

Poor High Schools! — Blamed for Country's Ills

(By C. M. Ward, M.A., Vice-Principal of Adelaide High School)

MR. C. M. WARD, M.A., vice-principal of Adelaide High School, takes up in this article the cudgels on behalf of secondary education. He suggests that Prof. Kerr Grant (lecturer in physics at the University of Adelaide) had his tongue in his cheek when he told "The Mail" recently that secondary education, as it exists, does not achieve its purpose.

The humorous aspect of the professor's strictures, says Mr. Ward, is that they came from the University, which controls, in the main, the examinations of the secondary schools. It is the University, Mr. Ward emphasises, which demands that the student should "stuff his mind" with French, Algebra, Latin, geometry, and mechanics, and he says that if Prof. Kerr Grant does not approve he should make his representations to the University Council, instead of attacking secondary education.

The contention of Mr. H. L. Ward, B.A., F.I.C.A. (principal of Muirden College) that secondary education is responsible for much of the unemployment, causes the vice-principal of Adelaide High School to reflect that high schools are being blamed for all the ills of the country. He wonders why they are not held responsible for the defeat of Australia in the last Test matches!

It seems hardly fair to attack the views expressed in "The Mail" recently by Prof. Kerr Grant on education in general and secondary education in particular. Indeed, there would be no need to do so if one could feel that the public would read the professor's strictures with a proper appreciation of their humor.

Those who have had the pleasure of attending Prof. Kerr Grant's lectures, even if only an occasional extension lecture, will know that this distinguished scholar indulges an engaging sense of fun, and will realise that he has, in this no doubt hurried interview propounded, with his tongue in his cheek, a few pet paradoxes. He has thrown out a bait and is ready to chuckle at any poor fish that nibbles.

The professor's fun is usually more distinctive than on this occasion. H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, both authorities on education and everything else, and arch-exponents of the Gospel that everything that is wrong, but humorous all the time, have written whole books in the vein adopted in this interview by Prof. Kerr Grant. We have heard so often from these and similar authorities the bald assertion, without any scientific data, that "education kills initiative and stifles inherent ability," that the paradox has ceased to amuse us.

Incidentally this word "initiative," which is used so glibly as an epitome of all the virtues, is responsible for much vagueness in our outlook on character. We do not distinguish sufficiently the initiative that leads to a high ideal from that which ought to land a man in jail; between the initiative of the man who does something fine and that of the confidence trickster. Revolution, highway robbery, promiscuous love, murder, and parsimony may all be as much the outcome of initiative as good government, high finance, married bliss, forbearance, and charity.

INITIATIVE may be a slayer of dragons, but if it conceives the notion that constituted authority is necessarily a dragon, then it becomes a menace. No doubt the word is fashionable because of the prevail-

ing cult of science as the be all and the end all of life.

The immortal Louis Pasteur, however, like many other great men, was sent to college by hard-working parents who had not enough initiative to "throw him out into the world," as Prof. Kerr Grant suggests should be done. Their motive was just that humdrum sense of duty which actuates ordinary people. The boy's "natural bent" (another of those catch-phrases much in vogue but still quite undefined) was for fishing and portrait painting. These he put behind him like a good boy (he was sadly lacking in those instincts for naughtiness, truancy, and so on, which according to the modern paradox-monger give such promise of greatness), and set to work to "stuff himself" with mathematics, elementary science, and the rest.

This must have been a great shock to his dear little "natural bent." He passed the examination but, thinking he had not done himself justice, set himself to the task of doing it again. It was afterward that he developed his passion for chemistry. What a pity he did not follow up his natural bent for fishing and produce a book like "The Complete Angler"! Or, but for those useless studies he might have discovered his bent for chemistry at an earlier age. But then again he might have blown himself up. This one example, I know, proves nothing, but it successfully counters Prof. Kerr Grant's citation of his own case.

