

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

TUESDAY, 17 AUGUST 1875

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

*Tuesday, 17 August, 1875.**Physical Training in Public Schools.*

PHYSICAL TRAINING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The PRESIDENT said he had placed certain abstract resolutions on the notice paper, which he should now move; and he intended that, if they met with the approval of the House, they should take effect whenever the Education Bill should come before the Council. As all were aware, the colony had undertaken for many years a very expensive system of education for the people. He supposed that, in the ensuing year, the cost of that system of education would amount to, if not exceed, the sum of £100,000. It appeared to him that at such a cost it was advisable that the House should look at all the bearings of the question, and endeavor to extract from it the fullest amount of good which it was possible to obtain for the country. Of course, the object of educating the people was the profit of the country in the future;—it was to render the citizen, or any number of citizens, as capable and as perfectly competent to perform the duties that each owed to the State as it was possible to make him. Even allowing that all the children were taught to read, and write, and cypher, it had struck him forcibly that, in preparing the rising generation for the exercise of their various avocations in life, they were not, in the fullest sense of the term, provided for undertaking their duties as citizens, and that there were qualifications which they should possess which had not been taken into consideration in connection with their education and early training. In the mother country, during late years, and at the present day, the physical education and improvement of the people was proceeding at a rapid rate. There, they had appliances and means for giving effect to that desirable object which were not at the command of the colonist. There were in the United Kingdom persons of fortune and education who could devote their wealth and afford their example to the improvement of the great body of the people; and throughout Great Britain there was now a consolidated force which attracted a considerable amount of popular attention. Every honorable member would, he was sure,

agree with him, that the tendency of such a state of things must be to provide a manly and athletic race of citizens in the State. It must not be supposed that the whole business and occupation of the rising generation should consist of making one penny grow into ten. The time would come when the quiet days which we were living, and which had existed ever since the introduction of self-government into the colony, would pass away. He could believe that the continuance of the peace and quiet now enjoyed could not be realised in the world except in the dreams of the golden age. The time must come when the residents of this colony would have to defend their hearths and homes as best they could, by physical force and their own strong arms. In legislating for the education of the people, he thought it desirable at any rate to legislate in view of such a contingency. Even now could be perceived some slight symptoms of the storms that might arise in these colonies. Only the other day, he saw, in one of the newspapers, a project started by a member of one House of Parliament in Victoria to acquire a certain portion of the territory of New South Wales. He had no doubt that, as an abstract question, it would not create much difficulty at the present day. But, some years hence, such a proposition would, he had no doubt, give rise to a very serious disturbance. And it was probable that, owing to questions of border customs, and others that every now and then arose, it would become manifest that physical force might be a very good quality to be possessed by any particular colony. When the idea first occurred to him, it suggested that grand machinery was ready to hand for use, and that a very small proportion of the money annually expended upon education in the colony might be devoted very beneficially to the creation of a spirit of emulation and of love of country, of patriotism, amongst the rising generation that attended the public schools. It would not cost much to set that machinery working effectively, to establish a system of physical training which would prove most beneficial to the community. In all large towns where there were one or two hundred boys attending school, they should have opportunities for such training; and there should be annual meetings at which they should compete in their sports for prizes. The prizes need not be of large amount, in the first instance. As stated in the third resolution, every third year, boys from the schools in all parts of the colony might be brought together in the metropolis to contend amongst themselves for the highest prizes which would be then offered. There was the example of an ancient people, who in their time exercised a great influence upon the world—and even to the present day that influence was acknowledged;—he alluded to the Greeks, who throughout the many hundred years of their history, attended their public games, which were of great renown; and whose example showed, in the cause of

education, how physical training should accompany the cultivation of the intellect, with the highest moral results, as evidenced in their patriotism. In that direction the idea embodied in the resolutions pointed. If the House agreed to them, it would, of course, be his business, when the Education Bill should come up, to introduce in committee the necessary clauses to provide for the object he had in view. He thought it would be best to seek the opinion of the House on the subject beforehand. He had not talked to any one about it; he had not heard it discussed; but it appeared to him that in considering what was beneficial for the education of the people, it was desirable to teach them self-reliance, and to foster a patriotic spirit amongst the rising generation, and to imbue them with the feeling that they were bound up in the country by mutual interests. He should not trespass on the time of the House, but move—

1. That, in the opinion of this House, a certain percentage of the large sums now expended annually on the education of the people might beneficially be devoted to providing for the physical training and improvement of the rising generation.

