

TEACHERS' FEDERATION.

Arbitration Endorsed.

Matriculation Standard.

The sessions of the Australian Teachers' Federation were resumed in the lecture room at the Institute, North terrace, on Wednesday morning. The President (Mr. A. G. Alanson) occupied the chair.

Uniform Matriculation Standard.

The proceedings opened with a paper on "Uniform matriculation standard," by Mr. E. J. Rourke, B.A., B.E. (New South Wales). He pointed out that the standard suggested by the executive committee was not the same as at present existed in any of the Australian universities, but it was considered to be most adaptable for the Australian youth. The writer urged the elimination of Latin as a compulsory subject, for matriculation. Its virtues were admitted, he said, but there was insufficient justification for the exclusion of many men and women from a great deal of university life and advantages because they had little or no Latin. Very few of those who reached the present matriculation standard were able to read with fluency and pleasure classical authors, and the majority found that they could get nearly all they desired in beauty of expression and grandeur of context in the works of English and French writers. Few continued to read Latin after they passed the matriculation. Were a reasonable number likely to attain even moderate skill in reading or writing Latin? For the very few who did, was there sufficient value in such a result (a) for the self, and (b) for service to the State, in comparison with other studies, as English history and modern languages? Now it was not the means of communication, either verbal or written, in politics or science, as was the case in the middle ages, and the Renaissance. There were good reasons, cultural and utilitarian, for its close study, but the former were only for a few gifted with proclivity, leisure, and earnestness. It could not be argued that those who took Latin to the matriculation standard got a reasonable insight into Roman literature. From the utilitarian point of view, it did not seem that there was justification for the study, because the amount or quality of the useful things found up to the matriculation stage appeared to be unwarrantably insufficient. In the suggested subjects for matriculation for law, Latin was retained, because a great many of the basic principles and maxims came from that language, and were promulgated by Latin jurists. The executive was strongly of opinion that it should not be a compulsory subject for arts. While admitting the value of the study, he thought that weakness in the subject or total ignorance should not debar capable and willing students from proceeding to a degree, and that the universities, as well as individuals, lost by insistence on Latin. Everything pointed to the conclusion that it was time substitutes for Latin could be well employed. The writer argued that history should be made a compulsory subject for the matriculation standard in all Australian universities, and that both English and history should be passed at the higher standard. He moved:—"That this conference receives with appreciation the scheme for a general matriculation standard for Australia, and instructs its council to obtain expressions of opinion from the various university authorities, and that the scheme together with these opinions be referred back to the committee for final report."

Mr. W. F. Hadfield, B.A., B.Sc. (N.S.W.), seconded the motion. He said that Mr. Rourke was a teacher of Latin, and realized the value of the subject.

Mr. H. L. Grace, B.A. (Tasmania), opposed the motion. He thought the proper procedure was to go into the matter and say what should be the uniform scheme of matriculation and when they had agreed, to put it to the universities, which would be holding a conference at Adelaide in May. He moved an amendment:—"That a committee consisting of one representative from each State be appointed to consider the matter and to see if some suggestions cannot be embodied in the scheme."

Mr. G. Robinson (V.), seconded the amendment. The amendment was negatived, and the motion carried.

Registration With Arbitration Court.

Following the discussion introduced by Mr. E. Dash, B.A. (N.S.W.), on Tuesday, with respect to the question of registration of the federation with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, that delegate moved:—"That we affirm the principal of conciliation and arbitration, and that we request the delegates from the various States to urge their organization to link up with the State School Teachers' Federation of Australia."

Mr. D. Black (V.) seconded the motion. He said there was a strong desire on the part of teachers in all States to become one. As they were functioning under different State administration, they must use their Federal machinery to bring about

that unanimity of aim and conditions that would give them the same chance of building up the professional status that they aimed at. Many of the wives of the lower-paid teachers were pinched or starved. They were slaves to their homes, because their husband's status was not what they expected when they entered the profession. He saw in the motion the possibility of reaching that "land of promise," towards which they were all looking. He hoped all the delegates would commend the principle to their respective unions.

