

Office is not utterly bankrupt of brains and vision, it will seize the golden opportunity, and render a service to the Empire the beneficent influence of which will be felt not merely in the immediate crisis, but also in the brighter days that are to come.

Registration of Catholic Schools

During the past week or two, the heads of our Catholic schools, both primary and secondary, have been in receipt of circulars from the Education Department, or from the local Education Board, drawing their attention to certain changes effected by the new Education Act of last year, particularly in the direction of making provision for the registration of schools, and advising them to make application to the Director of Education, Wellington, to have the schools under their charge registered; and as some of our teachers are not very favorably circumstanced for mastering the detailed enactments of the bulky, comprehensive, and revolutionary measure which is now in force, they may be in some perplexity as to the exact bearing of the advice which has been given them, and as to the course which it is proper for them to pursue. In spite of the labyrinth of clauses and sub-clauses in which the proposals are embodied, the situation is in reality quite simple, and Catholic teachers need not hesitate to comply with the suggestion in the circulars, and to make application, in terms of the Act, to have their schools registered.

The principal section of the Act to which the circulars direct attention is Section 133; and we quote the more important clauses:—(1) Where the teachers or managers of any private school apply to the Director to have such school inspected by an inspector, the Director shall thereupon arrange for the inspection of such school to be conducted in like manner as the inspection of public schools or secondary schools, as the case may be; and a copy of the inspector's report shall be sent to the teachers or managers of the school. (3) If the senior inspector reports that such school is efficient, the Director shall forthwith cause such school to be registered as a registered primary school or a registered secondary school, as the case may be. "Efficient" means, in respect of any private school, that the premises, staff, and equipment are suitable and efficient, and that the instruction is as efficient as in a public school or secondary school, as the case may be. (5) On the receipt at any time of a report from the senior inspector that any registered school no longer fulfils the prescribed conditions, the Director may declare that such school has ceased to be a registered primary or secondary school, and may remove its name from the list of registered schools accordingly. (6) The Director shall publish in the *Gazette*, at intervals not exceeding one year, a list of all schools for the time being registered under this section. This means, in effect, that the new Act contemplates that practically all schools shall be registered schools; the only exception being the rare case, rare, at least, as regards primary schools, in which a school is seriously, and glaringly inefficient. In the case of those Catholic schools which are already subject to State inspection, registration will be effected merely on application to the Director of Education, and to secure this application is the purpose of the circulars which are being sent out. In respect to any Catholic school—primary or secondary which is not yet subject to State inspection, and which the teachers desire to have registered, it will be necessary to make application to the Director of Education to have such school inspected by an inspector; and if the latter's report is satisfactory the school is forthwith registered by the Director. Registration is not absolutely compulsory on Catholic schools, but it is very nearly so. Broadly speaking, no school attendance will count for the purposes of the compulsory clauses of the Act if not at a registered school. There is, indeed, a provision—in Section 60, Clause 1, Sub-clause (b) whereby a parent may obtain a certificate of exemption for a child if he can show that 'the child is elsewhere under instruction

as regular and as efficient as in a registered school'; but the provision is evidently meant to apply to the case of individual children, and could hardly be used for the purpose of securing exemption for a whole school. Practically, then, all Catholic primary schools will find it necessary to be registered. The principle of the new Act is: All inspected schools shall be registered and all registered schools shall be inspected. The principle applies, also, to secondary schools, but there is no element of compulsion in their case; the only penalty for non-registration would be that the unregistered secondary school would not be likely to be 'approved' for scholarship purposes.

The only seeming drawback to the registration scheme is that, on paper at least, it gives the inspector a power to interfere in the matter of 'the premises, staff, and equipment' of Catholic schools which he has not had hitherto, and which, if arbitrarily exercised, might conceivably occasion trouble and inconvenience. It should be noted, however, that the inspector is called upon to certify, not that the premises, staff, and equipment are of the most complete and up-to-date character possible, but merely that they are 'suitable and efficient.' If the inspector exercises his power in a reasonable manner it is in the best interests of the Catholic body that any defects under these heads should be promptly remedied—we have absolutely no interest in maintaining other than a high standard in these matters. If, as is extremely unlikely—for the inspectors, as a body, are amongst the most reasonable and fair-minded of men—this power should at any time be exercised in a really unreasonable and arbitrary fashion, there are ways and means of ventilating the injustice, and of securing redress. In these days of free press, Catholic Federation, and ready access to Ministers, inspectors of schools are as amenable to public criticism where there is real ground for it and to departmental correction as any other body of public servants. The definite advantages accruing to Catholic schools under the new arrangement. These advantages are as follow: (1) Catholic schools are now to a certain extent to be incorporated and given an officially-recognised place and status in the general education system of the country. The mere fact of registration amounts to a Government certificate that the 'premises, staff, and equipment' of these schools are 'suitable and efficient,' and that 'the instruction is as efficient as in a public school of the same grade.' (2) Pupils of registered Catholic schools will now be eligible, on the same terms as pupils of the public schools, to compete for both Junior and Senior Scholarships. (3) Scholarships are now tenable at 'a (State) secondary school or its equivalent approved by the Minister.' By the mere fact of registration, every registered Catholic secondary school is declared an 'equivalent' to the State institution, and practically becomes, *ipso facto*, a school at which both Junior and Senior Scholarships may be taken out. (4) Registered Catholic schools may, on the application of their manager, receive free medical inspection of pupils on precisely the same footing as the public primary schools. These advantages still fall short of complete justice to Catholics, but at least they are an instalment.

In connection with the last-mentioned benefit, we may recall that, for some mysterious and unstated reason, the Legislative Council attempted to deprive Catholic schools of the concession of free medical inspection, and that we owe it largely to the energetic protest of Mr. G. W. Russell, member for Avon, that the right was retained. We quote from the *Hansard* report of Mr. Russell's speech on the point: 'Another amendment he desired to refer to, and which was sufficiently important to deserve attention, was that in clause 134, dealing with medical inspection. The Legislative Council had struck out the following sub-clause: '(6) The manager of any registered private primary school may apply to the Director for the medical inspection of the school and of the pupils thereof, and the Director may arrange for such inspection accordingly.' Why had