

Register 19th June 1902.

"The Age" 24th May 1902

Mr. E. Harold Davies, Mus. Bac., A.R.C.O., who some time ago resolved to enter for the degree of Mus. Doc., has been successful in an exercise which he forwarded to London to the examiners, Sir Hubert Parry, Mus. Doc., principal of the Royal College of Music, and Sir Frederick Bridge, Mus. Doc., organist of Westminster Abbey. The subject of the work is the Te Deum, set for soli and chorus, with full orchestral accompaniment. Mr. Davies is known as one of the foremost musicians of this city. He has written a number of church compositions, and his anthems have been well received. In addition to his scholarly theoretical attainments he ranks amongst the most accomplished local organists, and for years past he has filled the post of organist and choirmaster to the Kent Town Methodist Church. The present magnificent instrument, one of the finest in this State, was erected in the church since he took charge of the psalmody. It now remains for Mr. Davies to enter for a further written and oral examination before the high distinction of Mus. Doc. can be attained to.

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News has been received that Miss Trema Corvan, who won the Elder Scholarship in 1898, has passed her final examination brilliantly at the Royal College of Music, London, and has thus gained the diploma of A.R.C.M. After the Coronation Miss Corvan intends to return to her parents in Tasmania.

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COMMERCIAL EDUCATION.

What have the commercial men of Melbourne, or the Government of this State done to further commercial education? This is a question frequently asked. The answer is always the same, "practically nothing"; and the reply is as true as it is startling. Why have we lagged behind other countries, including England, so long, and failed so dismally to recognise the overwhelming importance of the subject? Who are we to hold responsible for this inactivity and unprogressiveness? The blame does not altogether rest with Parliament; much of the responsibility lies with our Chambers of Commerce and Manufactures, and leading mercantile houses and associations. Although the position of all these bodies would undoubtedly improve as commercial education advances, and notwithstanding the fact that this form of instruction is of considerable importance to individual members of these organisations, practically nothing has yet been done by them to further the subject. A remarkable phase of the matter, however, is that we appear to have got on very well in the past without any special attention being paid to the subject. This no doubt is due to the smart and apt manner in which Australian youths pick up that knowledge which they find, on entering our business houses, it is absolutely essential they should possess. But a lad will only get up to a certain stage of commercial proficiency, and this at the expense of his employer and his own pocket, because the employer pays low remuneration in order to compensate himself for the bad work done by his employe, while such employe is learning to perform his duties in a satisfactory manner. When an employe has mastered what he terms the difficult and intricate part of his employer's business, he imagines he knows all about commercial education, has nothing more to learn, and prides himself on his "commercial capacity." Now, as in nine cases out of ten the employer only possessed a vague idea of up to date commercial work, and since the employe had at the most only reached his employer's standard, on entering a new business establishment he finds that he knows very little of his new work, and the result is he again commences to learn his duties—again at the expense of his employer. This is where there is something radically wrong with our commercial life. There is absolutely no uniformity. It is entirely unknown in commercial circles. Why is this so? The reason is not far to seek. There is no recognised commercial institution, or course of instruction. Consequently youths gathering their knowledge from good, bad and indifferent employers learn totally different methods for performing precisely similar duties. In Germany, the most educationally progressive country in the world, this is avoided by uniform instruction in the high commercial institutions. In commercial education uniformity is, to a large extent, very desirable, whereas in other forms of instruction, especially technical education, it would be unwise and perhaps disastrous.

In the German establishments the knowledge needed for commercial callings can be rapidly built up on the mental soil which has been both economically and properly prepared. And the wonderful commercial progress Germany has made in recent years amply proves that the move has been in the right direction. Now, what is commercial education? Broadly speaking, the term is used to denote a full course of educational training for a business career, being mainly of a specialised nature bearing on commerce. In a letter to the London "Times," Sir Philip Magnus, the well-known English educational authority, stated his opinion in regard to commercial education in the following terms:—"The fact that no first class commercial institute is to be found in this country is partly due to the slowness of Englishmen to recognise the value of higher education for trade purposes. Only very recently have English manufacturers awakened to the necessity of the higher technical instruction; and even now the funds available for the purpose bear no comparison with those freely expended in other parts of Europe. There can be no doubt that German and Belgian merchants and manufacturers have been materially assisted by the ready supply at home of well-trained agents who have been educated in the high schools of commerce; and, having regard to the new avenues of trade which recent events are likely to open up for France, Russia and Germany, the necessity of adapting every possible means of adequately equipping our own youth for the growing competition has become a national obligation." These remarks of Sir Philip Magnus certainly have also a local bearing.

