

# "If You Can't Beat Your Adversary, Hogan, Disqualify Him"

(By Prof. Kerr Grant)

PROF. KERR GRANT, lecturer in physics at the Adelaide University, in the following article, reasserts and enlarges upon his original criticism of a scheme of universal secondary education. He replies to his critics and says that in spite of the accusation of Mr. C. M. Ward, M.A., he was not jesting.

Mr. Ward, he says, followed the dubious precept of disqualifying his adversary when he couldn't beat him.

Prof. Grant admits that it is possible for a man to be ground between "the stones of the educational mill" and yet achieve greatness. But he adds, "Just as the robust digestive organs of a camel can extract nutriment from dry thorns and woody fibre, so there are intelligences so powerful that they will thrive on the toughest, driest, most unpalatable mental pabulum. On the other hand those of tender powers of assimilation derive as much benefit from such fodder as a baby would from a diet of mixed pickles and corn beef."

Dealing with the remarks of Mr. McIntosh (Minister of Education) he declares that the cause of genuine education will not be advanced by giving an uncritical adherence to sweeping proposals under a system which contains features both useless and effete.

Prof. Grant's article follows—  
"If you can't beat your adversary, Hogan," said Mr. Dooley, "disqualify him." Mr. C. M. Ward, classmate of the Adelaide High School, evidently conscious of an unfortunate disability to give an effective answer to the criticisms offered by me, has suggested that secondary education be made universal, begins his rejoinder to my remarks with an unhappy effort to follow this dubious precept.

He accuses me of writing my article with "no thought in my cheek," alleging as evidence in support his possession of an "exaggerated sense of fun."

I plead "not guilty" to the perpetration of such an uncalculated and unworthy deception as Mr. Ward would implicate me, and I offer to readers of "The Mail" my emphatic assurance that the views put forward by me two weeks ago were given as sincere—though by no means complete—expressions of my views upon the topic submitted to me by the editor for an opinion. Moreover, I assert that Mr. Ward knows this as well as I do. This is clearly shown by the fact that, immediately after making this attempt to discredit the genuineness of my contentions, he proceeds to deal with them quite seriously. Why take this trouble if, as he professes to believe, they were written in jest? Mr. Ward stands self-convicted of a gratuitous and foolish piece of insincerity, which weakens whatever might there may be in the rest of his remarks.

Some of these I regard as trivial or irrelevant.

others are not inconsistent with my own attitude. None leads me to retract a word of what I formerly said. My stated opinion, may I remind readers, was definitely adverse to any unqualified and indefinite proposal to extend our educational system on the lines of our present scheme of secondary education—and let me say here that I had no thought of singling out our State high schools for attack, as Mr. Ward seems to think was my purpose, on the grounds solely—

(1) That there is no guarantee that the heavy financial burden incurred in such an extension would be compensated by an increase in the industrial or productive efficiency of the community.

(2) That the curriculum and methods of instruction obtaining in the present-day type of secondary school, excepting those designed for technical or vocational instruction, are quite foreign to the natural interests and aptitudes of youth, quite hostile to the mentality of the average child (I did not say "all children"), and quite useless in the main as a preparation for the future avocation of the boy or girl.

(3) And that whatever benefits accrue to the pupil from spending two or three years at a secondary school—and I will freely concede that quite apart from the question of instruction there are many such benefits—these are largely offset and even outweighed by the really educative influences of responsible participation in the real activities of life.

It is a convenient presumption of a certain type of

academical education that if a child is not at school he is learning nothing. Thousands of harassed parents will bear me out when I say that the natural desire of a healthy child to acquire knowledge about anything and everything under the sun, their spontaneous impulses to participate in all the activities of those around them, in short, their striving to educate themselves—in the truest sense of the word—is one of the most striking attributes of childhood and a source, at times, of much embarrassment to their parents.

*Following the articles in "The Mail" Mr. Anthony in the Assembly this week called attention to the criticism of the State secondary education system by Prof. Kerr Grant and asked the Hon. M. McIntosh if he would have an impartial enquiry made.*

*The Minister replied that the article of Prof. Grant was striking because of its inconsistencies. The Government was endeavoring to get the best value for the money expended. The standard of education should be consistent with Australian requirements so that one State should not be placed at a disadvantage with another.*

*The statement of the Minister is dealt with by Prof. Grant in this article.*

In fact, I have an uneasy suspicion that the complacency or indifference of the average parent toward the "education" which his children receive when they enter upon their schooling has its foundation in the sense of relief from the duties of a perpetual instructor thus obtained.

