

Register August 30<sup>th</sup> 1886

## THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—I am sorry to learn from your footnote to my former letter that I was in error as to the Inspectors not assisting in framing rules, &c., for the guidance of schools. Their doing so, I regret to say, suggests either that they are not true to themselves or that they have yet to learn the golden rule "To do to others as they would be done by." It seems incredible that they, most of whom, it may be presumed, are the fathers of grown-up daughters, should destine other men's daughters, with all the accompanying weaknesses of youth, to such drudgery as is meted out to pupil teachers. I have it on reliable authority that their working hours are from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.—that is, after half an hour's journey by tram or on foot they arrive at the school at 8 o'clock, pursue their studies till 9, teach till 4, leave the school at half-past 4, travel home, and again study until 8 p.m. Is this reasonable? And for what are they wearing themselves out? For the miserable pittance of from £26 to £35 per annum—barely enough to keep body and soul together. Are the salaries of the office bearers after the same ratio? Then the classes are by far too large. My children tell me, and their veracity is to be relied upon, that there are seventy, eighty, and even ninety pupils in their classes. No wonder that results are not so good as might be expected for such an immense outlay of State money. How can a teacher do justice to so many, or herself either? Injustice is also done to the children by keeping them too long in the lower classes when, if they could have better teaching, they could be raised to higher classes, and the sooner be qualified for the battle of life. I believe the average attendance to be sixty; but how long have the teachers to work before they find that? And that number is too high. Forty children are as many as any teacher can properly manage. Again, the Inspectors insist on perfection in those branches of education which it is deemed advisable to teach in outline to the lower classes as best suited to the capacity of young children. How preposterous is this! If education can be given in its entirety in the third and fourth classes, of what use is it having higher ones? Their standard also for examinations is too high. For instance, six questions on one subject are put on the board, and if there is one mistake the candidate "fails." I need not say how discouraging this is, both for pupil and teacher. Before ending with the wrongs of female teachers I wish to add that there is a lady in a large school, not 100 miles from Adelaide, who is doing the work of head mistress and assistant combined. Is she getting the salary which the former officer commands? I think not. I wish it to be understood that I am not the mother of a State-school teacher, nor do I intend to be; but wishing that abler pens than mine would take up their cause,

I am, Sir, &c.,

THE MOTHER OF EIGHT.

Sir—That the rulers of our chief schools both for boys and girls should show more sense and more righteousness is much to be desired. Things come before me constantly which cause me to ask, Are these keepers of schools deficient in reason or are they actuated by a short-sighted desire for cash at any price? One great wrong which I constantly see done to parents and children is that schoolkeepers urge that children should be taught too many subjects in proportion to time and capacity. The result is that the money and the precious years of the children's time are wasted. For example, I know a lad of only ordinary capacity who has been to a leading school and has been taught Latin, Greek, German, and French. He has been in that school six years and last year could not pass the primary examination. All he knows of the four languages is harmless. Now the master must or ought to have known that it was preposterous nonsense to be teaching all these languages to that boy. If the time spent at the four had been spent at the one the lad would have made some decent acquisition. The knowledge of the tongue would have been useful, and he would have derived more mental polish and culture from a real knowledge of one language instead of a wretched smatter of four, united to a total breakdown of elementary English. Let a man who knows talk to the youth out of our schools who have been supposed to be learning three languages for years. You cannot find one in twenty who has any real full permanent knowledge of one of the tongues. School rulers are full of a mania for these many languages, and there is the same mania for smatterings of many sciences.

There can be no doubt but that the University authorities do much to encourage this madness. For they give honours to the one who can do a little in many subjects instead of to those who can do real work in a few. But I suppose the madness of the University people is incurable, as nobody is so mad as men full of books; and they think that all the languages, arts, and sciences can be crammed into each human mind, whereas

the intellect of most youth is a very limited quantity, and those who direct its use should have a very solemn sense of responsibility.

The ladies' schools are as guilty as the boys' grammar schools. For example, I know a young lady who after a period in a Model School and certain harmless ladies' schools was sent to a tip-top Adelaide boarding school to finish for eighteen months. So by the advice of the lady principal she was at once set to work upon German and French, higher music, drawing, and painting. Result, not a year away from school and the little French and German learned are all gone. Something might have been done if all the time had been put in one language. But I now know another going to the same school to be finished in one year who has not been at school for two years, and has not learned a word of any tongue but English, and the preposterous lady principal also advises that she should learn German and French. Many parents have not had many advantages, and they are easily misled. For the sake of righteousness and for the true good of the children, do ask the teachers to consider the pupils' capacity and opportunity, and to adjust the work given to the pupils accordingly.

I am, Sir, &c., PARENT.

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**THE EDUCATIONAL RETURNS  
LATELY OBTAINED BY MR. BAG-  
STER, M.P.**

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—Some weeks since Mr. Bagster asked of the Minister of Education what may have seemed to some a strange question; it was in substance—"Had any instructions been issued from the Education Office which would have the effect of hindering teachers of State schools from preparing pupils for the University examinations?" In the returns lately furnished, which were also obtained by Mr. Bagster, the reason for his question seems plain. Those returns are of importance and deeply interesting.

First as to his question—it appears to have been to ascertain the cause of the remarkable falling-off in the number of candidates at the University examinations from State schools. In 1878 seven pupils passed, in 1879 five passed, in 1880 three passed, but in the five years which have elapsed since then but six pupils in all have passed University examinations from State schools. The quality of the teaching seems therefore to have been lowered every way, for it cannot be said that teachers have left the higher work in order that all their attention might be more effectually concentrated upon elementary teaching, and that this, therefore, has been better done, for that lower elementary work has been a failure, a serious and "disastrous" failure, in every department, so much so that

some new-angled system is being resorted to and new methods are to be tried in the hope of better results. It would appear that either the teachers have been expressly hindered or have been tacitly discouraged and checked by over mastery, and meddling, and muddling, and by an inveterately inefficient system of bureaucracy, or that the ablest teachers have left or have been driven out of the service. Had they been allowed to exercise their abilities freely, had there not been scandalous mismanagement, many scores of pupils might have been in far better positions to-day owing to the efficiency gained by the higher teaching, and by their holding University certificates, which have a positive money value in the world's market. Every earnest teacher would find it a positive relief and a pleasure to be allowed to teach the higher subjects, and would do the elementary work the more thoroughly on account of it. It is true in many ways—

Who aimeth at the sky

hoots higher much than he that means a tree.

Members of Parliament owe it to the country to demand a full explanation of the incapacity which is evidenced in the returns obtained by Mr. Bagster, and of the inefficient state of the Education Department confessed to by the Inspector-General. The teachers also owe it to themselves, and their pupils, and their pupils' parents to remove, if they can, the stigma of impotence which they manifestly must bear so long as the words of the Inspector-General at Quorn and the condemnatory evidence of the returns lately given are unexplained. The colony has not spared money for educational purposes. More than a million has been spent within ten years; and yet the results seem to be in a rapidly dwindling proportion. Thus from 1878 to 1885 we have in the return the numbers 7, 5, 3, 0, 0, 2, 3, 1. Had the progress been from 7 onwards (and why should it not have been?) what a benefit it would have been to the country, to how many families, to what a vast number of individuals! The much-talked-of ladder out of the State-school gutter is becoming a remoter possibility than ever.