Mr. Robinson supported. He did not think, however, that they should use extravagant statements. In Victoria they were not pinched or starved.

Mr. Black—You know nothing about it! Mr. Robinson said he did not know any case in Victoria where a teacher was pinched or starved.

Mr. H. Hart (V.) opposed the motion. He agreed with the principle of conciliation and arbitration, but he could see they were on dangerous ground. In one of the States they now had a board of conciliation, and if they passed the motion the delegates from that particular State must vote against it for fear that their Government might use it as an argument to cancel the board.

Mr. Dash—Why did they make a threat of that description?

Mr. Hart said his amendment would not alter the provisions of the motion, but would cover those particular States. He moved an amendment—"That this conference endorses the principle of conciliation and arbitration, and urges its delegates from those States which have no satisfactory system to link up with the Federated Teachers' Association of Australia."

Mr. G. W. McLean (W.A.) said he was not opposed to the principle. He wished, however, to dissociate himself from the motion, as they had a satisfactory tribunal in Western Australia. He advised South Australians that if they were going to have an appeal board they should have one similar to that in the Western State.

Mr. L. T. Latter (N.S.W.) supported the motion. He said that teachers had been the plaything of the Governments. Had delegates considered where they would go if arbitration tribunals were wiped out—as they were likely to be at any time? That was why the New South Wales delegates were so strongly in favour of the motion.

Mr. Dash, in reply, said in view of the fact that the delegates had expressed approval of the principle, and wished at some future time to link up with the federation, he would accept the amendment, so that there might be a unanimity of opinion.

The amendment was carried. Mr. Black said with reference to the charge of extravagant statements what he had meant to convey was that many of the teachers were pinched and starved of those things that a teacher's wife should be entitled to. (Hear, hear.)

Henry Lawson Memorial.

Mr. Latter moved—"That the conference approve of the support being extended to the movement for a Henry Lawson memorial fund." He said that Lawson had been a true poet of Australia, and teachers should regard the matter from that standpoint.

Mr. McLean seconded. Mr. J. Bensted (Q.) said he would oppose the motion if it were intended to raise money through the efforts of school children. If the teachers were going to raise the funds then he was with them all along the line.

Mr. Rourke (N.S.W.) supported the motion. He hoped that a statue to Henry Lawson would soon be erected, as such a memorial would be an inspiration. It was a pleasure to him to see statues to McDonald Stuart and Col. Light in Adelaide. It was a fine thing to thus recognize the work of men who had helped in making the history of Australia.

Mr. W. Bennett (S.A.) said South Australian teachers would be in favour of the scheme, but there were many restrictions placed upon collections in their schools. At present they were languishing through lack of funds for the Capt. Flinders appeal.

Mr. Robinson (V.) said teachers had discussed the matter in Victoria, and could not support the proposal for a statue. The motion was carried.

Apprenticeship and Education.

Mr. Hadfield, in treating the question of apprenticeships and education, said that sheer necessity, due to the lack of skilled labour, had compelled practically every Australian Government to study the subject of apprenticeship. As a result there was being generally built up in some States, at least, a definite system of apprenticeship in place of the haphazard conditions of recent years. He was strongly in favour of extending the compulsory school age to 16 years, with a special course of instruction for each form of continuation school. He enumerated the following points in summing up:—(1) The possibility of being apprenticed at an age later than 15 years; the need for physical development and sense of responsibility made 16 years the minimum limit. (2) The reduction of the period of apprenticeship under special conditions, e.g.:—age beyond 16, and for special educational fitness. (3) Necessity for training in the elements of citizenship as well as craftsmanship, i.e.:—the need of continuation schools; and (4) the establishment of vocational bureaus or apprenticeship information bureaus. The last named was so pressing that he moved, "That delegates to this conference of teachers urge their respective Governments to provide

and establish information bureaus, whose main functions shall be (a) the collection of all information relating to apprenticeship; (b) advising parents and pupils of the prospects in each trade, and, where required, endeavouring to secure apprenticeship in those trades for which the lad appears best fitted. (c) advising the authorities on matters relating to training and education of apprentices; (d) making known the facilities provided, and endeavouring to direct lads in dead-end jobs into the ranks of skilled labour."