I cannot deal in detail with the whole of Mr. Ward's article, nor is it worth while. He gives at my statement "that education tends to kill initiative and stifles inherent ability." He tacitly agrees, unless I misinterpret him, that the accusation is justified, but takes pains to point out that "initiative" may as easily "land a man in jail" as lead him to high ideals.

Of course it may, but—I might retort—cannot the same be said of "education"?

Of course the "initiative" referred to is "initiative" which makes for good results and not for bad.

Is it inconceivable to Mr. Ward that there should be a system of education which, in its spirit and its practice, encourages the one type of "initiative" as much as it discourages the other? If his imagination cannot rise to this mild elevation, I fear I am wasting the time of myself and my readers in replying to him.

Mr. Ward cites the solitary case of Pasteur as an illustration of the fact—which I never dreamt of denying—that it is possible for a man to be ground in the stones of the

## DUBIOUS PRECEPT ADOPTED BY MR. WARD, SAYS PROF. KERR GRANT NO JEST IN ATTACK ON SECONDARY EDUCATION

educational mill and yet subsequently achieve greatness.

Of course it is possible! Just as the robust digestive organs of a camel can extract nutriment from dry thorns and woody fibre, so there are intelligences so powerful that they will thrive on the toughest, driest, most unpalatable of mental pabulum.

On the other hand, those of tender powers of assimilation, and they—alas, form the great majority—derive as much benefit from such fodder as a baby would from a diet of mixed pickles and corn beef. Mr. Ward admits that many great men have owed little or nothing to their education, but professes to see no significance in the fact!

"High schools and colleges exist for those who wish to qualify for a professional career... as also for those who wish mainly to be educated." In this sentence Mr. Ward touches, I believe, near the root of the evil. It is obvious that the requirements of a professional career demand a specialised and in a sense "technical" type of education, which may well be different from that best suited to those who wish to pursue other walks in life or merely to be "educated."

The University demands by examination certain entrance standards for those entering upon its professional courses. It is undoubtedly unfortunate that these standards and examinations should dominate as they do the whole of the instruction given in the secondary schools. But responsibility for that does not lie, as Mr. Ward would place it, wholly upon the University.

Space would not permit, however, of an adequate statement of the true position here.

The parts of Mr. Ward's article with which I have dealt will serve, I think, to illustrate its general weakness. With my other critics I must deal briefly. There is a "banker" who finds my views on education "ridiculous," and who is, apparently, entirely satisfied that ours is the best of all possible systems.

It is with some amusement that I recall a discussion on the value of secondary education some 19 years ago. I recollect with perfect definiteness the somewhat distressful confidences of the professor of English of that date. One of the leading bankers (can it be the same man?) had voiced to him a bitter complaint that English—as then taught in the school—was utterly useless as a preparation for the duties of a bank officer. "We have to teach them how to write a decent letter," was one item in the indictment.

"Sans doute, nous avons change tout cela."—"Without doubt we have changed all that."

But the main point of my remarks was not an attack upon the present state of affairs, but a criticism of the proposal to extend a similar type of higher education to all and sundry. The great majority of boys and girls will not become doctors, lawyers, bankers, or professors, but will be clerks, typists, artisans, laborers in the field, factory, or household.

Can any sane person seriously propose that those who are to become agricultural laborers or domestic servants should spend two years or more receiving instruction in "French, algebra, Latin, geometry, and mechanics" (Mr. Ward's list; I accept it as a fair type)? There is no thought here in my mind of an aspersions on the worth or the work of those who pursue these less exalted avocations. I hold in honor the honest and capable worker in every sphere of life, however humble.

I have a deep sense of gratitude toward all those who relieve me (at times) of the duties and drudgeries which would interfere with the performance of my obligations, and I would warmly support any educational movement which had for its object the lightening or the more effective performance of their labors, or add in any way to their opportunities for culture or enjoyment. But the suggestion that boys and girls whose walk in life is to be in these humbler though not less honorable paths should spend hundreds of hours in the (to them) dreary drudgery of memorising the interminable lists of irregularities in the systems of some foreign language (dead or living), or in hopeless, heart-breaking efforts to master the intricacies of a mathematical calculus, they can never hope to understand, much less to apply, appears to me so unspeakably foolish as to require only a moment's consideration for its unequivocal condemnation.

