

# THE TEACHERS' UNION.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

The annual conference in connection with the S.A. Teachers' Union was opened at the Trades' Hall on Monday morning. There was a large attendance, including Mr. W. M. Broome, of the Superior Public School, Surry Hills, N.S.W., and Messrs. G. H. Carter, President of the Victorian Union, and J. J. Burston, of St. Kilda. The President, Mr. J. Harry, occupied the chair.

The President in his annual report stated:—For several years past it has been the practice to meet at these conferences to listen to addresses and to hear lectures dealing with various phases of education. These have been delivered by those who have been specially qualified to deal with the subjects that have been considered. The present conference will be found to be no exception to the rule, and for him who hath ears to hear there will not be wanting an abundance of instruction and enlightenment. It appears to me, therefore, desirable that I should consider the question of the Teachers' Union and the teachers rather than that I should attempt to deal with some abstract subject relating to education. The time has arrived when we may fairly endeavour to gauge the work and position of the Union. No more fitting time than the present will occur. We can, I think, as members look with satisfaction upon the work that we have accomplished, and upon the fact that the position and influence of the profession in this colony have certainly been strengthened since our Union was established. The Union has had a beneficial influence upon ourselves. (Applause.) We have felt the impetus of individual enthusiasm. Nothing is more essential to thorough success than enthusiasm, and in the teaching profession it is a sine qua non. It is enthusiasm that writes great books, that thinks out striking inventions, that rears great architecture, that breathes sublime music, that paints great pictures, that undertakes heroic enterprises, and that makes education a living power. If the Union has given us increased enthusiasm, it has performed a useful work. (Cheers.) It has also tended to destroy a feeling of isolation that is often felt, especially by our teachers in the scattered portions of the colony. Many of our members are doing an admirable work on the outskirts of our civilization—(cheers)—and although we can meet here but once in a year, we all realize that we are one in purpose and in aim, and that which at one time was to most of us a list of names in the "Education Gazette," has given place to the idea of personal interest in one another. (Cheers.) The Union has given us a higher appreciation of the work in which we are engaged. Ashamed we may sometimes be of ourselves we need never be so of our occupation. The light and frivolous may sneer as they will, but those whose opinion is worthy of a moment's consideration never fail to appreciate it at a better value. We praise the sculptor who, from a rough block of marble chisels out a beautiful image that seems to almost live, we praise the statesman who gives a splendid Constitution to the State; we praise the physician who with unremitting care and skill brings back health and strength again. Is he who unfolds the thought and life and character of the child less worthy of our commendation? The Union has brought us in closer touch with the thoughts and endeavours of teachers in other colonies. It has been the privilege of a few of us to be welcomed to their conferences by our brethren in Victoria, and it has been the pleasure of us all to cordially receive delegates who have visited us from that colony. The reception that we shall at the proper time extend to the gentlemen who, I am glad to say, have been able to come from Melbourne and Sydney to be with us to-day will be most cordial. (Cheers.) These interchanges can be productive of nothing but good to all concerned. I anticipate that some day we shall have a federation of Unions. (Cheers.) Although the federation of the colonies is not supposed directly to affect education, there can be no question that the tendency will be that the rules and practices will eventually in all the colonies be brought more into line. (Hear, hear.) We may have some things worthy to be adopted by other colonies, and there can be no doubt that they have many things to teach us. I hope I shall be pardoned if I say that the Union has not been entirely unsuccessful in its connection with the Education Department. We have on different occasions represented our views to the department concerning the work in the schools, and we have met with unvarying courtesy and consideration. Whenever we have approached the present Minister of Education, or his predecessor, our representations have been carefully reviewed, and on the occasions when we have met the Board of Inspectors our requests have been fully considered. (Hear, hear.) There never was a greater spirit of mutual confidence, I believe, between the department and the teachers than at present. (Cheers.) More than this it would be out of place to state, while we should fall in our duty were we to neglect this acknowledgment. All that we have asked for has not been granted. (Laughter.) In some cases we have carefully reconsidered our proposals and have on better information decided to abandon them. In other instances, where we have felt that the changes that we wish are just, right, and necessary, we have endeavoured to strengthen our arguments, and at the proper time to urge our requests again. Some of these have been approved, and we have reason to believe that changes that we have for some time desired will shortly be made. (Applause.) It is perhaps best that reforms come slowly, and it is but right that before changes are made in our system of education they should be most carefully considered. And in this consideration it is but proper that the department should have the benefit, not only of our opinions as individuals, if required, but also those of the teachers as a body. The Union has in the past had many friends who have willingly and powerfully assisted the teachers. The papers that have been read and the addresses that have been delivered have been a stimulus, and, if retained for perusal, will afford a splendid stock of educational literature in the time to come. Seeing that we have an institution that exists in such favourable circumstances, it may be worth while considering how its

