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THE EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE.

A New School Timetable Suggested.

Among a number of suggestions regarding an improved time-table for the schools the Rev. K. J. F. Bickersteth mentioned at the Educational Conference yesterday the cutting out of lessons on a couple of afternoons each week, the time to be made up by work on Saturday mornings.

At the afternoon session of the Educational Society Conference at the North-terrace Institute, yesterday, the Rev. K. J. F. Bickersteth (headmaster of St. Peter's College) delivered an address on "A Reformed Timetable."

Mr. W. J. Adey (Superintendent of Secondary Education) presided, and said Mr. Bickersteth was a man of such personality and ability that he had made a big name in the community. (Applause.) He would deal with one of the most important problems in education. Educationists had so far failed to turn out youths from the schools who loved their jobs. More than 90 per cent. of people working in the city found their chief enjoyment outside their daily task. So long as that was so they were failing in part as educationists. (Applause.)

Mr. Bickersteth said he had no intention of putting into operation in his school the proposals which he was about to discuss. He simply brought the points forward as a matter of academic interest, and if changes seemed possible in the future they should not be brought into operation except when endorsed after free discussion. He did not want to scrap the whole of the present school timetable, but there were certain obvious defects arising largely owing to the mass of subjects and the consequent congestion of the timetable, which was too full. Thirty or 35 periods in the school week were not enough, and students had often to decide between alternative subjects—a very difficult matter. The subjects were compressed into six or seven hours of the 24. Parents objected to the child being given home work, and enquired where the home life came in. The school child seemed to have no time away from his lessons between Monday and Friday. He advocated taking the week as a whole and breaking it up into three pairs of days. He suggested the same timetable for, say, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and another for the other days. He would spread the time on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9 a.m. until half-past 4, and a sensible reduction of sport would result. He would reduce the time spent in home work. An advantage to those who had to make up timetables would not have to make up alternative subjects at the same time. On Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday he would make the hours 9 to 1. That would break the monotony of the school week. It would be good for the teachers to have a couple of afternoons free in a week and would stimulate them for the work on the longer days. Dealing with games, he said the open spaces in the park lands on week days were not sufficiently utilised. He would allow for use of the laboratories on such afternoons and organise field and country excursions. He did not believe the compulsory games scheme was altogether good except for keeping the boys and girls under supervision. Many boys and girls on getting a half-holiday went to the picture shows, but others did not. In this country there were three or four months of hot weather, which made teaching not easy, and an occasional afternoon off would be a great relief to the children. At present a very short period was available for games on school days, owing to children having to catch cars or trains before the concession tickets became valueless. Taking away two hours on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon had to be made up. Such time could be found on Saturday mornings. Three hours of morning teaching would be better than 1½ hours on two afternoons. They would therefore have ordinary morning school on Saturday. He could foresee strong objections. The parents would say the privilege of Saturday morning would be taken away; that the help of the children at home was wanted. They would say five journeys to school each week were enough, and that children often went away on Saturday for the week-end. How could children attend the dentist or "music lessons" they would ask. Many girls and boys and teachers would prefer two clear afternoons to one morning. Regarding the help the children were supposed to give, he thought perhaps they were not so useful as they were supposed to be. (Laughter.) Regarding the week-end excursion, there were very few except the wealthy—and by the wealthy he meant the skilled artizans who worked only five days a week, and millionaires—could ignore their work on Saturday. People would perhaps object to Friday night homework, because that was the dancing night or the time of the treat at the pictures. But a cinderella dance would be better on Saturday evening than dancing from, say, 8 to 2 on Friday night. (Applause.) Regarding long journeys to school on six days, it was too far to send a child every day from, say, Mount Lofty to Adelaide, and he suggested that the boarding accommodation of schools should be more availed of. Games on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon would be better for the children than the excitement of a football match on a Saturday afternoon. Sacred Heart College, Adelaide; Guildford College, Perth; and several schools in Melbourne had Saturday morning school, and he had never heard any objection raised to the practice. (Applause.)

The Chairman said the paper was, in a measure, original, and bristled with suggestions. He did not believe in homework. In the last five or six years in which he was in charge of a school he gave no homework. He would not permit any teacher to make a child of his stay up till 10 or 11 o'clock doing homework. His impression was that there was a lot of waste time in teaching life in primary and high schools, and colleges as well. (Laughter.) A timetable could be drawn up in which there was more time for leisure subjects and less for homework. Saturday morning was the time of organised sport in the high schools. The staffs willingly gave up their mornings to the oversight of the sports. A sixth school day would be a hardship to many high school children who had to travel long distances. (Applause).

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH.

READING OF GOOD LITERATURE ADVOCATED.

