

Register April 2nd 1908

Public Library and Institutes.

South Australia is said to enjoy the unique distinction of being the only country in the world where Government grants are given to all kinds of institutions without any official inspection or supervision. Under the heading of "Education" may well be classed the grants to country and suburban institutes, and it has been a general belief that these have not in many cases served their true purpose so well as they should have done. In the financial year 1906-7 the Government grant to urban, suburban, and country institutes amounted to £4,517, and a larger amount is set down for the current year; but the total spent by the institutes as a whole in books and periodicals came to £46 less than the Government grant. The subsidy is at the rate of 15/- in the pound of members' subscriptions; so that really the Government paid for more than all the literature purchased. Many of these volumes could scarcely be considered as being educational in their nature, and one particularly disheartening fact is that a well-equipped special science library, established by the Public Library Board for the benefit of institute subscribers free of charge, is rarely utilized, although it has been brought repeatedly under their notice. One of the chief functions of the institutes is to be intellectual and educational centres in the districts in which they are established, and to some extent they are. A few of them have founded literary societies; but in one or two the only class of any kind is a quadrille assembly; and Gawler, Norwood, Port Adelaide, Saddleworth, Wallaroo, and Manoora are said to be the only institutes which have made successful efforts to provide instruction in any branch. The fees of the students attending the institute classes are subsidized by the Government, but this amount came last year to only £130. A little point has been brought under consideration in connection with this subject. Gawler's students are full members of the institute, but in the other towns mentioned the students are not. As the Government allot money to the Schools of Mines, and also to the institutes, and pays in addition for continuation classes, it is claimed that students at all the subsidized schools should be granted the free use of books from the local library, although admittedly that question thus suggested is surrounded by difficulties. The law provides that there must be a public reading room, and generally this is available, and sometimes it is abused by people who can well afford to pay institute subscriptions. Each year a return which gives certain particulars has to be supplied to the principal librarian and secretary of the public library, whose duty is to call the Minister's attention to any defects or omissions, and these are considered in connection with the renewal of the subsidy. One improvement would be that which The Register has frequently suggested—a periodical inspection of institutes by some officer competent to give advice to the committees of management, and this could be arranged on an inexpensive and effective system between the Public Library and the Institutes Association. So far as the Public Library itself is concerned, a demand is arising for greater practical utility. It has a treasury of some of the finest educational works in

the world; but some enquirers are raising the question whether they are not, to some extent at least, restricted to the scholar of the more leisureed class. "The idle man," they say, "may feast his mind on the best literature, and the student at the University or in the schools may in spare moments improve himself from the stored knowledge on the shelves; but the man who has to earn his daily bread enjoys little or no opportunity, through the medium of the Public Library for systematic study of any section of industry or culture. The books are there, but many of them lie unopened in the bays." "It is strange," the critics continue, "that while a subscriber to a country institute can borrow, through that institute, from the Public Library, books on scientific, technical, and other subjects of an advanced educational character, this privilege is not available to city readers." On the other hand most of these readers are within easy reach of the Public Library by walk or tramcar, while the country folk are scores or hundreds of miles distant from that institution. Another factor in the calculation is that if even a modified suggestion were adopted by keeping the Public Library open later than the hour—9 p.m.—at which it closes now—additional expense would be incurred, and the Library has always been more or less starved by successive Governments. There has lately arisen a strong demand for a free lending branch of the Public Library. The means to this end, at least, are close to the Lord's hand in the presence of the Adelaide Circulating Library, in connection with which it is generally understood, radical changes must be made before long.

Agricultural School and College.

After the Agricultural College had been established it was found that the ordinary public schoolboy was scarcely sufficiently advanced to enter it, and an agricultural class was formed in the Adelaide School of Mines and Industries. Students from this won nearly all the scholarships for the Roseworthy institution. Now, however, the examination for the entrance prizes—there are six each year—should not be beyond the reach of any lad of 16 who has been through the upper classes of the public schools. Boys who go as paying students have to satisfy the principal that they have had a fair commercial education. At the school in Adelaide students learn much theory with less practice, but it is claimed that it is merely preparatory for the college, and that its influence has been beneficial. There are other questions besides those previously suggested which a small board of independent men might investigate.

To the Editor.