interests may be conserved. And in the remarks I am about to make I speak not as one going to the battle but as one who is now being released from responsibility, and who has the experience that comes only therefrom. (Cheers.) In the first place, then, we should be moderate in our requests. (Hear, hear.) The fable of the boy and the nuts will point a moral for many a day. It has one here. Let us not be too anxious to secure great reforms that, however good, are entirely beyond our reach, but rather let us endeavour to obtain those advantages that are attainable. (Hear, hear.) Another thing to aim at is to gain broad views of things. They should be national, not parochial. (Hear, hear.) There is a constant tendency for primary teachers to narrow the view. We are so constantly in the habit of bringing our minds to meet those of the children that it is very difficult to avoid the error of looking at things from too near a position. Especially is it necessary that in our intercourse with the department we should endeavour to look at things from its point of view. The department has so many interests at stake, it has so many varying conditions to bring into harmony, that it naturally views many matters from a quite different standpoint. We may sometimes by taking a different view save ourselves from disappointment and failure. After all, the main point is to remember that the interests of the scholars are of primary importance. I do not suggest that this has not always been so. Indeed, it is undeniable that the subjects that we have most frequently and earnestly considered have been those relating to the improvements in our modes of teaching, in changes in the curriculum for the benefit of the scholars, and in kindred matters. It will be well not to forget that the school is built for the scholar. We shall find that as the welfare of our pupils becomes the inspiration of our lives our labours will be of greatest blessing and profit to ourselves. There have been elements of weakness in Unions in other places that have militated against their complete success, and we shall do well to note them in order that we may avoid similar experiences here. There is a desire often to secure reforms and an impatience when they are not speedily obtained. As teachers we must "learn to labour and to wait." When, however, we are convinced that we are seeking that which is good and right, let us pursue our aim with determined courage and steady perseverance. "Let us not be weary in well-doing." (Applause.) We are, I hope, above the feeling that the great object of our coming together is to have one big grumble. We have been wise in this respect in the past. There have been instances within our knowledge in which the spirit of grumbling among members of similar bodies has killed confidence and retarded progress. One thing that we ought particularly to guard against is any feeling that the interests of the country schools are not those of the town, and that the city teachers are indifferent to the needs of the country. This, you may be assured, is not the case. Equally should the thought be banished that the goodness and energy and talent and wisdom of the profession are found only within the sound of the Town Hall chimes. (Hear, hear.) This, you may be fully convinced, is not the case. It is unavoidable that the bulk of the work of the Union should fall upon the city teachers, but when possible those in the country should have full time and opportunity to discuss every matter brought before us. It