THAT "many great men of the world had little or practically no education" is admittedly true, although the implied deduction has not even the virtue of a paradox. The professor will, no doubt, agree with the equally true, if more novel, assertion that "many great men have received a thorough education on orthodox lines." Both these statements have to stand at that, as I have no statistics that will help to decide which is the greater number. Mr. W. T. McCoy, the late Director of Education, after careful observation of education abroad, expressed the opinion that with the advance of education competition is becoming too keen for the self-made man. He declared that the only schemes of vocational guidance and placement that he saw worked with

success were connected with super-primary schools. Those who left school at the primary leaving age could not, in the main, compete with their better educated fellows. It would seem then that the modern youth, if his ambition is for self-made greatness, is taking a great risk, in view of the possibility that, before many years, the successful self-made man may be practically confined to the family album.

One does not take seriously the professor's claim to self-made greatness. Nor is it fair to take literally his statement that practically all his learning came from books. We know that he never would have achieved greatness in science without a large amount of research in the laboratory. At any rate, his department prescribes a course of laboratory work for public examination candidates.

ROUSSEAU was a thoroughgoing apostle of the doctrine of allowing the child to follow his natural bent, a method which, at the best, may flood the market with geniuses, and at the worst may allow the child to go to the devil in comfort, without any officious interference. He, no doubt, felt, as Prof. Kerr Grant does, that "it is absolutely criminal to expect a class of small children to sit immobile in rows when natural instinct calls them into the open to be romping and tumbling about in the sunshine." Whatever provocation Rousseau may have had for his radical notions, surely Prof. Kerr Grant has very little. Let him visit some of the infant schools and he will find that he is complaining about a state of affairs that is certainly not prevalent.

The little ones today lead on the whole an elf-like existence at school. It is left for the parents to bring them to earth with an occasional "keep quiet for a few moments or you'll be dented!" And the children like that, too! I am not so sure that children are

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to scramble about or even sit down. The fact is they are restless, and like change.

I am taking the professor

too seriously. The humorous aspect of these strictures on education, particularly secondary education, is that they come from the University. Surely Prof. Kerr Grant is having a friendly dig at his colleagues! The University controls in the main the examinations of those secondary schools which the professor has in mind. He is aware, of course, that there are other super-primary schools that provide for what he considers more practical subjects.

HIGH schools and colleges exist for those who wish to qualify for a professional career, or for the many positions which require a pass in the intermediate or leaving examinations for entrance, as also for those who wish merely to be educated. Six subjects are required for a pass, and it is clear that the student who wishes to jump the hurdles set up by the University cannot confine his attention to subjects which he is actually going to use in life.

The University demands that he should "stuff his mind" with French, algebra, Latin, geometry, and mechanics—and quite rightly too, perhaps. Of course it may be asked why a student entering the profession of dentistry should have to pass French and Latin before he can begin. The reply "Why not?" is only the beginning of an inconclusive argument which we shall carry no further because it is beside the point. If the University desires intending law students to pass Latin or commercial candidates to pass subjects other than those "which will benefit them in the fight for existence," then why complain that secondary schools shoulder their responsibility? If Prof. Kerr Grant does not approve, then he should make his representations to the University Council instead of attacking secondary education.

If secondary schools were abolished there would no doubt be more money available for the University, which now receives a grant of public money equal to one-half of the sum paid for the maintenance of the whole high school system. But then the University, rich in funds, would surely languish for students. Indeed, eventually we might be able to dispense with a University altogether. How we should steal a march on all those benighted countries that still cling to education!

IN support of Prof. Kerr Grant's criticism Mr. H. L. Ward, B.A., blames secondary education for unemployment. Mr. Ward, as principal of a commercial college, is no doubt an authority on economics. It does appear to me, however, that his facts and his interpretation of them are open to question. That

unemployment is rife in all sections of the community is unfortunately true, but is Mr. Ward sure that secondary school students constitute an undue percentage of the unemployed? Further, is not the cause of the general industrial depression the failure of our primary industries? Surely Mr. Ward is not so heartless as to turn away from his college students who desire to train for commerce, which he says is overcrowded, and persuade them to go out to some of those open spaces, many of which, as he must know, will hardly support a goat even in normal seasons? In fact, school is the only place open for a boy in these times of depression.

Prominent business men, too, have expressed views from their various angles. Such views are interesting and may be helpful, but, at the risk of appearing priggish, I venture to say that it still remains for someone to put the discussion on a higher plane. Our methods are bound to be open to criticism. We realise that we have to combine idealism with utility, but we refuse to sacrifice the former to the latter. In the endeavor to perform this double duty we often fail, but that failure is not so ignominious as to warrant our extinction.