Sir—I was surprised when reading your special reporter's article on the above subject on March 28 to note that the Acting Minister of Education compares the country Schools of Mines with continuation schools of the best character. What the "best-character" brand implies I am not prepared to say; but to compare the work at the Moonta Continuation School, for instance with the work at the Moonta School of Mines, is ludicrous. The continuation classes are worthy of every parent's support, but it would be doing the workers of the Peninsula an injustice to close their School of Mines on the assumption that the continuation school will supply their requirements. It is stated that in the rural towns the Schools of Mines are open at night only. I might add that for the past 16 years Saturday afternoon and Saturday evening classes have also been conducted at Moonta. This means that both students and teachers had to work during those hours which the average individual allots for recreation. The evening classes provide the opportunity for the mines' employes of the district to improve themselves in the theory and practice of those subjects pertaining to their particular branch of labour. Who is more entitled to educational grants than the institution whose mission it is to furnish these men with keener insight and undoubtedly increase their earning capacity to the benefit of themselves and their employers? Granted that it is necessary to give the youths of this important mining centre every opportunity of acquiring useful knowledge for the advancement of mining and metallurgical practices more than a slight alteration will be needed in the curriculum of the continuation school, which, if your reporter's statement is correct, is a little in advance of the sixth-form standard. I have yet to meet the boy from the sixth form or the continuation class who could make a survey of a mine or an assay of the ore produced therefrom, or is in any way conversant with "mining methods." It is readily admitted that such subjects as mathematics, physics, and chemistry (to some extent) are perhaps taught equally well in the continuation school, but it is doubtful if a student from the above school could make a qualitative analysis of an ordinary chemical compound. Further, I think the slight alteration will magnify when provision is made on the teaching staff to instruct students in assaying, metallurgy, mineralogy, mine surveying and levelling, magnetism and electricity, machine drawing and design, and the complete course of plane and solid geometry as set down by the Board of Governors of the Public Library. The above subjects and others have been taught at the Moonta School of Mines for many years past, with good results, as shown in the annual examinations, which reflected great credit on the staff of teachers who until the end of last year were (exclusively) men holding positions at the local mines and works. These gentlemen are specially qualified for this kind of work—not merely imparting abstract knowledge, but also teaching the student how to apply industrially the knowledge thus attained. It will be obvious to the most casual observer that both are worthy institutions, but the one is only the complement of the other. I think honour is due to the gentlemen constituting the Moonta School of Mines Council who have interested themselves so earnestly in the young men of the district, and have rendered such signal service gratuitously for the development of such a worthy object.

I am, Sir, &c., MINER.

March 28.

ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY.

The annual general meeting was held in the Prince of Wales Theatre on Monday. The retiring President (Professor Bragg, M.A., F.R.S.) presided. The annual reports of the secretary and treasurer were read and adopted. The following officers were elected:—President, Professor Chapman, M.A., B.C.E.; Chairman of Committees, Mr. W. Fuller; Secretary, Mr. J. L. Gibson; Treasurer, Mr. L. F. Burgess; Committee, Messrs. R. Ellis, B.Sc., and I. Lewis, B.Sc., Messrs. E. R. Stanley, W. I. Bragg, and W. W. Gray. The inaugural address was delivered by Dr. W. T. Cooke, on "The life of Joseph Priestley." The lecture dealt with Priestley's work in the realms of religion, education, and science, and was concluded by a number of lantern slides and experiments illustrative of his life and work.

Advertiser April 3rd

THE EPIDIASCOPE.

Members of the microscopical section of the Royal Society, and members of scientific societies generally, as well as students of the University, the School of Mines and Industries, and the Education Department, will be pleased to know that an Epidiascope will shortly be available for use in Adelaide in connection with lectures and educational demonstrations. The Epidiascope is a combination of the microscope and the lantern, and it enables the most minute objects to be magnified and thrown on the screen. The great advantage of the instrument is that living objects are just as easily screened as inanimate bodies. The smallest aquatic insects known, for example, can be magnified in their native element, and be watched on the screen, so that some objects which are invisible to the naked eye will doubtless provide hours of amusement when seen on the screen. The Epidiascope is being brought out by the German liner Roon, which is due at the anchorage to-day, and as soon as possible it will be conveyed to Adelaide, where it will be unpacked and permanently fixed in the new lecture-room at the rear of the institute, where special provision has been made for its accommodation. The most powerful electric light is required to work the instrument, and before it could be constructed the makers had to be supplied with information concerning the size of the room, the power of the light available, and other matters. The instrument was ordered about a year ago, but Zeiss, the famous manufacturer of Germany, wrote after the work had been

begun stating that improvements were being worked out, and asking if he should delay the completion of the instrument in order to embody them in it. He was authorised to do so, and the apparatus sent out is the most modern production in the world and the first to come to Australia. The cost will be about £150 landed here.