The realisation of such a proposal would involve an egregious and unwarrantable waste of public money, and I am surprised that a respected and responsible Minister of the Crown should have allowed himself to be betrayed, even momentarily, into an utterance which might be misinterpreted as giving it his approval.

I am absolutely confident that not only Mr. McIntosh, but every other thoughtful and disinterested friend of education will, on consideration, agree in all essentials with the substance of my views. It is indeed imperative that we should give the closest attention to our educational problems and that we should see to it that we do not fall behind other States or nations.

But the cause of genuine education will not be advanced by giving an uncritical adherence to sweeping proposals of the type under discussion, initiated and advocated, it well may be, by persons interested in the maintenance and aggrandisement of a system which, whatever merits may be claimed for it, contains features which are both useless and effete.

REC. 26. 11. 29  
**CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL TO HAVE PSYCHOLOGIST**

**Dr. E. A. Allen Appointed**  
THE time has gone by when most juvenile ills were treated on the prescription of Mrs. Squeers—a spoonful of brimstone and treacle, administered regularly. For many years now, the North Adelaide Children's Hospital has progressed steadily, introducing modern ideas and equipment. The Outpatients' Department, in particular, is a model of efficient planning and service.

**To Help Nervous Children**  
The latest addition to the staff is an Honorary Psychologist, Dr. E. A. Allen has received the appointment. The problems that face the hospital authorities, particularly in the Outpatients' Department, are often those of behaviour and adjustment in the environment. Nervous troubles have their roots in the ills of childhood, and even more serious are the cares they are laying up for adult life. Dr. Allen will be available as a guide and counsellor in cases like these. In her private practice Dr. Allen handles many cases of difficult and nervous children who are sent to her by medical practitioners.

REC. 28. 11. 29  
**HAS FREE REIN IN SPENDING £75,000**

**Australian Institute's Gift From Carnegie Corp.**  
MELBOURNE, Wednesday.—Completing the arrangements for a gift of £75,000, extending over 10 years, for educational research and investigation in Australia, the Carnegie Corporation of New York has attached no conditions as to methods to be followed.

The Australian Institute, of which Mr. Frank Tate, the former Victorian Director of Education, will be president, will be left free in its allocation of the money. Vocational guidance will be the first subject of investigation. Mr. Tate has received the approval of the Board of Trustees of the Corporation. The Corporation has approved of a grant of £50,000 to be paid in instalments of £5,000 per annum for 10 years to finance the Institute. The trustees have also undertaken to provide £25,000 a year for 10 years to cover the salary of an expert executive officer, and necessary travelling and administrative expenses.

NEWS 28. 11. 29  
**Examiner's Error**

"Parent," North Unley.—Examiners in the public examinations of Adelaide University in their annual reports are prone to put much of blame perpetrated by hapless youngsters. Yet these men themselves are not above committing errors. A glaring mistake on the part of an examiner was made in question four in the intermediate geography examination yesterday morning. It read as follows:—"A wireless concert in London starts at 20 h. (P.M.) when (local time) would the first beam be heard in New York (lat. 74 degrees W.), Pernambuco (lat. 200 degrees W.), Port Adelaide (lat. 125 degrees 30 E.)? What would be the standard (official) times for Albany, Port Adelaide, and Melbourne?" Clearly longitude and not latitude of New York, Pernambuco, and Port Adelaide should have been indicated in the question. However, candidates have no right to assume that the examiner means something quite different from what he says. The demoralising effect of questions carelessly framed cannot be stated for by any subsequent leniency on the part of the examiner. For a university examiner giving the latitude of Port Adelaide as 125 degrees 30 E!

NEWS 28. 11. 29  
**Physics Paper**

"Candidate," St. Peters.—On Tuesday a paper was put before candidates for the physics leaving examination on matter on which little of our work was based. We were set a book this year called "Hadley's Everyday Physics," and most of the questions were obtained from "Hadley's Physics." Could not the examiners use the book set instead of going out of their way to call carriers from other books? "Taxpayer," Mount Gambier.—It is not right to set a book for candidates for the year and then question them on an entirely different work and still expect results of a high standard. It is unfair to demand high entrance fees and then waste the work of a year. Candidates should be given a chance in the all-important examinations and examiners should be prevented from "catching" them in this way. [Mr. F. W. Eardley (register of Adelaide University) said that the complaints of "Parent," "Candidate," and "Taxpayer" would be brought before the attention of the board of examiners.]