

The Critic Aug 14th 1907

The Elder Conservatorium.

SOME UGLY RUMORS.

A STRICT ENQUIRY ADVISABLE.

AS THE CRITIC mentioned last week, there are ugly rumors circulating in musical circles in Adelaide as to the conduct of affairs at the Elder Conservatorium. This is a public institution, and as there appears to be a solid foundation for many of the complaints with regard to its management, THE CRITIC considers that it is thoroughly justified in focussing public attention upon those complaints with the view of their amendment. Ventilation is a means towards purification, and if the information supplied to THE CRITIC is in any degree correct the need for a thorough investigation into certain matters connected with that institution is very desirable.

Such enquiry, however, should be open, and not secret. THE CRITIC is informed that the University authorities delegated to the Education Committee the task of investigating certain complaints against the Conservatorium staff, but the enquiry is being held in secret. Certain gentlemen engaged in the music trade have given their testimony in regard to the sale of instruments and music. It is very difficult, however, to induce witnesses to come forward, but THE CRITIC understands that as a result of the committee's investigations a stoppage will be put to these practices.

One matter to which the committee might well direct their attention relates to the acquisition by the Conservatorium of ten Brinsmead pianos. From enquiries made among the piano firms in Adelaide THE CRITIC has learned sufficient to view this transaction with, to say the least—suspicion. One leading piano firm state that they were asked to give a quotation for three pianos. They did so, and received a notice that their quotation had been received. Then silence. Suddenly they found that ten Brinsmead pianos had been installed throughout the Conservatorium. Though there may be absolutely nothing improper about the transaction, it is nevertheless a coincidence that a member of the Conservatorium staff was at one time a salesman or piano-tuner in the employ of the Brinsmead firm!

The head of one of the Adelaide piano firms stated that had he been informed that the Conservatorium intended to secure ten pianos he would have been willing for the sake of the advertisement gained by one make being installed throughout the institution, to have quoted the actual cost price. But he was only asked to quote for three instruments, and so did not realise the opportunity for advertisement.

A member of the trade actually twitted a member of the Conservatorium staff upon having received a "thumping big commission" on the transaction, and though it was denied, the trade retain their opinions upon the subject. "Why would he not take a commission from Brinsmeads," asked our informant, "when he has twice taken commissions from me for the sale of pianos?" Fancy, members of the musical "profession," let alone members of the Conservatorium staff, demanding commissions on the sale of pianos to students! What would the public think if professors of the University demanded from booksellers a commission on books sold to their students? Yet there is no point of difference.

Then as to the sale of music. THE CRITIC understands that when the Elder Conservatorium took over Herr Reimann's College of Music that gentleman had a stock of music valued at about £300. It was arranged, so it

is stated, that Herr Reimann should be given a position in the Conservatorium for life, and that he should be allowed to sell the music he then had in stock. But the stock of music seems to have beaten the widow's cruse for the duration of its supply. That appears to have been part of the trouble in regard to the sale of music.

THE CRITIC understands that Dr. Ennis denies having accepted a fee as adjudicator at Strathalbyn. THE CRITIC never said he did, but would like to ask him a few questions:

1. Was he not asked to accept the position of adjudicator at the forthcoming competition at Strathalbyn?

2. Was not a fee mentioned in the letter?

3. What was his reply?

4. Did he not say to a certain gentleman, who disapproved of his accepting the fee, he might as well have the cheque as anybody else.

THE CRITIC will be most happy to publish Dr. Ennis's replies to these queries.

Kapunda and Port Pirie are said to be the towns at which, it is said, another member of the Conservatorium staff accepted a fee in connection with musical duties.

It is a strange fact that, in spite of giving that gushing testimonial to Beale pianos, Dr. Ennis purchased a Steinway for his own private use!

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The fact has leaked out that at the time of the re-organization of the Education Department Premier Price offered the position of Director of Education to Professor Henderson at £1,000 a year. He was at the time receiving £800. The University, not wishing to lose such an able professor, offered him £1,000 a year to stay with them. And Premier Price lacked the courage to bid higher. Result is that we have a cheaper Director strolling around somewhere in Europe trying, in the intervals between jollifications, to pick up some of the knowledge that a more expensive man would have possessed. This is certainly false economy. And meanwhile there is disaffection among the teachers.