

House of Assembly  
Register 17/6/91.

### EDUCATION BILL.

Second reading.

The MINISTER of EDUCATION (Hon. J. G. Jenkins), in moving the second reading of the Bill, expressed his deep regret that the late Minister of Education, who moved and so ably conducted the Bill through the House last year, had been deprived by death of the privilege of again doing so. By his death they had lost a very earnest and ardent advocate of free education. The necessity of doing away with the school fees and the benefits that naturally followed had been so ably placed before the House by various speakers last session that it would be unnecessary for him to make any extended remarks now. While he thought personally, as indicated by an amendment he moved last year, that the Bill went hardly far enough, yet he did not wish to sacrifice a measure that would be of great benefit to the colony on account of any views of his own. Therefore as far as the free education part was concerned the Bill was practically the same as last year's. There were one or two additions which did not bear directly on the question of fees. One provided that a master could refuse admission to a child who really could attend a school which was nearer where the scholar lived. That was necessary to prevent children following a popular teacher. The other clauses merely affected the general working of the department, and they would be explained as the Bill passed through Committee. He had always been a strong advocate of free education, perhaps stronger for having seen and experienced the working of the principle in America, and if anything had more than ever convinced him of the necessity for it it would be the few months that he had been connected with the Education Department. Last year some members said the voice of the country was not in favour of it. Individual members, however, sometimes imagined that their respective districts, no matter how small the population, voiced the whole country, and some imagined that a particular township possessed of a few loud-voiced people expressed the voice to a certain extent of the country. The members of the Ministry were in favour of free education. (Mr. Gillen—"All of them?" and another member—"Is the Attorney-General?") Most decidedly. The majority of the members of the last Ministry were in favour of it, and many independent members representing three-fourths of the colony were in favour of it. (Mr. Gilbert—"They are not in Yatala.") It might not be the voice of Yatala, but that was a slow-going place. (Laughter.) The Education Department was carried out in the country by Boards of Advice, whose members, generally speaking, were able and intelligent men. There were seventy-nine Boards, with a membership of from three to eight each and averaging five. They represented about 400 members, spread in every minute corner of South Australia. The opinions of the Boards, though not absolute, were by a large majority in favour of free education. He looked to that fact as to a far greater extent the voice of the country than were the views of a few members who were themselves opposed to it. Undoubtedly the voice of the country was in favour of free education—he should judge by a majority of three to one. Last year a conference of Boards was held in Adelaide, and they were nearly unanimous in favour of it. (Mr. Castine—"Not up to the fifth class.") Up to the fourth class. Last

year some members pointed out the fact that a great deal of time was taken up in collecting the fees, and that those who paid fees knew who did not pay them. He was last year at a conference where 10,000 scholars were represented, and it was unanimously resolved that all the children who paid fees were well aware who did not. Members could visit schools any Monday morning and see for themselves. (Mr. Hancock—"That is the fault of the department.") No; the teachers could not be expected to call on parents to collect the fees. There must be some system of receiving the children's payments, and the present fee system created an invidious distinction, which should not exist between the poor and the better-off children. It was difficult for people to get their children on the free list. The reports of the various Boards of Advice showed this, and friction was often created between the Boards and the teachers and the teachers and the parents. A great many provisional teachers did not receive the amount they were supposed to get. Not only was there a great loss of time entailed on the part of the teachers, but also of the members of the Boards and highly paid Government officials. He had before him a number of dockets which had passed through the department. In one case the Board of Advice had absolutely refused to grant free education. The teacher earnestly requested that it should be done, as there was a likelihood of the children leaving school, and if proceedings were taken against the parents he would not be able to recover the fees. Any one going through the correspondence over that one case would be convinced of the friction occasioned between the Board and the teacher. Even if the Boards were themselves in favour of free education it was not their duty to grant every request for it. The Boards had to administer the laws. Another docket showed that a teacher sent in an application for free education for some children in January last. The Board disallowed the application, but subsequently promised to look into the matter. This was six months ago, and the amount of arrears in respect to these children was £5 6s. 4d. The teacher said the parents could not afford to pay, and the former would lose this amount, which as a provisional teacher he was supposed and entitled to receive. Another docket disclosed that an application was made by a Board of Advice that the fathers of children in two families should be looked up. The application went to the Inspector-General, thence to the Commissioner of Police, thence to an Inspector, from the Inspector to a mounted constable, who passed it on to another constable, who returned it again to the Inspector. The Inspector returned it to the Detective Office, whence it was forwarded to the Commissioner of Police, and it subsequently reached the Secretary to the Minister of Education. That docket was over a month making the transit, and the expense the country had to pay in official salaries and expenses for time devoted to it during that time must have been, in all probability, between £50 and £100. An advertisement was subsequently inserted in the *Police Gazette* to the effect that information was requested concerning these people with a view of compelling them to pay for their children's education, which was now being done by the State, &c. The cost of the advertisement itself would be considerable. Was it not absurd for the Government to spend pounds and pounds in looking up these men whom there was no likelihood of finding, and who when found were not likely to have any money to

