

THE HALF-CASTE PROBLEM.

ADDRESS BY THE REV. J. C.
JENNISON.

At a meeting of the Liberal Women's Educational Association at the Liberal Club hall on Monday night the unhappy plight of the half-caste was the subject of an address by the Rev. J. C. Jennison (president of the Australian Aborigines' Mission). He said he had been closely associated with aborigines and half-castes for many years, in connection with his ministerial duties, particularly in Victoria, the Northern Territory, and in Western Australia. The native had not had a fair deal, but the half-caste was between the devil and the deep sea, and was denied even the scant privileges of the full-blooded native.

In every country where native and white races live side by side, there was a half-caste problem, and to prove that it was a real one here, Mr. Jennison said official figures showed there were 1,167 half-castes in South Australia, even though many of the half-caste babies were killed at birth. From a wide knowledge of the subject, he estimated the half-caste population in Australia at nearly 10,000. During his stay in the Northern Territory he had become greatly attached to the Chinese, Japanese, Malay, and aborigine half-castes in the notorious compound at Darwin, although there were heart-breaking situations to deal with. The only way to do anything for these people was by training, education, and continuous oversight; but the Governments of South Australia had been extremely parsimonious in their dealings with them. Although valuable native reserves had been resumed, the Government were annually out of pocket to the extent of only £9,000. It should not be considered that the only future for half-caste girls was domestic service; efforts should be made to provide them with opportunities for making homes of their own. Too much of this expense of dealing with the half-caste child was thrown upon the Government on account of the state of the law under which, in the Northern Territory, it was practically impossible to lead legal proof of paternity against a white man. White fathers should be made responsible for the maintenance of their half-caste children. In this regard it would perhaps be helpful if it could be made compulsory for all births to be registered. More care could be given to the children if they were placed in homes, and although in general he strongly disapproved of taking children

from their black parents, in many outback places it would give half-caste children a chance in life if they were taken away from the camps.

The best way to deal with the problem, however, was by prevention, and much could be done in this regard if land-owners in pastoral areas were required to employ a certain proportion of married men, for whom they would have to build houses. Conditions should also be improved for white women, and some of the disabilities of outback people removed by providing cheaper fares on the railways. There was no doubt that aeroplane communication and wireless would remove something of the loneliness that prevented white women from going outback, and made it impossible for a young man to find a suitable mate.