is by being united that we shall be strong in influence, strong in endurance, strong in usefulness. There is a need that we all shall be united in our efforts to improve the means of education in this colony. There is neither time nor room for obstructionists, nor for idlers. Our system is not yet perfect. None can be. True systems are progressive. To the knowledge and experience of the past must be added the opportunities and conditions of the present. We hear sometimes the statement that young teachers have no special interest in our proceedings. If this be so, there can be no greater mistake. (Hear, hear.) Those who have borne the burden and heat of the day, and whose work is nearly done, may have reason to feel that any changes that may be made will affect them but little; but every controversy, every decision, every change will certainly influence the lives of younger men for years. It needs no great argument to show that the young teachers of to-day who take the greatest interest in all that pertains to their calling, will be tomorrow those who shall be leaders of thought and action in our midst. We can congratulate ourselves in that we have a system of training for teachers that is the envy of other places, that is a credit to the hearts and brains of those who willed and wrought it, and that will, we believe, be of lasting good to this colony. (Cheers.) The pupil teacher system is not abolished, but some of the chief objections thereto have been removed, by provision for two years' uninterrupted study at the beginning of the course and the consequent raising of the age at which responsible teaching begins. After that a further two years at the University places the teachers in an admirable position to continue their education. At present provision is made, we understand, for female students to undergo a similar training to that of males. The time will probably come when it will be necessary for some of the former to omit some branches of the course, in order to be specially fitted to teach infants and to give instruction in such subjects as domestic economy. (Applause.) We are now in a transition period, and the way in which difficulties have been overcome speaks volumes for the devotion and ability of both the department and the teachers. During the year several changes had been made in the inspectorial staff. They were all glad to congratulate Mr. Whillas to-day. (Cheers.) Mr. Whillas was a most able, active, and useful member of our Union from the day of its establishment until the day when he became an Inspector of Schools. They knew that, although he gone over to the enemy—(laughter)—he had not altogether lost his interest in our welfare, but he was one with them in heart and soul. (Cheers.) It must be pleasing to the members of the Union to know that the President of last year was elected as the gentleman to be Inspector of Schools. (Cheers.) Mr. Martin had also become an Inspector, and we hope to see him during the conference.

He was sure that they all regretted to remember to-day that a lady who had graced their platform for years, a lady whom they had always welcomed in their schools (he referred to the late Miss McNamara), had passed away in the midst of her usefulness. Although there might be a difference of opinion as to the wisdom or the need of a lady Inspector there could be no difference of opinion as to the way in which Miss McNamara did her work. (Applause.) As a Union they would be glad to welcome Mrs. Hills, who had been appointed to take charge of the branch of domestic economy. (Cheers.) Our privileges in many ways are great; but great privileges involve great responsibilities. "To whom much is given, from him much shall be required." We are at the foundation of a glorious edifice. We are helping to fix the corner-stones of a great nation in these southern lands. Shall we not determine that as far as we are concerned they shall be truly laid. The builders will pass away and be no more seen; but the building will endure. The toil and weariness will be forgotten; but the work that we do for good or ill will continue for many generations. (Cheers.) Sometimes in the summer evenings as the sun is setting we look to the eastern hills. The valleys and the hills are seen; but soon the lower heights are lost in shade, the valleys disappear in shadow. The summits, however, seem to have an added splendour. They appear to live in a flood of glorious light. And so with us. When towards the evening of life we shall look back upon the past the depressions, the weariness, and the failures will be lost in oblivion; but on that which we have accomplished, on the memory of duty done, on the remembrance of the good, there will rest the light of the setting sun. (Cheers.)

Mr. Burnard presented the Treasurer's report. In doing so he said the finances were in a satisfactory condition. The receipts for 1900 had been £53 5s. 8d. and the expenditure £10 19s. 9d., leaving a balance of £42 5s. 11d. Of the £53 odd received, no less than £47 4s. was represented by subscriptions, showing that 472 teachers had become bona-fide members of the Union. That was an indication of the estimation of the Union by the teachers of its popularity and the great interest felt by them in its success. (Cheers.)

Mr. A. H. Neale, Minute Secretary, submitted his report, which stated, inter alia:—