There was a large attendance at the evening session, presided over by Miss M. E. Patchell. The subject was "The Teaching of English." Mr. R. C. Bald (assistant lecturer in English at the Adelaide University), in introducing the matter, said the teaching of language must start with the very beginning of education. In this connection it was important that they should be sure that the teacher's English was correct, and that they were treading on safe ground. There was only one way in which they could assure the correct teaching of the English language. That was by the teaching of phonetics. The pupil from his earliest stages should have before him correct forms of speech. They had to face the question of the teaching of reading and recitation. The reading, of course, must be intelligent and clear. Without that it would be impossible for the pupil to read poetry with a proper perception of its meaning. They could always be certain, in English verse, where the stress should come. He referred to the great value of dramatic reading. It was not necessary to dress in character to get plenty of fun and enlightenment out of dramatic reading. Referring to the writing of English, he directed attention to the criticisms which examiners made from time to time of the papers submitted to them. One of the most difficult tasks the teacher had to face was to train the pupil to write English well. It should be remembered that every teacher was a teacher of English even if his special line was physics or some kindred subject. Grammar was a means and not an end. In the old days it was frightfully overloaded with unnecessary terminology. This fault had been largely remedied. The teaching of grammar on its formal side would always be necessary. All other languages must be approached in their schools through the medium of English and grammar, and it could only be done successfully if English grammar was properly understood. In regard to composition he said the pupil should be trained to use his powers of observation in connection with the composition of his essay, rather than to employ his imagination. He should be encouraged to start from the facts which lay close at hand, and of which he had a personal experience. He should clearly visualise his subject in order to make others see with him. The day of exclamations, rhetorical questions, and exuberant adjectives was over. The Prayer Book was a splendid example of English style. But in the non-Episcopal churches this was not used, and it sometimes happened that a sort of jargon was common, which tended to influence the younger members of the congregation. He pleaded for a more extended portion of time being devoted to literature in the schools. The first and third years of the high school period gave the teacher a great opportunity of forming the taste of his class. He was constantly impressed with the need for wider reading in the school courses. The pupil should be encouraged to get firsthand acquaintance with the books the teacher talked about, and he should be told how he could get them. One authority had said the success of a teacher could be fairly gauged by the degree in which the pupil could do without him. He advocated special attention being paid to the school library. Good models of English literature should be placed before the pupil from the very beginning of his education. It might be objected that there were always some who did not and could not appreciate good literature. By placing good models before the young student it would be possible to discover what he did admire. Literature taught sincerity—that anything which was not real was false and could not stand the test of time. The teacher was the guide who should lead his pupils on. Literature in its higher branches often contained a theory of life. By means of literature they were introduced to men and women. It placed before them divers characters and when they pondered the work they got some foretaste of the diversity of life that would come after the class-room, and of the way in which the world might reverse its judgments. (Applause.)

AN EXPERIMENT.

DEVELOPING POWERS OF INDEPENDENT THOUGHT.

Mr. E. Allen (Master of English Literature, Adelaide High School), took as his subject, "An Experiment in the Teaching of English." He said it was generally admitted that they must respect more the individual, who should be adjusting himself to the environment of the natural, the social, and the moral world in which he was to live. It was not so much what they did for a boy that counted, as what they could get the boy to do for himself. In forcing children to conform to certain arbitrary rules they might crush what later they most desired to foster—an independence of thought and a self-conscious adaptation to the needs of society. They distorted the minds of the pupils to make them fit in with their own, instead of developing those qualities with which nature had endowed them. The ideal specialist teacher of the future would be a psychologist. Mr. Allen gave some examples of poetical compositions by his pupils, several of which indicated decided talent. Referring to examinations, he said that he agreed with Professor Adams, who had said the fact was that external examinations formed the dead hand which tradition placed upon all attempts to get out of the rut of established educational custom. Nothing of vital importance could be done in the way of reforming educational methods till that incubus had been removed. Why could not they grant certificates to boys in approved schools as was already done in Victoria, without holding an external examination? They must go for that instead of wasting their energy criticising the questions set. Some were content to sit back and accept the examination on the principle that "whatever is, is right." They must admit that the type of questions set last year marked a decided advance on anything that had gone before. It aimed at what they were all trying to do, namely inducing the pupil to read and criticise for himself. That the aim would exceed the grasp of the average boy of sixteen was only to be expected. He had tried his best to develop the powers of independent thought in his boys, and when they had had time, say a week to read, discuss and reflect about a question they had turned out some astonishingly fine work. In the last terminal examination, when they met with questions similar to those discussed in class, their answers were admirable. But when confronted with a new type of question altogether, most of the boys were inarticulate. Only three out of twenty-two were capable of saying anything at all on the question—"What in your opinion constitutes a great novel, and how far the 'Master of Ballentrae' approaches or falls short of that standard?" If they had been allowed a few days to discuss the question with him in class, and reflect, he felt sure their answers would have been satisfactory. Only the brilliant boy could in half an hour answer an examination question which had not previously been touched upon in class. In an effort to cover too much ground in the way of criticism to satisfy the examiner, the boys were missing the poetic experiences, and attempting something beyond them. Much of their best efforts during the year were useless from the examination point of view. He was doubtful whether English literature could be "marked" at all. They only discouraged the art of writing by insisting on ready-made answers to artificial subjects. Literature was not a matter of grammar and decoration, but a method of expression. To read poetry was to come into contact, not with a pattern, but with a personality—to be taken into a living world. It must guide rather than control, and inspire rather than teach. They might go so far as to say with the Master of Balliol that "Education consists in all that remains when we have forgotten everything that we have been taught." (Applause.)

