

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

(From the Lake Wakatip Mail.)

It is somewhat curious, as well as a significant fact, that in all the rage for retrenchment displayed by the present Government, the Education Department has not been touched. The appropriation for primary education alone, for the current year, amounted to £407,764, and the Colony is spending, at the least, half as much again on secondary schools, the Provincial University Colleges and the University of New Zealand. It is true these latter derive the chief part of their income from land endowments, but as these are from the public estate, it is practically the same as if the money was granted from the ordinary revenue. Necessarily, under the existing system, the expenditure on education must increase year by year in proportion to the population, and there can be no finiteness as to the amount which may be required. The Roman Catholics refuse to send their children to the State schools; if they were to do so it would involve a further charge to the Colony of, at least, £40,000 irrespective of the necessity which would arise for increased school accommodation in order to house 12,000 more pupils. They have to pay taxes like other people, and at a great expense to entirely provide schools for themselves.—We say nothing just now as to the success or otherwise of the education system by law established, and, although it is admitted to be defective in certain important essentials for success, we will even concede that it turns out a fair proportion of well-instructed, decently cultured young people; but the question forces itself upon the attention—whether the country is not paying "too dear for its whistle" in the matter. The aggregate annual cost is not far short of three quarters of a million of money, and, moreover, a not unimportant section of the population is in a chronic state of discontent. Surely without abandoning the principle that every child must be educated, some reasonable means might be devised for lightening the burden which now presses so heavily on the taxpayer, and must press heavier year by year. The Minister for Education—that very opinionated and self-sufficient young gentleman, Mr. W. P. Reeves—has quite recently declared that the Cabinet are not in favour of either directly or indirectly reducing the expenditure of the Department. Even warm supporters of the system have expressed the opinion that material reduction might be effected, without risking efficiency, by limitation of the school age, charging fees with the higher standards, etc., but it would appear that the labour delegates, who really rule the roost, are steadfast in the determination to maintain things as they are, and indeed, one of the most blatant of them has seriously proposed that the school books should be supplied by the Government free, gratis, and thus a further annual expense of about £100,000 would be thrown upon the revenue.

We may expect next that it will be insisted upon that the children attending the schools shall be supplied with luncheon and kept in shoe leather at the public expense. It is in the district which enjoys the privilege of being represented by this delegate that, immediately in front of a school attended by over 800 children there runs, or rather stagnates, a pestilential ditch. As neither the Education Board nor the School Committee have been in funds to remove or to abate that dangerous nuisance, an appeal was made to the parents of the pupils in attendance, whose health is continually risked. The amount collected for the purpose after a vigorous beat-up was under £1! The idea evidently is that the general tax-payer is to stand the whole racket, and parents are to be absolutely free from trouble or expense. It certainly behoves the producing classes, who practically have to find the money, to weigh well the pros and cons of this question. If things proceed as they are doing, half the entire available revenue of the colony will soon be absorbed in maintaining the educational system, the results of which, up to the present time, are by no means reassuring, if we may judge by the gangs of larrikins by which the large towns are infested. With regard to secondary education, provided or subsidised by the State in District High Schools, High Schools and Colleges, there is small room for doubt but that the expense might fairly be borne by the parents, and the public revenues to that extent relieved. One effect of education, beyond the elements of being open to all, has been to dissatisfy the children of all classes with homely employments and country work. The boys all want billets in offices, while the girls despise and will have nothing in the shape of domestic service or house-work. There were in Dunedin the other day over 350 applications for some 30 vacancies of pupil teachers under the Education Board; whilst a legal gentleman, to our knowledge, who advertised for an office-boy at 5s a week, received 55 applications—several from grown lads who had passed the highest standards in the city schools. This is what our educational system is bringing about, and it can hardly be regarded with satisfaction from any point of view. Let there be free and compulsory education by all means up to a certain standard, so as to secure that every child shall learn to read, write, and cipher, but beyond that—or very soon after—let parents contribute to the cost of instruction. To meet the case of specially clever children, who are by no means a common production, there might be a liberal system of scholarships, to be competed for in the primary schools.

