

HIGHER EDUCATION.

The Royal Commission on Higher Education and the University of Adelaide is an enthusiastic and ambitious body, which started work without having any very definite idea concerning the limits of its investigations. Eagerness to acquire ability to pronounce judgment upon all aspects of the great education problem threatens to place its members in the condition of the man who "could not see the forest because of the trees." When the Commission was appointed the Assembly rejected a proposal by Mr. Coombe that technical education should be included within the scope of its enquiries. Yet at one of its early meetings the Commission agreed with a suggestion that it should hear evidence in behalf of a scheme for imparting instruction on "sex physiology" to boys and girls in primary schools; and much of its time has been occupied with matters chiefly affecting technical and secondary education. On awakening to the fact that, unintentionally or otherwise, it had thrust open the doors and entered all the apartments of the educational edi-

fication, the Commission thoughtfully asked the Assembly to justify its inquisitiveness by giving it the extra authority which it had assumed to possess. By a majority of one vote, and in opposition to the Government, the House yielded to the request, after the Chairman (Mr. Ryan) had intimated that the enquiry would probably be concluded long before the beginning of next session, and that the Commission desired to "bring in a report which would meet the requirements of education in South Australia to-day." This enlargement of the Commission's scope is necessarily embarrassing relatively to the early passage of the Education Bill, painstakingly prepared by Mr. Coneybeer and the Director of Education. How could Parliament this session consistently adopt a new and elaborate education system, while a Commission of its own creation is exhaustively investigating the principles on which all branches of education, from the infant class in the primary school to the University, should be conducted so as to secure the greatest profit to the whole community?

The progress report presented to Parliament yesterday is of greater interest to the Treasurer than to the Minister of Education. The recommendations evince a liberal spirit and a hearty appreciation of the services of the professorial staff of the University. Requests preferred by the University authorities, involving large additional outlays of money, are so freely and fully endorsed that the applicants may be tempted to regret not having asked for much more. A comparison of the Adelaide University with those of Sydney and Melbourne convinced the Commission that "the local institution is poorly equipped financially, and that its work at present is hampered and its future endangered by lack of sufficient funds." Presumably the addition of £4,000 to the annual Government grant is designed to augment the salaries and allowances of the professors and lecturers. The "City of

Culture" is said to suffer in prestige on account of the smaller remuneration paid to its University instructors, and if the Government is honestly able to afford higher salaries they ought to be given. The claims of the University were powerfully set forth by the Chancellor (Sir Samuel Way), whose assurance that the salaries now paid to the professors are "miserably inadequate" was approved by the Chairman of the Commission. The Chancellor, however, was careful not to do an injustice to the community in that respect. As he remarked, during the last 30 years South Australia has passed through occasions of great financial stress, and various educational institutions were then looked upon by many people as beyond the requirements of a small population obliged to exercise strict economy in its expenditure. It is gratifying to know that, in spite of all drawbacks, the University staff has included some of the ablest scientists and scholars in the Empire. Maintenance of the present high standard of teaching, and the much desired provision of means for valuable research work, certainly demand an exercise by the State and private donors of far more generosity to the University than has hitherto been displayed.

The Chairman's opinion that the University was "one of the most ultra-conservative institutions" was characterized by the Chancellor as "a popular delusion." Regarding its constitution, His Honor considers the University thoroughly democratic, or, at least, representative. "The governing bodies are, first, an elective body—the senate; secondly, an executive body—the council; and all legislation must receive the approval of both these bodies and also of the Governor-in-Council." The accuracy of this statement does not lessen the importance of the fact that an impression has widely prevailed that the University is beyond the reach of poor students unless fortune in various ways shall smile upon them. This wrong idea is now to be dispelled, if the Commission has its way, by adding to the Council of the University five Parliamentary representatives—three to be chosen by the Assembly and two by the Legislative Council at the beginning of each Parliament, and to hold office during the life of the Parliament. In order to secure further State support, the University authorities recommend the adoption of this proposal; but record the opinion that "the complex affairs of the University require an intimate knowledge on the part of members of the Council, which can only be obtained by experience and continuity of office," and express fear of "the entrance of political differences into the administration of University affairs." The reform sought by the Commission should have the effect of modifying the character of both the University Council and the Parliament, but whether it would prove mutually beneficial must depend mostly upon the mental calibre of the selected legislators and the spirit in which they would perform their duties. On this point the experience of Victoria is not encouraging. Sir John Madden (Chancellor of the Melbourne University) stated that the three legislators who belong to the Council of that institution do not give

close personal attention to its affairs, although they are "advantageous in dealings between the University and the Treasurer." Sir Norman McLaurin (Chancellor of the Sydney University) said he was strongly opposed to any Government representation on the Senate (which corresponds to the Council in Adelaide). He remarks that "the qualities which make a man a politician do not necessarily make him the best man to elect a professor," and that there is a danger that the influence of Parliamentary representatives might be too great. This may be true enough, but if the democracy should learn properly to value the University, it will demand a high level of educational qualifications in its legislators, and Parliament would always have a number of members worthy to hold seats on the Council. If the Commission's recommendation should be adopted, the Government will need to resist the temptation to either exercise too much control over University affairs or treat them with comparative indifference. The promotion of higher learning in the interests of all sections of the community ought to be regarded as a sacred trust far above the arena of party politics.

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ANTARTIC RESEARCH

DR. MAWSON'S EXPEDITION.

SYDNEY, September 12.

At a meeting of the Cabinet to-day consideration was given to a letter from Dr. Mawson asking for £7000 towards his Antarctic expedition. The request was strongly backed by Professor David. Dr. Mawson explained that the amount meant the difference of failure and success. The Cabinet decided to comply with the request.