Mr. McLean seconded the motion, which was carried.

Education of Older Children.

Mr. Robinson read a paper on "The Education of Older Children." He said it was everywhere agreed that the question was vital to the welfare of every nation. In Victoria secondary education was still in its infancy. There were not enough high schools or higher elementary schools to go round. A remedy would be to turn certain of the central schools into high school, and that was receiving consideration. They had a few most successful and admirable schools of domestic arts. What provision was there, however, for the technical training of boys, and domestic or other training for girls? An extension of the elementary schools and high schools kind of education would be the easiest provision that the Education Department could make for the extra year or two at school. If Australia was to take a worthy place among the nations of the world they must do their best to urge on all concerned the necessity of a far-reaching system of education that would provide guidance and training for boys and girls from 14 to 18 years, and to do that thoroughly teachers must bring to bear all the forces of science, skill, and sympathy at their command. They must further Australian interests by progressive and combined activity. The schools could engender the right national spirit and lay a sure foundation. It was their part to stress the importance of secondary education, and thus help to educate and mould the public mind. (Applause.)

Education and Efficiency.

Mr. McLean, in discussing the question of efficiency in the schools, asked how far were their educational systems seeking to develop the child in accordance with the needs of the community? In his own State they recognized that the primary industries must be the mainstay of the community for years to come, and yet it was a curious fact—and one he believed common to all States in Australia—that there had been an insistent demand for high or secondary schools and very little demand for agricultural colleges. Every town of any size insisted on having its high school, with a curriculum university-moulded and university-looking. Such a curriculum did not make for social efficiency. The building of high schools as vehicles for traditional secondary education very often had a political, rather than an educational, significance. They might talk about the efficiency of their schools, social or otherwise, but they would never get a true educational system until education was looked upon as the first and vital need of the country, and as such was removed from the turmoil of politics, and dependency on the financial exigencies of the Treasury. The States provided sinking funds for the redemption of the public debt. Why should they not have a national fund for the education of their children? (Applause.)

Schools and Citizenship.

Mr. Black contributed a paper entitled "Our schools as nurseries for citizenship." He contended that the school system failed in its first aim of community service. What percentage of their population took advantage of their hard-won right to be a voice in the government of the country, or any practical interest in those things which were of community interest, such as hospitals, public libraries, recreation reserves, and the erection of public halls in smaller towns? The conscientious work of the teacher was 95 per cent. preparation for examinations, and perhaps 5 per cent. preparation for the highest duties of the citizen. That disproportionate distribution of duty was imposed upon them by the administration. Teachers' organizations must force on the public an educational atmosphere which would make possible the development of a system of education which would give teachers the guidance and development of their youth to at least the age of 18 years. Until such time, teachers could not be made to shoulder the chief blame for faults in community life of Australia. They must also seek greater freedom from examination and inspection. He moved, "That this conference re-affirms its belief in the desirability for extending the compulsory school age to 16 years, and is of opinion that a set course of instruction must be arranged for each form of continuation school."

Mr. McLean seconded. Mr. Bensted said the man on the small wage could not afford to send his children to a high school. They were attacking the question from the wrong end.

Mr. Dash said the school was becoming too much of a departmental organization. What was wanted was to bring the parents and the teacher in closer co-operation.

Miss Swann (N.S.W.) supported the motion. She said that once the system became established the social conditions would adjust themselves. She had gone to work when very young and had since regretted her missed opportunities for further education.

Mr. J. Hopton, B.A. (Vic.) supported the motion, as did also Messrs. Rourke and Hart.