2. That, under this view, three per cent. on the total sum expended should in each year be set aside for prizes in athletic sports, to be held in each of the large towns of the colony.

3. That, in every third year, provision should be made for a grand tournament meeting, to be held in the metropolis, at which scholars from all public schools could compete with each other, and in some cases with strangers, in athletic sports, rifle shooting, and boat racing.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL said he did not think that much good could come from honorable members discussing at the present time the abstract question put before them by the President. They knew that, last session, both Houses had passed resolutions with the view to direct or check the action of the Board of General Education in granting to pupils of the primary schools £50 scholarships, tenable for three years; and that the Board took no notice whatever of those resolutions. Seeing the result of their efforts on that occasion, it was not at all likely that on the present occasion any action would be taken by the Board upon the resolutions proposed. At the same time, as the President had promised to embody the resolutions in the Education Bill, when it should come up to the Council, he (the Postmaster-General) must say that he was quite opposed to anything of the kind. He might point out that at nearly all the large schools of the colony a drill-instructor was engaged to drill the boys. Then, they had their cricket clubs. Further, as the newspapers showed, in Brisbane, a Sports Ground Company had been started, to provide athletic and physical exercises; and to organise displays and games in the same way as in New South Wales; and he had no doubt it would be equally successful. At

the grammar schools, drill was taught, and the primary schools of the colony, also, were all provided for in that way. With regard to protecting "our hearths and homes," he could assure the honorable and gallant gentleman who moved the resolutions, that there was not the least danger of one colony trying to take the territory of another; and the little disputes that now occurred between the colonies would cease altogether when there was sufficient population to occupy their territory. Such a notion as the forcible annexation of territory would be scouted throughout the colonies. He had no hesitation in stating that when the present generation of Australians had grown up, instead of quarrelling about separate colonial interests, all the colonies would be for forming themselves into one nation by federation. As regarded the volunteers, there were now eight companies in this colony; and there would be sixteen companies organised in a short time. In fact, every town in the colony was striving to have a volunteer corps. The volunteers would have their regular drill, and their athletic exercises, and their periodical contests. He knew that, twice or thrice a year, prizes given by the officers were competed for by the volunteers of West Moreton, and that there was great emulation amongst them at rifle practice, for the distinction of best shot.

AN HONORABLE MEMBER: Oh! ho!

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: If the same thing was done in other places, there would be a number of fair shots in the colony. However, he regarded this matter as quite foreign to the education question; and the House might as well leave it to the masters and pupils of the schools of the colony. As far as athletic sports were concerned, if he was to judge by what he saw within view of the Council Chamber, in the Queen's Park, where football and cricket were carried on with great spirit, this colony was not much behind the other Australian colonies in practice of athletic sports and physical exercises. He feared, indeed, that we were a little behind the Greeks; and he thought that if the rising generation at school applied itself a little more to books and a little less to the playground, an improvement would be apparent in the training of young Queensland. He did not care for the proposal, and he should like to see the resolutions withdrawn.

The Hon. T. L. MURRAY-PRIOR said, although he agreed in the abstract with the President, and if the Education Bill came up he should probably support the introduction of a provision embodying the resolutions, yet he thought that the passing of the resolutions now would shackle the House in dealing with that Bill. He believed in primary education, and in a certain amount of scholarships being given to deserving pupils, to secure a secondary education; but, as for the Bill, the House hardly knew what its shape was, or what provision it would make. He trusted that the President would postpone his motion until

a future date, when, probably, it would receive stronger support than now.

The Hon. H. G. SIMPSON said he thought such a provision would be advisable if proposed when the Education Bill came up from another place; but he should not bind himself to the exact terms in which he would support it. Having been ventilated, perhaps it would be best to let the motion stand over until the Bill was under consideration. He was glad to have heard two things from the Postmaster-General which he did not know before:—First, that there were drill instructors in almost every school in the colony; and, second, that there was a great increase in the volunteer movement. All he could say with reference to the subject was, that it was very creditable to those who took part in the volunteer movement; for it was very certain that no credit was due to the Government, who had done every thing they possibly could do to discourage it.