Several members of the audience expressed appreciation of the addresses. Dr. H. T. Postle, principal of the Presbyterian Girls' College, referred to the fine work of the conference, and mentioned that the success was largely due to the painstaking work of Mr. Gordon Wood (secretary).

THE SCHOOL TIMETABLE.

Radical Amendment Plan.

Mr. W. J. Adey (Superintendent of Secondary Education), who occupied the chair at the session of the Educational Society of South Australia at the North Terrace Institute Building, Adelaide, on Monday afternoon, said that the schools had failed to turn out pupils who liked their work. He thought that fully 90 per cent. of people did their work without liking it. That was a problem they had to overcome.

The Rev. K. J. F. Bickersteth (Head Master of St. Peter's College), gave an instructive address on "A reformed timetable." He said that doubtless there were present many advocates of the Dalton system. He did not propose to deal with that, but to place before them certain suggestions as a matter of academic interest. Under the existing school system, he proceeded, there were certain obvious defects which largely arose owing to the mass of subjects. The timetable was so full as to cause mental indigestion among the pupils. It had been possible at one time for a man to cover the whole field of knowledge. Each year, however, fresh major subjects were acquiring a period of full time and the necessity now arose for specially trained teachers for certain subjects. Unless a choice of profession was to be made at an early age, —say, 13 years—they could not overcome the difficulty, except by alternating subjects. The multiplicity of subjects did not permit of them all being taught properly. Thirty to thirty-five hours a week were not sufficient for the whole course. In the choice of subjects there were differences of opinion. There was a tendency to make invidious distinctions, because some teachers were apt to suggest subjects which they liked best.

A Few Suggestions.

He could not discuss the subjects most suited for the child, but the compression of the six or seven hours each day for study was a question upon which he would like to make a few suggestions. There was a rush from subject to subject, and class to class. Then there was the home work. By Friday night the pupil was glad to throw aside books for a spell of a day or two. Advocates of the day school system made a great point of the home life of the pupil. He felt that time was hardly given for the children to "possess their own souls" owing to the rush. A boarder's period at school was six hours a day, and Saturday was a badly-arranged day for them. He advocated breaking up the week into three pairs of different types of days. As an example, he would suggest a different timetable for Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from those on the other days. He would advocate spreading the teaching periods on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday over a long stretch of time—say, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.—and that the time usually spent towards the end of the afternoon for sport should be eliminated on those days, if not altogether cut out. He would suggest at least one hour for homework in the evenings. It might not be necessary to have similar subjects always on the same days, because the longer period available would permit of a choice of alternate subjects. Under such a scheme the school on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday would start at the same hour, and cease at 1 o'clock for organized games which could be finished early. That would, to a large extent, break the monotony of the five-days' school. Pupils and teachers would return to work with greater zeal to tackle the longer period of work, if, on the day previously, they had a measure of freedom from study. It would be a great advantage to teachers to be free from school on two days at 1 o'clock.

Sports and Hobbies.

The question as to what form the sports should take on those afternoons was, added Mr. Bickersteth, a difficult one. Some schools were limited in the matter of playing grounds, but he thought they could make far greater use of the park lands. The system would give the pupils more time to develop a hobby. He would advocate freer use of laboratories and excursion trips. That would give the child an opportunity of finding its own soul. He did not think compulsory games were to be advocated, except under the eye of the teacher. When half-day holidays were given at present it appeared that most of the children used them for picture shows. The relief to the teaching staff under such a system would be enormous. They had to remember that certain games could not be played in a hurry. In Australia, where they had, perhaps, established themselves as the greatest exponents of cricket in the world, it would not be desirable to play that game in a hurry.

Saturday Morning Session.

If the scheme were to be complete, Saturday morning school would become essential. They would then have three half-days off in the week. Three hours' teaching in the morning were worth more to the scholars than one and a half hours