Those really qualified for intellectual employments would by this means have full opportunity of following their bent, whilst the great mass would fall into the groove intended for them by nature—as well as so much needed in our young country—and tackle real hard work, as colonists should do.

PASSING AWAY.

(From the Adelaide Southern Cross.)

It has always been a matter of gratification to Irishmen, when taunted with their want of success in the land of their birth, to point to the number of their countrymen who have attained honour and distinction in every other part of the world. Men to whom the alien Government of their country offered no honourable career have in other climes become eminent in every walk of life. This week there have passed away two men who afford striking examples of the truth of these remarks. They differed in creed and in political opinions. The one hailed from the back North, the other from the South; but it was the Ulster man who professed the religious and political creed of the majority of the people, while the Munster man adhered to the faith of the minority. Our readers will see that we refer to the late Hon. John Macrossan, of Queensland, and Sir Francis Murphy, of Victoria, both of whom joined the great majority on Monday last.

John Murtagh Macrossan was born in County Donegal in 1832. Like so many other stalwart young Irishmen he left his native land at an early age to seek his fortune beyond the sea. With no friends or favours beyond those secured by his own stout heart and willing hands he advanced himself up from the position of a working miner to that of a leader in the councils of his adopted country. Queensland was the colony in which he settled. He entered Parliament in 1873, and in 1879 became Minister of Mines and Works, and has been in office almost constantly since then till the present Griffith-McIlwraith combination. The deceased member was an ardent advocate of Federation, which he did much to forward. He was a brilliant debater and a great authority on mining matters. Macrossan was a thorough liberal in politics, and always a staunch advocate of the claims of the land of his birth to enjoy the right of ruling her own destinies. At the time of the mission of the Redmond brothers to Australia, eight years ago, when popular feeling was strongly excited against the Irish cause, he was the only public man holding a portfolio as Minister of the Crown who had the courage to identify himself with the movement. He was appointed as one of the delegates for the National League of Queensland to the Irish Australian Convention, held in Melbourne under the presidency of Dr. O'Doherty, of '48 fame, in 1883. The meeting of Parliament prevented his attendance, but he sent a letter expressing his sense of the honour done him, and his regret at his inability to be present at "the first meeting of United Irishmen in Australia." "I hope," he added, "it will not be the last one." Macrossan represented Townsville in the Queensland Parliament, and as a consistent Home Ruler advocated the separation of the northern portion of the colony, and his death will be a severe blow to that movement. He died in Sydney, where he was a delegate of the Federal Convention now sitting; and it is a curious fact that he was a member of the Federal Council of the Irish National League in Australia, elected at the Irish-Australian Convention above referred to, the first Federal Council formed in Australia.

Sir Francis Murphy, who was Speaker of the Victorian Parliament for some years, was a Cork man by birth, and a doctor by profession. He arrived in Sydney in 1836, and ten years later went to Victoria, where he engaged in pastoral pursuits. He was elected member of Parliament in 1851, and Speaker in 1856—a position which has always been held by countrymen of his till the death of Peter Lalor, of Eureka Stockade celebrity, last year. It is a remarkable fact that Irishmen, who are accused of being unfit for self-government at home, have in the colonies presided over all the colonial Parliaments with dignity and impartiality. A few years ago five of the colonial speakers were natives of the Green Isle. Sir Francis Murphy had attained his 82nd year. He had not taken an active part in politics for some years.

While speaking of the two distinguished statesmen who have passed away, we cannot omit also referring to the death of James Fletcher, member for Newcastle in the Sydney Parliament. Mr. Fletcher was not an Irishman, but, like Sir John Robertson, a sturdy Scotch Protestant. Like Sir John, he was always a true friend to Ireland, and an enthusiastic Home Ruler. He presided at the mass meeting addressed by John Dillon in Sydney in 1889. Mr. Fletcher was twice a Minister of the Crown. The respect in which he was held was testified by the immense concourse of people who followed the funeral cortège. The funeral was the largest seen in Sydney since the remains of the patriot Wentworth were consigned to their last resting-place.

It is stated that the coloured men in Virginia own more than 6,000,000 dols. worth of property, which speaks well for their industry.