Mr. M. Gerlach (S.A.) suggested that a scheme should be formulated embracing the various classes of work which it was expected to undertake. He strongly urged that endowment schemes should be considered with the greatest care, as children did not appear to appreciate their value as they should in the present day. The motion was carried.

Mentally Deficient Child.

Miss Ingram (V.) read a paper dealing with the necessity of special schools for mentally deficient children. She said it was of the greatest importance that the condition of those who were not normal should be recognised early, so that the child could have medical care and proper training in an institute if necessary or if the defect should be slight, in a special class or school. She moved, "That the representatives from each State approach the authorities in their State to urge the need for the establishment of special schools for the mentally deficient."

Miss Swann (V.) seconded the motion, which was carried.

High School Curriculum.

Mr. E. Allen, M.A. (S.A.), in his article dealing with high school curriculum, said it was necessary to reopen the question what constituted a liberal education? To his mind it seemed necessary to include music, drawing, calisthenics, and handicraft of some form. Girls should not be made to take the same courses as boys. Mathematics beyond the intermediate stage was too difficult for the average girl. He favoured the setting of examination papers by experienced teachers rather than by the university. The total amount of examination work should be considerably reduced. Terminal examinations wasted valuable time. It was generally admitted that they taught too much. Would it not then, be possible to make room for as much preparation in school as should remove the necessity for set homework? The gradual humanizing of their school course would make less pronounced the break between school and life work. He moved:—(1) That an attempt be made to set up, by careful investigation, a series of categories to enable the teacher to form a useful estimate of the natural bent and capacity of their pupils; (2) That this conference is of opinion that the tendential treatment of vocational preparation does not interfere with the fullest development of the cultural side; (3) that the question of what constitutes a liberal education for those who do not wish or do not need to matriculate be reopened; (4) that in any curriculum room be found for music, some form of handicraft, and calisthenics; (5) that the teaching in high schools should no longer be dominated by external examinations, but that certificates issued by approved schools be sufficient guarantee of the pupil having satisfactorily completed his school course; (6) that the day's work can be effectively accomplished within the school, and that therefore we should assume responsibility for such avocational guidance as will lead to the worthy use of leisure time which should not be encroached upon by set tasks."

Mr. Gerlach seconded the proposition, which was agreed to.

Rural School Problem.

Mr. A. D. Hill (W.A.) made a plea for the outback settlers and their children. He said rural children had a right to well-organized, well-equipped, and well-taught elementary schools with a curriculum specially adapted to their interests and needs. He felt that their small schools' curriculum fell far short of that ideal. It was the bounden duty of the conference to display a liberal and national feeling towards the education of the settlers' child. He moved, "That in the opinion of this conference the welfare of the Commonwealth demands that no further delay should be tolerated in providing for the teacher of the small country school a training equal to that provided for the teacher of the city school."

Mr. McLean seconded the motion, which was carried.

Mr. Hill then moved, "That this conference, realizing the financial difficulties of the States in providing the same educational facilities for rural children as are provided for urban children, take the necessary steps to urge upon the Federal Parliament to subsidize the various departments for the purpose of extending such facilities."

Mr. Lee (Tas.) seconded the motion. Mr. Hopton submitted an amendment, "That consideration of the question be postponed until next conference, and that in the meantime the executive and State committees consider the question."

Mr. Dash seconded the amendment, which was carried.

Election of Officers.

Officers elected:—President, Mr. W. Bennett (S.A.); Vice-President, Mr. F. J. Gortrell (S.A.); Treasurer, Mr. Edgar Allen (S.A.); Secretary, Mr. T. H. Smeaton (S.A.).

An honorarium of £26 was granted to the secretary for his services, on the motion of Mr. Robinson, seconded by Mr. Hadfield.

It was decided to hold the next conference in Tasmania.

The Social Aspect.

The business sessions were concluded on Wednesday afternoon. In the evening the visiting delegates were entertained at dinner at the Piccadilly Cafe by the South Australian Public Teachers' Union, and afterwards a social evening was held, when representatives of various school departments met the visiting delegates.