During the past year eleven regular monthly meetings of the Executive have been held and one special meeting. The attendance of members has been very good, although, in consequence of changes in the personnel, the average is not so high as last year. Mr. Whillas retired from the Executive on being appointed Inspector. Mr. Williams was only appointed at Easter, when Mr. Holloway retired, and Mr. Wicksteed was unfortunately prevented by illness from being present at some meetings. The resolutions of last Conference were laid before the Board of Inspectors of Schools by your Executive. The result of their presentation has already been made known to the various Associations. Members of the Union must not be disappointed at finding their wishes in connection with these resolutions have not been at once acceded to. In matters of departmental policy, where compliance has been refused, it has to be remembered that public interests, as well as those of teachers, have to be safeguarded. The changes in connection with the work of the schools are of different character, and teachers, who are experts, must have patience, and in the end they are bound to gain their point. Last year's resolutions, dealing with subjects of this character, should receive very careful consideration. The vexed question of rating of teachers' residences has been set at rest by the test case heard in the Adelaide Local Court, in which Mr. Launpe consented to allow himself to be made defendant. The decision of the S.M. will be a precedent for country Magistrates, and it will be useless for teachers to make any further attempts to obtain exemption. While they may feel that the law presses somewhat harshly, it is better to have the position decided, and all doubts as to their liability removed. The meeting of the General Committee at Easter was only moderately attended, only about one-half of the Association being represented. The Executive desire to urge members of the Union to regard this meeting as of the utmost importance. The September Conference brings its members in the mass into closer touch with the foremost men of the province who are not in the ranks of the teachers, so they are enabled to gain an insight into the views of the outside public on education, while the Easter meeting, as the Parliament of the Union, enables its members, through their delegates, to consider the application of details to the work of the schools. The wish of the Executive is that every Association should be represented at this meeting; that delegates shall be fully prepared with the views of their Associations and armed with authority, so that the results of the deliberations shall be accepted by all as the best possible solution of those matters which are discussed. The leaflet "Union News" has been issued during the year, but the number of subscribers to it barely covers the cost of production. The issue has been an experiment, and may have to be discontinued at the end of the year unless there is greater demand for it.

The President and Mr. Burnard welcomed the visiting delegates. The latter gentleman, in the course of his remarks, said that the system under which they were working in South Australia was the outcome of twenty-five years' devoted life on the part of that gentleman whose loss they so deeply regretted. Much good must result to the educational system from the visit of the delegates from the older and more populated countries.

The visitors gracefully acknowledged the compliment.

At 11 o'clock His Excellency the Governor, Lord Tennyson, took the chair, and there were on the platform the Minister of Education (Hon. E. L. Batchelor, M.P.), the Board of Inspectors, Professor Douglas, Mrs. Hills, several members of Parliament, and many prominent citizens.

His Excellency said:—I spoke to you at length last year, and accordingly this year I shall confine myself to a few brief remarks. I have to congratulate you cordially on the University system now in full working order of the teaching of pupil teachers, which seems to be good and sound. I should like to urge the very great importance of making the Public Library here better than it is, so that the teachers all over the province may keep up, by means of the travelling libraries, what they learn at the University, and be on a level with modern requirements. I am sorry to say I am ashamed that the librarians' meeting at the Library Conference next month should spy out the nakedness of the land, the dearth of common standard or new works on the shelves, except for the fact that if attention is drawn to it the Government may be induced to supply adequate funds, so as to place the library on a proper basis. Do not sacrifice your literary education to any "golden calf" of utilitarianism. If you do you will lose your greatness as a people. "So urgent," said the American Ambassador in London, "are the American author-