The Hon. G. SANDEMAN said he entirely endorsed the opinions expressed in the resolutions of the President, which shadowed forth what ought to be carried out in all the educational establishments of the colony. He believed that without physical training, England would not be what she is at the present day. Look to the youth of the country, the result of whose education, physical and intellectual, would affect its future. However, as it was supposed that the Education Bill would soon come before the House, the present question might best be left until honorable members should know what its provisions were. When they had the Bill under consideration, he should be prepared to support the embodiment in it of the principle of the resolutions.

The Hon. W. THORNTON said he thought that the sole object of the President in bringing forward the resolutions was to elicit the opinions of honorable members, and to ascertain whether they were sufficiently favorable to justify him in introducing a provision in the Education Bill embodying the principle of the resolutions. For himself, he always had the idea that the physical training of man was only secondary to mental training. If it was desired to have "a sound mind in a sound body," gymnastics should form part of the education of every one. Physical and mental training should go hand in hand. No doubt, the country would have the advantage of such training of its youth; and especially, military drill was advantageous. It was his opinion that physical education was neglected in this colony. That might be observed in the slouching carriage and ungraceful deportment of the young men in the streets, which must convince any one of the necessity for bodily training, even to improve their appearance. Much might be due to the climate; but that was only a reason in favor of the advisableness of having physical training made a part of the curriculum of the school. He should support the

resolutions if the President pressed them to a conclusion, now; and, if the honorable and gallant gentleman should hereafter propose to introduce a provision embodying the principle he laid down in the Education Bill, he should vote with him.

The PRESIDENT said he should avail himself of the privilege of reply, to make some observations upon what had fallen from the honorable member representing the Government. What the honorable member had said, made him (the President) a much more strenuous advocate of the principle contained in the resolutions than he was before. He was quite satisfied that if the honorable member could sit comfortably in his seat, believing that athletic sports were carried out, and the volunteer movement promoted by the Government, to the advantage of the country, then the Postmaster-General was under a delusion that it was very desirable he should be aroused from. He was told that there were instructors in gymnastics in many of the schools;—he hoped, at any rate, that they were at the Grammar Schools and the Normal School;—but whether they were at the various country schools he was not prepared to say, and he had no satisfactory information that they were. From his knowledge of such matters, he was convinced that there was a great want of attention to drill and athletic exercises in the schools of the colony; and he had drawn up the resolutions with a notion that the defect in training might be remedied. He proposed that provision should be made in order to excite emulation amongst those who were growing into manhood throughout the colony, by the award of prizes for excellence in the public games; and in order to arouse and keep alive a spirit of patriotism. What the honorable gentleman said about the volunteers was astounding; because, with his (the President's) knowledge of the subject, he did not believe that there were twenty properly armed volunteers in the country: he did not believe a full company of men could be put forward, even with the old-fashioned arms, to oppose an enemy. If the Government were satisfied, theirs was a state of happiness which might be envied but certainly not admired. When speaking of the desirableness of training the inhabitants of the colonies to enable them to protect their own homes, he alluded, of course, to future contingencies. The rising generation should be so trained that, if called upon, they would be prepared to perform the active duties of citizens. He did not contemplate any such disaster in his time. But, in providing for the future of this country, the provision should include the possible requirements of the State, and its claims upon its citizens under all circumstances. No one acquainted with the subject could regard the way in which the volunteers were treated as satisfactory for the future of this country. He knew that there were a number of fine young men who were exercising themselves but he

could not say much for the means of instruction provided for them, or the facilities for rifle practice. There was no rifle shooting now.

The POSTMASTER-GENERAL: Yes; in Ipswich.

The PRESIDENT: So there ought to be in all the country towns; just as in England, when she was famous for her archery, and when every village had its matches. There was not a town in the colony that ought not to have a rifle range, where the young men and youths could regularly practise, and become proficient marksmen. He must have something more to say on the volunteer question before the session closed. Meantime, he protested against his honorable friend's assertion that there was a large volunteer force in the colony. Seeing the feeling of the House, he should withdraw the resolutions with a view to propose something to the same purport when the Education Bill should come before the Council.

HONORABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.