

"The Register" August 5th 1898

"Register" 3rd August 1898

REFORMS IN EDUCATION.

To the Editor.

Sir—At the dinner of the Adelaide Teachers' Association in honour of Sir Langdon Bonython I took somewhat unseasonable advantage of the presence of so many men in authority to mention two matters, one of which I think highly desirable and the other of fundamental importance in a national system of education. I was unable then to present them very fully, and you quote a remark in connection with the second and more important, which must seem either alarming or impertinent when read without a context. I commended both matters to the Teachers' Association because one is suspicious of reforms in education which do not come from those who know best, and because in South Australia the teachers are entirely fortunate in those who control them, and who indeed may almost be said to represent them. But at present they are also matters of public talk and interest, and with your permission I shall place them as briefly as possible before such of your readers as care for these things.

1. The first concerns the future of the pupils who leave the State schools to make their living, but it has no special concern with any question of their further education. That is doubtless important, for—to quote Mr. Batchelor—it is only during their teens that they can get the special skill and knowledge which are to make them for life. But what I urged as a proper affair of education is merely the keeping a register of the pupils after they leave school. I mentioned nineteen as an ideal age for the record to reach, but considerably less would serve. The uses of such a register, made up and summarized once a year, are too obvious to mention. They may be partly gauged by the eagerness with which it would be received by any one with an interest in economic and social conditions. I question if any statistical table would have more significance, and none could point more definitely to proper measures of relief. But I urge it especially as giving not merely the best but the only ultimate test of the efficiency of our educational system, and for every reason the teachers are best able to keep the register, with, of course, what assistance and leisure they require. If it were once instituted I am sure they would regard the duty as appropriate, and perhaps have from it more than from a high percentage of passes, that abiding inspiration for their work, which is no less difficult than absolutely necessary. Such words have doubtless a suggestion of insincerity, and of difficulties concealed; but the difficulties, like the expense, would not amount to much, and I presume there is no inevitable sentiment against such a record being kept. Still I feel that I am urging a new and therefore unacceptable idea, and not being a combatant in the ranks either of educational or of social reformers I have no desire to say more. The idea is really neither new nor untried. On the contrary—and I hope this will help to rescue it from the limbo of fads—the thing is done in at least many of the German provinces, and the figures show beyond dispute that the number of loafers and unattached or unskilled labourers is least where education is best. Figures are hardly needed to prove that, perhaps; but they are a comfort, and in other respects they may lead to much.

2. But it is another question that I chiefly ask your space—one which, like the last, is suggested by the Parliamentary discussion on education, and more particularly by the constant comparison of German and Scotch education with our own. The comparison is of use, not because education is certainly better in Germany and Scotland than elsewhere, for it would be easy to find still better in many respects, but because in both countries it has been so long what it is now, and is thus quite beyond the region of experiment and the enthusiasm of novelty. And the comparison is, above all, of use because the system of school education in Germany is quite different from that in Scotland in every important respect but one. That one is not the charge upon public funds; and, if it concerns cost at all, has reference to its distribution, and not to the total amount, which is not greater in either country than elsewhere. The one thing in which they agree, the one thing which has so long distinguished their schools, and the one which, so far as school education is a factor, has made their people respected, and has in one way realized that ideal of equal opportunities whose praise is in every mouth, is nothing more heroic or wonderful than the education of their teachers. It would be useless to state the educational advantages which are and have to be enjoyed by teachers in Germany, because there, as in nearly every other European country, the pupil-teacher system after a trial has long been given up. But in Scotland, where the system still prevails, there is a clear road for the pupil teacher to a three years' course at the University with something for maintenance, if he passes a good enough examination at the end of his term of apprenticeship. This is not the place for details, but the result—not merely of this, which is a recent provision, but also of previous arrangements—has been that it is becoming the rule rather than the exception for the masters to be graduates, and there are several countries where a man would have no chance of appointment to the headship of even a village school unless he had been through a University and could carry on boys as far as they might require. In England within the last seven or eight years a similar opening is offered to the Queen's scholars, and there are now some at Oxford and Cambridge, there are hundreds at the Colleges of Victoria University (Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds), and they actually form the bulk of the regular students at the new University of Wales. Indeed, every University College but one, I believe, admits them, and the best of the old residential Colleges now send their students up for the London University examinations and have the results accepted by the Education Department in lieu of its own. That department now does everything to encourage the Queen's scholars to take a higher examination than they require for a certificate, and the official reports constantly emphasize the advantage to the coming teachers of associating with

students who are entering upon other professions. Now, admirable as our primary system of education is, it offers the very barest educational advantages to its teachers. Such as they have are of the best both in administration and instruction. Nowhere, I think, is such excellent work produced at the cost. And I know that the teachers, by their own efforts, have gone very far beyond the education that was required of them. Indeed, I should be willing to admit that things are very well as they are, if it is not found that the teachers are almost if not altogether unanimous in favour of being given a harder and higher education without any view to compensation in the shape of higher salaries. It is the poorest possible policy to starve the education of teachers, for any reason. If they are well educated they will soon find means of teaching advanced pupils what they like to teach, and will encourage them to go on. It was so in Scotland long before they were paid to do it, and the recent endowment of secondary departments in the common schools there was a spontaneous acknowledgment by the Government of work that was already being done for next to nothing. But this letter is already so long that I shall not even draw the practical conclusion, for though obvious in a general way it would require me to enter on matters of detail which have no general interest.