In Victoria we want a clearly defined course of commercial instruction, before entering upon which a student should have already completed a course of primary instruction, equally well defined and adapted to achieve the ends at once of sound liberal culture and of equipment for commercial life. Some slight practical office knowledge is also desirable before a youth enters upon a full commercial course. This would enable the student to more quickly grasp, and better retain, the knowledge imparted. Those fruits of commercial education have also been produced for many years past in France, Belgium, America, and, in recent years, in England. In those countries commercial institutions, which are usually subsidised and endowed by Government, the chambers of commerce and manufactures and leading commercial houses, have long since been established for clerks, &c., over 17 or 18 years of age, such as have already completed a sound course of primary education. As this form of instruction would require to be given in the evening, thoroughly practical teachers could, and should, be secured. Capable, practical merchants, accountants, &c., could be engaged to lecture to the students, of which a very large number are at present waiting for sound and economical instruction. It would be absolutely useless to engage school teachers to instruct in subjects of which they themselves possess but an elementary theoretical knowledge.

A few years ago an English commercial man, Mr. Passmore Edwards, donated £10,000 for the purpose of erecting a school for commercial education in London. Having thus forced public attention on the matter, arrangements for a suitable building site were made by the London County Council, and the institution then erected has been steadily growing and expanding ever since, until it is now fully recognised by business men as the commercial college of London. At the present time some 600 students are attending the institution.

The County Council also makes an annual grant exceeding £3000 to aid this form of instruction in London, while throughout the length and breadth of England the municipal authorities display an active interest in all educational matters, and annually devote large sums of money towards the maintenance of technical and commercial institutes. Our municipal bodies, on the other hand, appear to find it extremely difficult to rise above such matters as a philosophical discussion on the sewerage system, or a learned dissertation on "filthy tips." To suggest that these bodies should support, both financially and otherwise, the furtherance of education, is a proposition certain of ridicule, and even unblushing contempt, from a section of our "fit and proper" councillors.

In an able article which appeared in the "Educational Record," Mr. Michael E. Sadler lets welcome light into the educational systems pertaining in foreign countries. He says that in Belgium the Institut Supérieur de Commerce at Antwerp aims at being a university for the future merchant, or commercial man. Towards the maintenance of this institution the Government contributes three-quarters of the necessary funds, and the municipality of Antwerp the balance. The annual subsidy of the State amounts to about £2000, while the initial buildings cost the municipality £20,000. In 1897 the students numbered 233—a small number for such a substantial outlay—of whom 90 were foreigners. The course extends over two years, though special work may be added to the curriculum. Low fees are charged, and the course includes the following subjects:—

Routine of a merchant's office, including practical instruction in advanced commercial arithmetic, rates of exchange, average and marine insurance, bills of lading, execution of charter parties, calculation of values of foreign weights and measures, commercial correspondence, history of commercial products, political economy and statistics, commercial and industrial geography, elements of commercial law, French and English. The students are of two kinds, those who take up certain subjects only, and those who undertake the full course. The latter form the large majority. Examinations are held at the end of each year, and successful candidates are eligible for Government appointments; the certificates are highly valued by commercial men, those securing same easily obtaining outside employment. The standard for these certificates is kept high, and students obtaining same require to be both industrious and clever. In order to encourage commercial inquiry, the Belgium Government also grants £1800 per annum to provide for travelling scholarships, "travelling studentships for commercial research," as they are called. These scholarships, it is pointed out, do valuable work in training men who will be eminently fitted to write on commercial subjects for the press.

In Germany municipalities and commercial houses and societies have for many years past provided young clerks and others with splendid opportunities for acquiring commercial knowledge and other aptitudes of value in business life. In this country there is what is termed a higher school of commerce. The course at this institution extends over two years, and may be undertaken by those who have completed a sound course of secondary education. Students are admitted to attend occasional courses of lectures, this privilege being specially extended to undergraduates at the University of Leipzig and to those already engaged in business. The course of study differs very little from that in operation at the Antwerp Institut Supérieur de Commerce. The school is subsidised by the German Government and commercial establishments, as in Belgium.

France has for a considerable time past given special attention to the requirements of commerce. Ten years ago the Paris Chamber of Commerce drew up an elaborate scheme of commercial education. This body, differing from similar organisations in Australia, has already devoted large sums of money in furthering the movement. At the present time there are no less than twelve recognised schools of commerce in France, while the students number about 1300. Students obtaining a diploma from a recognised commercial school receive a remission of two years' military service.

In nearly every large American city well equipped commercial colleges are to be found, the instruction being on a thoroughly sound and efficient basis, and the fees on a very low scale. To make any form of education successful, if the instruction is not absolutely free, it is essential that the fees should be very reasonable, in order that the poorest clerk may not be debarred from attending the classes. Our University authorities have utterly failed to grasp the importance of commercial education, and have done absolutely nothing to advance the subject, notwithstanding the fact that a little commercial knowledge within the University might have been very useful in preventing a recent scandal. The time is not far distant, however, when the University will not only have to introduce evening lectures, as in England, and even at Sydney, but also cater for the requirements of commerce.

It will be seen that commercial institutions in foreign countries are doing highly satisfactory work, which is fully appreciated by the respective Governments and by men actively engaged in commerce. If we are to hold our own with foreigners it is absolutely essential that more attention and support should be given to this branch of instruction in the future. In business circles the dogged belief in the all sufficiency of the three r's has long since passed away. Something more is now required, and the sooner that something is supplied the better for the commercial prosperity of the State.