

ROBERT EDGAR RUDMAN examined on oath. (No. 13.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am principal of the Thames High School.

2. And your educational qualifications are?—A1, M.A., and B.Sc.

3. Will you make any statement in regard to any point in the order of reference that you please?

—With reference to the expenditure on manual and technical instruction, so far as my secondary school is concerned—it is a mixed school—we get grants in connection with our science training and such things as needlework; but so far as any influence on our work is concerned, I do not think these grants are necessary in regard to technical education. In the district I come from we have unique facilities for technical education, in that there is one of the finest schools of mines I suppose in Australasia. It is splendidly equipped, and has a splendid director—I think anybody who knows him knows that—and yet it is very badly attended. It would appear that the residents of the Thames do not like that sort of technical education, although I suppose a boy going through that school of mines is fitted to make a much better living after his four years there than at almost any other occupation. There is also technical training to be got quite easily at the foundries at the Thames. A boy can get a very fine foundation by being apprenticed there for technical work. On the top of that we have the Technical School, which is quite a nice building, and it seems to me that as the people who live there do not make much use of the really good technical institution there, it is almost a case of overlapping to have the Technical School at all. Of course, that Technical School is used for giving the primary-school children instruction in cookery and woodwork, I think. I think there is a plumbing class of three or four, and a few other technical classes that are not well attended. It seems to me that the day classes in a technical school, except in the big centres, lead to overlapping with the secondary schools—I mean where the day classes of the Technical Schools are being subsidized for such things as commercial English, commercial arithmetic, and commercial geography. The word “commercial” is added to them, although I do not think that the teacher has any particular qualifications. I am not speaking in any sorrow, because they do not interfere with me in any way, but they might do so. In regard to this overlapping, I would be inclined, except in the large centres, to wipe out subsidies to technical schools for primary commercial courses, because I think, with the exception of typewriting, these commercial courses can be taught in the secondary schools. I believe in the continuation night classes. I am referring only to the day classes. The point has come under my notice at the Thames, and I am afraid my Board has had a little bit of correspondence with the Department on the matter. Some eighteen miles from the Thames there is a district high school. Now, rightly or wrongly, I have regarded district high schools as a sort of stopgap until a fully endowed high school could be built, or until the circumstances warrant it being built. We have an endowed High School at the Thames with a fairly well-paid staff of four. This particular district high school is staffed with two ladies. I do not wish to draw invidious distinctions, but of course if we, as an endowed high school, are not doing much better work than they are, we should not exist. Now, the Department will not pay the railway-fares for pupils to pass this district high school to come to the Thames High School. That is in accordance with the regulations no doubt, so of course I must not blame the Department. I hold, and my Board holds I think, that the High School at the Thames should be for the whole of the district, and that if a parent wants to send his child to the High School past the district high school he should be allowed the railway fare. As it is, quite a number of parents have applied to me, and quite a number of parents in the place where this district high school is situated are sending their children to the Thames High School, and are themselves paying the fares, the Department having refused to do so. They, of course, come in as junior free pupils. I may say that the senior free pupils have their fares paid because the Department says they cannot get that particular instruction at the district high school. I merely mention this as a matter that may be worthy of attention. I think where there is a properly endowed and staffed secondary school, and where children wish to attend that school, they should not be debarred from doing so by reason of the railway fare. There is another instance of overlapping which I think perhaps most of us secondary-school teachers have come across. There are some primary-school men—I do not think I am drawing invidious distinctions between the two—who like to keep their Sixth Standard proficiency pupils on for another year. In some cases I believe it is with the idea of gaining a scholarship, in other cases they say they can do better for them. They say they are not fit to go on to the secondary school, although the Inspector has given them a proficiency certificate. I find that a pupil who is kept like this is a year behind when he comes to us, and is a year behind all the rest of his school life. I think he gets the heart taken out of him by going over the ground again. So far as the finance of High School Boards is concerned, I do not think our Board is in any particular difficulty. We have an income from endowments and we have an income from the Department for free-place pupils, and I think the Board spends it as wisely as it can. With regard to agricultural instruction or rural courses, so far as the Thames High School is concerned, as I have said, there is no demand on the part of the parents of pupils to make mining experts or engineering experts of their sons. There is a great demand to take up what I suppose one might call the grammar-school course, the old-fashioned secondary-school course, with a view to the boy entering the Civil Service—that is what they are very keen on—or to enter a profession; or, if he fails in this, to make a schoolmaster of him. In regard to this question of Latin, you would be surprised at the number of parents who say to me—of course the Department makes Latin an alternative subject, and rightly so in my opinion—that they want their boys to take Latin or commercial work. They say, “I want my boy to go in for the Civil Service”; and I reply, “Yes, but he will not need Latin for that.” Then I am asked, “Suppose he is fairly successful, and wants to become a lawyer”; and I reply, “He will need Latin for that”; and then I am told to let him have Latin right away. Of course, the high schools have not a general syllabus like the primary schools, but there is no doubt