I am, Sir, &c.,
W. MITCHELL.

University, August 6.

"The Advertiser"
August 9th 1898.

ORCHESTRAL CONCERT.

The sixth orchestral concert will be given by the Conservatorium orchestra in the Town Hall next Saturday night. A very fine programme is announced, including Respiger's celebrated overture "The mountain mill," "Andante con moto" from symphony op. 21 (Beethoven), a selection from Mendelssohn's "Songs without words," Schubert's unfinished "Symphony in B minor," a new pizzicato for strings only, Till's charming serenade for French horns, the intermezzo from the "Mountebanks," and Bizet's grand march "Carmen." Miss Ethel Lohmann and Mr. Swann will each contribute two vocal numbers, and Mr. T. H. Jones, Mus. Bac., will be the accompanist for the evening.

"The Advertiser"
6th August 1898.

"THE NORMANS IN EUROPE."

On Friday evening, at the Adelaide University, Mr. E. G. Blackmore commenced a series of lectures on "The Normans in Europe" before a large audience. The lecturer, who spoke chiefly of the effect of the Norman element in English life, said it was within the bounds of accuracy to say that the Norman period really began in England with the accession of Edward the Confessor. He regarded the study of that period as most fascinating. The Norman conquest had not crushed the old English spirit, but it had rather strengthened it. The conquest of England by an invading force had not made the inhabitants foreign in their modes of life, but had made the invaders thoroughly English. Usually it was taught that English history began with the invasion of Julius Caesar. This, however, was a mistake. The real history began with the Norman invasion. The work done by the Romans in England was mostly material; it was not a work done on or for the people. There was no uniting of the tribes, no government was taught the native population, and the entire influence tended to make the land an easier conquest to the Teutonic invaders of a later date. The great fact subsequent to the Roman invasion was that Britain was changed into England, and the history of England had its inception in the year 449. The overrunning of Romanised Britain was a difficult task and took about 200 years to accomplish. Since then the English had never been ousted from England, and although it had had many foreign rulers it had assimilated them, and had never been assimilated by them. The struggle between England and the Danes had led to the small separate States being merged into one strong nation. The lecturer spoke in glowing terms of the strength and valor of the Normans. One of the most remarkable facts connected with these people, who had influenced very largely almost all modern European history, was that they had nowhere any separate existence to-day, but had been absorbed by the very nations over which they had exerted such a large influence.

THE ELDER CONSERVATORIUM.

To the Editor.

Sir—If the statement at the end of the reply of Professor Ives to the teachers' memorial is the official endorsement of that reply by the University authorities, it is apparently intended as a rebuff to those members of the musical profession who have expressed their opinion on a subject about which they are rightly concerned, whether their motives be personal or artistic. Cannot individuals as well as institutions act disinterestedly? Motives are mixed in both cases, and the rebuff is therefore undeserved and ungenerous. The clergy are supposed to have a voice in ecclesiastical matters, doctors in medical matters, lawyers in legal affairs, why not musicians in musical affairs? Unfortunately the musical profession, like the Christian Church, is afflicted with "unhappy divisions," or probably every prominent member would have subscribed to the document in question, in which case the innuendo of the phrase "certain members" could not have been used as a shield. The members of the musical profession should not be looked on as necessarily antagonistic to the Conservatorium. They are in their own sphere as loyal to the cause of music as an institution or even a Chair of Music. The Chair of Music has very largely owed its continued existence to the fees derived from the public paid for examinations. Thus in one way it has occupied a less meritorious position than the ordinary members of the profession, who have sustained their positions on their merits either as teachers or practical exponents of their art—not on money derived merely from the examination of the work of other people, and that with a hazy standard, too much like a net with a mesh small enough to capture the little fish as well as the big. The easier the standard the more the entries; the more the entries, the larger the income. This represents a position more undignified than has been occupied by the teachers.

The trouble appears to be due to three causes:—(1) The late Sir Thomas Elder made a princely gift to music—in fact, the sum was out of proportion to our population. A proportional sum left to London would amount to nearly a million pounds. This in itself created a difficulty. (2) The suggestion made by the Director and decided on by the University authorities was to found an institution on the same lines as the Guildhall School of Music, not like the Royal Academy or Royal College of Music. If Adelaide is to be made, as was rather vaingloriously suggested, the musical centre of Australia, it will be by aiming for quality, not for quantity, in connection with the University scheme. (3) Not only were the opinions and advice of the musical profession in Adelaide ignored as a whole, but so far as is known not a single prominent member of the profession was consulted. Fancy spending £20,000 on theology, law, medicine, science, literature, or painting without a word to or from those already in the field locally! The Conservatoire, like a philosopher, must pass through its babyhood, and this memorial, if it be repudiated now, will have its effect nevertheless, for the mill of experience grinds slowly but surely. Sometimes it is true friendship that reminds us of our shortcomings. The University Professor has more than once made the statement that the better class of teachers would not suffer, when a little consideration would have shown that they were precisely those who would be most likely to suffer if the Conservatoire were organized on the Guildhall plan. The hint that the memorial originated on account of the private interests of the signatories having suffered is an unworthy suggestion. Have not all the professional members of the Conservatorium staff, from the Director downward, their own "private interests"? Or do they work gratuitously for the love of their art alone? Let him who is not actuated by "private interest" cast the first stone. In any case, an insinuation is not an argument.

I am, Sir, &c.,
EDWARD HOWARD.