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THE EDUCATION BILL.

The State system of free and compulsory education is, happily, a fixed and an immovable institution in South Australia. The moral and physical welfare and intellectual equipment of growing boys and girls are objects of general solicitude, and rightly occupy a plane above the arena of political contests. The inestimable value to a country of citizens with well-ordered and well-informed minds, and the dangers and weaknesses which attend ignorance are fully recognised. In England the motive which led the State slowly and reluctantly to undertake the duty of insisting on the education of all was mainly economical. Primary education was seen to be a means by which other knowledge was acquired sooner and more easily. It was observed, too, that in the struggle between nations, other things being equal, the best-instructed people would be successful rivals of those who were not so well grounded. In Scotland the parish school has made the inhabitants of a naturally poor country industrially vigorous, enterprising, and opulent; and the wonderful progress of Germany and the United States in recent years is attributable principally to widespread educational efficiency. No other country could so ill afford as Australia to be neglectful of the priceless benefits of an effective system of school training. With the enormous responsibilities and the subtle political and social temptations which confront her people, an ill-educated and undisciplined Commonwealth would constantly invite disaster. Democratic ideals demand that to all children shall be freely imparted the fundamentals of true knowledge, and that provision shall be made for even the poorest youths and girls of capacity, diligence, and character, to enjoy to the full the advantages of the best University and other teaching.

The Education Bill, which Mr. Coneyber has introduced to the Assembly, embodies valuable ideas suggested by experience of the operation of the existing Acts. It is a consolidating measure, and the added reforms are of a far-reaching and comprehensive nature, designed considerably to improve the attainments of the average child, and to construct substantial bridges between the primary school and the highest seat of learning. Important advances are contemplated regarding compulsory attendance at school. Under the Act of 1875 children were required to attend "not less than 70 days in each half-year," and the period of instruction was fixed at from seven to 13 years of age. The Act of 1891, which abolished fees, set out that the attendance must be on 35 school days in each school quarter. The late Mr. Price in 1905 carried through Parliament a Bill providing that in thickly populated areas children must attend at least eight out of every 10 school gatherings weekly. This has had the good effect of increasing the average attendances, but it still permits a whole day to be snatched from school-work, and many children of unappreciative parents suffer accordingly. The present Bill insists upon a full attendance on each day when the school is open, and authorizes the police to discover from children who may be in the streets during school hours why they are not at their books. It also raises the "compulsory" age to 14 years, and forbids the employment of children under

that age—unless they shall have passed the compulsory standard—in any labour or occupation calculated to prevent them from profitably participating in school lessons. These provisions, administered with discretion, ought to secure to boys and girls a much more complete mental preparation for life's duties than the majority now receive. Effectively applied, they will make the work of teaching more satisfactory and pleasant, enhance the morale of the rising race, and place wholesome restraints upon selfish or loose-living parents. New safeguards are introduced to ensure that children attending all private schools of every kind shall be properly instructed. Such schools must obtain certificates of efficiency, supply regular reports to the Education Department, and submit their rolls for inspection to official visitors whenever called upon to do so. The term "provisional" is abolished, and all schools in which there is an average attendance of 10 and upward will rank as ordinary public schools. Parents of deaf, dumb, blind, or mentally defective children will be obliged to provide the sufferers with suitable education, and to assist financially in their training so far as their means will allow.

Important powers are conferred on the Minister for the promotion of higher education. He may raise any school to the position of a "higher primary school," in which the course of study in the advanced classes will consist of a two years' course, and include higher education in the various subjects ordinarily taught, and instruction in elementary sciences, manual training, and domestic subjects. He may also, wherever 40 pupils are obtainable, establish "high schools," at which the course of study will embrace all branches of a liberal education, including foreign languages, sciences, manual training (including workshop practice), and domestic subjects. In these "higher" institutions appropriate technical or agricultural training may be given, as may seem desirable. The Minister may establish and maintain continuation classes in connection with any public school. Technical schools will be provided, and on July 1 next the Education Department will assume charge of the existing schools of mines at Gawler, Kapunda, Moonta, Mount Gambier, Petersburg, and Port Pirie. Unfortunately for the logical completeness of the Government scheme, the Adelaide School of Mines and Industries is apparently to continue an anomalous existence outside the control of the Education Department, and prevent in the metropolitan district a co-ordination of educational factors which is essential to true economy, effective management, and the best achievement. This unaccountable incongruity is obviously a flaw in an otherwise well-conceived measure, and the Minister's explanation of it will be awaited with interest. Why the smaller institutions in the country should be merged into the Education Department when the principal establishment in the city, and adjoining, too, another school under the department—is allowed to remain free from the department's control, is a curious puzzle. The Bill retains the Boards of Advice, and empowers the creation of school committees—half nominated and half elected—for single schools in outlying districts. The affairs of high schools or technical schools will be entrusted to councils of not

fewer than six members each. Altogether the Bill is one of great public interest and public importance; it involves serious issues; and its treatment by Parliament will be watched with keen concern by all classes of the community.

Reg. Nov. 11th, 1910.

—Education Bill.—

The Minister of Education, in one of the finest efforts he has made in the House, moved the second reading of the Education Bill. He spoke for an hour and three-quarters, and dealt fully with the whole subject. He urged the necessity and importance of greater attention being paid to the higher education of the young. The Government scheme provided for high primary schools; high schools, continuation classes, and technical schools. The age of compulsory attendance was raised to 14, the children having to attend every day the school was open. High schools would be established in various centres, and the course of instruction would be so elastic that it would have a practical side bearing on the industries of the community in which the school was situated. Where there were no high schools provision would be made for carrying the pupils on for two years in advanced studies. Continuation classes would be established at night. The sooner attendance at technical schools was made compulsory the better. The Government did not propose to take over the Adelaide School of Mines at present, but it would assume control of the country Schools of Mines. An ideal system would be to have a thoroughly qualified technical man to be principal of the Adelaide School of Mines and superintendent of technical education. Private schools were to be subjected to departmental inspection, and attendance at these would be compulsory on the part of those on the roll. Truants would be committed to the care of the State Children's Council. Mr. Ritchie adjourned the debate.