouragement we may derive from such a conference as this, in which so many societies of teachers are represented. It gives evidence of the spirit and movement, and of the many forms of activity that now animate the educational profession of its eagerness to discover the more excellent ways, and of the high ideals you and others like you, have formed of what our schools may do for England, of your earnest efforts to turn these ideals into realities. (Cheers.)

In proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Bryce the chairman said that the teaching profession would find it absolutely necessary to consolidate by means of conferences such as that.

The vote was carried with acclamation.