WE are accused of being impractical, and yet the very troubles mentioned by our accusers may be caused by over-emphasis of the utilitarian aspect. The old notion of learning at school things that we shall not use in earning our livelihood is inadequate, but it is better than the idea of going to school for the sole purpose of qualifying for a copy billet.

Secondary schools have been the subject of much drastic criticism lately. The Taxpayers' Association singled out State high schools for special censure in their recent attack on education. Prof. Kerr Grant holds us responsible for those ills for which his University has the remedy. Mr. H. L. Ward, in supporting him, blames us for unemployment, for keeping young people from going out to the open spaces, and for the failure of primary schools to confine their attention to the three subjects (he does not say which three) that will best equip them to enter his college. It remains for someone to blame us for the water shortage, the Commonwealth tax on pictures, tobacco, and beer, and Australia's defeat in the last Test matches. Perhaps, then, when the farce has played itself out, somebody may tender a helpful suggestion.

HONEST, AT LEAST

Comments of Educationist

Of interest in view of the local controversy on the examination system is the following recent comment by Sir Michael Sadler, C.B., K.C.S.I., Master of University College, Oxford:—

"It is the chief glory of the English examination system that it is clean and honest. Scandals are practically unknown. In tests on which so much depends there is no cheating. The reputation of the English examinations, large and small, elementary or advanced, is unshaken."

"There is some truth in the assumption that an impartial test of intellectual attainment, conducted by an external authority which is unbiased in judgment and unembarrassed by any fear of alienating its customers, is indirectly a test of the industry and purposefulness of the candidates, and an audit of some aspects of the competence of their teachers."

as fond of incessant romping and tumbling in the sunshine as we sometimes imagine. Even on a particularly fine day they may enjoy it for only a surprisingly short while, and then wander into the house

VICTOR HARBOUR
Nov. Dec. 1929.

UNIVERSITY PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS.

Some years ago a trust was made by the University that Victor Harbour be constituted a centre for the public examinations in general education and in music. As it is the policy of the University to assist candidates in the country by providing facilities to enable them to sit locally, the request was granted. Subsequently, at a public meeting, held in the Institute at local centre, was duly formed, and committees, chairman and secretary appointed.

The Intermediate and Leaving Examinations began on Tuesday, 20th Nov. and what do we find? Two examination centres, while some eight or ten were this year, some from Port East and probably others from Geelong, sitting at Strathalbyn, Grant

now to miles a day, and suffering disabilities that would have been avoided had they entered for their home centre.

One naturally asks why the privileges granted by the University, which has provided the local machinery, although the centre is expected to provide a room free of cost, should not be applied up to the greatest extent possible?

I write from the point of view of the interests of the town, and in the interests of those children who are taking these examinations under such trying circumstances, viz. 11 hours, and 20 miles every day they sit

REG. 20-11-29
Professor Inconsistent, Says Minister

Professor Kerr Grant was inconsistent in his criticism of secondary education, said the Minister for Education (Mr. McIntosh) in the Assembly yesterday. The professor taught in a university, yet held that secondary education was of little use.

Mr. McIntosh was replying to Mr. Anthony's question if an enquiry would be held into the secondary education system.

The Minister said the standard of education in South Australia most conforms with that of other States. Only six per cent. of the youth of the State received secondary education.

ADV. 20-11-29
HIGHER EDUCATION

Professor Kerr Grant's criticism of the South Australian educational system was referred to in the Assembly on Tuesday by Mr. Anthony. He asked if the Government would institute an enquiry with a view to bringing about economy without loss of efficiency, and to ascertain whether they were proceeding on the right lines in regard to education. The Minister of Education (Hon. M. McIntosh) said Professor Kerr Grant's statement was full of inconsistencies. The Government were anxious to obtain the best results from the money spent on education, and to have a standard of education consistent with Australian requirements. It was necessary to have uniformity in this regard among the States of the Commonwealth. He would like to remove one misapprehension. Only 6 per cent. of the children enrolled were attending secondary education schools, and the opportunities to practice economy were thus limited.