pay? Supposing there were six children in the two families the expense of their education would not be more than £5 or £6 per year, and the expense of that docket would have covered the cost of educating them for perhaps ten or fifteen years. That showed that the fee system was a most expensive institution, which should be abolished. (Hear, hear.) The principal objections urged to abolishing the fees and to the amended Bill were the loss to the revenue, injustice to private schools, what some people termed the pauperizing of children, and the educating of children beyond their own requirements. As for injustice to private schools, this, he thought, was over-estimated, and was not of such great importance. In the first place if the colony had established a system of national education the object was that children could be better and more cheaply educated than at private and separate schools. It was the duty of the representatives of the people to do all they possibly could for the improvement and perfection of the school system. Depriving private teachers of their living by the adoption of free education was to a great extent a bogey. A teacher could easily find a place in the State Education Department if he was capable of performing a teacher's duty. Some urged that the adoption of free education would be pauperizing the people, but the present system was forcing them to it. The State was assisting the children to become more useful and patriotic colonists. The education of a nation was the strength of a nation. Why should not a man consider that he was pauperizing himself by walking along a road or jetty constructed out of Government funds? The united efforts of the people could carry out national works more cheaply than individual efforts, and every individual had a right to participate in them. If education were adopted as a national principle it must be advocated on the same grounds, and the same arguments would be applicable. He was surprised that any hon. member in this advanced state of civilization should argue that the children of the masses were being educated beyond their requirements—"Oh, that's nonsense"—and that they would only be fit to take clerkships in offices; but who designed those grooves for the children of the workers? Very few held this opinion now, and they were looked upon as a kind of connecting link between the time of slavery and the days of freedom. If they accepted the principle that the children of the working people should be educated only up to a certain standard, they might just as well say they should not be educated at all. The old system of slavery was undoubtedly a system of ignorance. In 1670, when the British Government sent to the various Colonial Governors for reports on the settlements in different places, the Governor of Connecticut stated in his report that one quarter of the revenue was devoted to the education of the people. The Governor of Virginia (the slave territory at that time and for hundreds of years afterwards) said he thanked God that there was no such thing as free education or a printing press in Virginia, and he hoped there would not be for another hundred years. He simply said this to show that the object of slavery was ignorance and of freedom education. He was glad that those who advocated a limit to education were very scarce. Because a child showed an aptitude for figures or writing while at school that was no reason why he

should stop at a merchant's counter all his life. Most decidedly not. It did not follow that because a person was educated in a certain line that he had to shape his whole career accordingly. (Hear, hear.) They wished to overcome the idea that there should be any distinction at all. (Hear, hear.) A man who worked with the lathe or the hammer, if educated, should be just as well respected as the educated man, who worked in the office. A free public school system would do a great deal to assimilate the different classes and educate an individual to follow any pursuit that he saw fit to adopt without detriment to himself or reflection by those who considered themselves higher up in life. If all classes could be elevated by a general education it was far better than to keep them in the lower stratum. With regard to the loss of revenue, the cost of education for the last year had been about £91,000, less the £24,000 paid in fees. The Government estimate that they would lose about £30,000 for the year if free education were allowed. That included all general expenses. The statistics for 1890 showed that there were 551 schools—253 public and 298 provincial. The number of children instructed was 44,804, and the average attendance amounted to 27,552. During 1890 the average attendance was very bad, and no doubt the roll would have been larger had it not been for the influenza, whooping cough, and other infectious complaints, but since January of this year there had been an increase of over 2,000 on the number of the previous year. According to the returns for last year the number of children taught in private schools was 15,000, and those present the day when returns were made 13,000. The number of free scholars during the year was approximately between 7,000 and 8,000, or one-sixth of the whole. The

expenditure was as follows:—Management and inspection, £7,954; Training College, £2,399; and public and provincial schools, £79,091. To this had to be added the fees paid by parents, £24,641, making a total of £103,732. The expenditure for the enforcement of the compulsory clauses of the Act would be £1,260, the retiring allowances to £674, and on evening scholars to £98, making a total of over £116,000, less the £24,000 in fees, leaving a balance of over £91,000. The number of teachers employed at the close of the year was:—Certificated, 409; provisional, including temporary assistants, 306; pupil teachers, 146; and monitors and sewing teachers, 206; making a total of 1,067. (Sir E. T. Smith—"Can you give the cost of the public school buildings?") From 1876 to 1890 inclusive the amount expended from loans was £394,000. The Government estimated that for the first twelve months there would be a loss in revenue of £30,000. (Mr. Gillen—"Does that include free books to free scholars?") He did not think that it would include free books to all free scholars, but the cost of free books to free scholars at the start. He believed that the second year's estimate of the loss would be greater than £30,000. (Mr. Castine—"Yes, more like £50,000." Mr. Lake—"Do you include additions to school buildings?") Only as far as free education would necessitate it. A great many of the country school buildings were at present overcrowded, and would have to be enlarged whether free education became the law or not, and it would hardly be fair in the first year to charge the expense of providing additional accommoda-