ities about the need of free libraries that in the State of New York the regents of the University, who have charge of the people's education, have established a regular system of travelling libraries throughout the State, each library carrying round 100 volumes, mostly all of valuable new or standard works. The tour of the remoter districts is made, each library being followed by another with books to take the place of those already read." Mr. Choate continues:—"One of the wise things our fathers did was to read the Bible through every two years in presence of the family. The result was that they knew the text, with the consequence of a vast influence on their language, morals, and character." Some clergymen and ministers are allowed, on appeal from eight parents, to read the Bible in schools in South Australia out of school hours. I cannot conceive why the various religious bodies have not bestirred themselves in the matter. At Birmingham, one of the most Radical constituencies in England at the present time, the teachers read the Bible each morning or afternoon without note or comment; but on Tuesday and Friday mornings approved voluntary teachers may have a department or departments of the school for half an hour for the purpose of giving religious instruction. The children may attend this instruction or not, as they please, and the teachers have the same option. The voluntary religious instruction is given under the auspices of a Nonconformist agency, and of the District Church Council. The School Boards, as you are aware, do not permit of religious instruction being given in school hours. There are 57 schools in Birmingham, and 60,000 pupils, the largest number on the register of any Board outside London. Instruction is given by the Nonconformists in 84 departments, and by the Anglican Church in 40. This system has been in force for more than 25 years, but lately a feeling has arisen that more is desirable in the way of religious instruction for the young, and general meetings have been held among the Liberals. It is expected that ultimately a basis of agreement will be decided upon. A majority of the teachers themselves are said to favour reform that would substitute a short religious service for this voluntary system. The Liberals and Liberal-Unionists will unite to carry the alteration. The Birmingham Liberal Association recommend (1) reading or memorising selected portions of Scripture, (2) singing of a hymn, (3) repetition of the Lord's Prayer. These data have been taken from the London "Daily Chronicle," and I am rejoiced that this remarkable reactionary feeling is growing up all over England that the Bible should be more and more studied by all ranks of the people, and this reaction will probably soon make itself apparent here. Those who are now indifferent are sure to learn sooner or later—I hope it will be sooner—that the religion of a people can never be founded on mere moral philosophy, or on brilliant disquisitions about tendencies that make for righteousness, and that it can only come home to them in the simple noble thoughts and facts of a Scripture like ours. As my father would say, "The Bible ought to be read, were it only for the sake of the grand English in which it is written, an education in itself." I had meant to tell you something to-day of our schools, classes of domestic economy, but I find that this subject has been treated very fully and lucidly in Professor Bragg's report to the Minister of Education in May. But I will touch on one or two other points on which we are insistent in our English schools. You are aware perhaps that the system of pass results has been abolished, hence the Inspectors have a more difficult task and far greater responsibilities, and are obliged to be men of wide culture and common sense. "The responsibility of the teacher," says Lord Reay, in his annual report this year, "is similarly increased as he has to develop the powers of observation and reflection of the scholars individually, and to form their character by influencing his staff and connecting the subjects of his curriculum." The teacher has to bestow not "less care on the individual scholar," but "more attention in the methods of teaching, by which the progress of every individual scholar" shall be better secured. That is to say, teachers have to be more careful over the needs of the stupid pupil than they have been hitherto, which is as it should be. It is reported that Australian parents do not understand the necessity of co-operating with the teachers in the matter of discipline; if so, the teachers have indeed a Herculean labour to perform. In England we give all teachers opportunities for leaving their schools for short periods, in order to visit first-rate schools and report on their disciplinary and educational methods. Bearing in mind this custom, I wrote a private letter to the Minister of Education (Mr. Batchelor), and begged him to allow some of your Inspectors and teachers to go to Western Australia, and report on their schools, which are under the guidance of an admirable educational expert, Mr. Cyril Jackson, and are the only schools in Australia rivalling yours, and in some departments of knowledge outstripping them. I sincerely hope that this advice, rendered in my letter, will be followed, for I feel that some such stimulus is required in South Australia at the present moment. The drawing in English schools is entirely ahead of yours, for you have not, except in a few schools, turned your attention to it. I think that this is owing to the strong recommendations made by the Royal Commission in 1887-1. That rudimentary drawing should be incorporated with writing as a single elementary subject, and that instruction in drawing (inclusive of figuring from natural objects by drawing, woodwork, and clay modelling) should be continued through all the standards. 2. That a proper supply of casts and models for drawing should be included in that "apparatus of elementary instruction" which a school must possess before it can receive public money. 3. That modelling should be constituted a subject on which grants can be secured. 4. That art should be properly taught in the training colleges to those who will have subsequently to teach art to others. 5. That the Inspectors should be made responsible for the instruction in drawing given in elementary schools. Mr. Armstrong, our Inspector in England of art for the Science and Art Department, suggested that "four hours a week should be allotted to drawing alone. This once done, he thought that one hour a week for modelling would be time well spent." And I would here say one word on agricultural education.