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OBSERVATORY AND UNIVERSITY

VIEWS OF A GOVERNMENT ASTRONOMER.

Mr. W. E. Cooke (Government Astronomer of Western Australia), who is spending a fortnight's holiday in Adelaide, when seen by a reporter of *The Register* on Thursday, alluded to the proposal of Professor Bragg that the Adelaide Observatory should be connected with the University, and a chair of astronomy established in Adelaide on that basis. "Most people," said Mr. Cooke, "think that the Meteorological Bureau was established for the advantage of meteorology only. As far as anything in writing is concerned it seems to have originated in the interests of astronomy, and not of meteorology. Several years ago the Board of Visitors of the Melbourne Observatory, which comprises a number of eminent men in Victoria, wrote to the Chief Secretary of that State urging that, in the interests of astronomy, meteorology should be taken away and formed into a separate bureau, because there were so many important things that required to be done in the realm of astronomy, especially in the southern hemisphere, that it was not fair to investigators in the latter science to expect them to think of the extra duty. Now that the Meteorological Bureau has been formed, I believe it is the intention of the Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth Observatories to devote themselves to the purpose for which they were originally founded—the furtherance of astronomical work.

—A Gigantic Task.—

"The business upon which those three observatories are taking part—the mapping of the heavens—is looked upon by astronomers all over the world, and by other scientific men, as the most important astronomical effort that has ever been attempted. I do not want to go into the subject now, but we are well on with the task, and can see the end in sight; probably it will come within the next dozen years. The question is—What shall be done till this is finished? At the last meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the President (Sir David Gill)—who has just retired from the position of Astronomer-Royal at Capetown, where he has established a name for himself as one of the leading astronomers of the age—dealt with the question of the present and future of astronomy. He laid it down emphatically that what was wanted more than anything else, and the most valuable work astronomers could undertake, was to select a certain number of stars per square degree throughout the sky, and determine their position and motions with the closest possible accuracy. This work is so urgently required that although several southern observatories, more or less, are engaged upon it, it is quite likely that a special southern observatory will be built by Mr. Carnegie in order to undertake that particular branch of investigation.

—Work for the Adelaide Observatory.—

"In addition to that Sir David Gill points out that this work requires to be triplicated. In Australia all the observatories are comparatively small, though equipped with first-class instruments, and it would require the united efforts of all the four southern observatories, including that at Adelaide, to take one of the one-third shares in that work. The Adelaide Observatory has hitherto not taken any very prominent part in astronomical research; but it is equipped with one instrument specially required for this work—the fine transit circle. That is practically the only good instrument it possesses. If this is used as at present and for some time past, only for determining time, it is like employing a steam hammer to crack a nut. Therefore it seems a great pity if the present opportunity of re-establishing the observatory on a useful astronomical basis should be neglected. In my opinion it is not possible to combine this work with the proposed University scheme. I am not, however, in the slightest antagonistic to that, which would be a very fine thing; but the other would be far more useful. The work of which I have spoken is, perhaps, to the general public uninteresting and monotonous; but it is to the national and State observatories that astronomers look for the completion of such endeavours as this, which could not be undertaken by private astronomers, and upon which the future progress of astronomy practically depends."

TEACHER AND PUPIL.

Illustrated Lectures.

While the Director of Education was on his world tour he took advantage of the opportunity to obtain photographic views of the chief places of educational interest, and these have now been prepared as lantern slides. It is his intention to deliver a public lecture dealing with the principal educational centres of the world, illustrated by these views. The slides will then be available for country teachers, who by this means should be able to greatly interest rural scholars and parents. Some very handsome educational institutions of Europe, England, and America are included in the collection.

New South Wales New Syllabus.

The reconstructed buildings at the Tempe Superior Public School were formally opened last week by Mr. J. A. Hogue, Minister for Public Instruction, who took the opportunity to refer at length to the new syllabus under which the whole of the ordinary instruction given in the schools had been made more practical by being brought into touch with every-day requirements. That particularly applied to the use of the mother tongue in both written and oral expression of the pupils' ideas. Further, it provided for the application of arithmetic to ordinary home and business calculations, and also for the extension of the reading course, so as to introduce the pupils before they left school to some of the chief literary works of the language, and to give them a taste for those works. It provided, in addition, for the introduction of nature study as a means of interesting children in natural subjects, and of giving them the habit of enquiry and observation. This, further, would serve as a basis for the science work of the higher classes. Another important feature in connection with the new syllabus was the establishment of school gardens at all schools where practicable. These gardens were being used as a basis for instruction in the elementary principles of agriculture, not, of course, that it was intended to make all boys farmers, but to give boys and girls a general bias towards rural life and rural pursuits. This latter object was further advanced under the new syllabus by the institution of the rural camp school for city boys. Further, a form of manual training was provided. In connection with the teaching of agriculture he mentioned the great success that had attended instruction of this character in some of the country schools, and stated that at the recent pastoral and agricultural show at Blayney, which he had opened, there were exhibits of vegetables, fruits, and farm products from four of the schools of the district. These exhibits were greatly admired, were the work of the children of the four schools in question, and were produced in the school grounds. Dealing generally with the question of education in New South Wales, Mr. Hogue insisted upon the absolute necessity of further progress in the education system to meet the growing needs of the rising generation, and he expressed his very emphatic opinion that in education, perhaps more than in any subject that could be named, when a State undertook the all-important work of public instruction of the young, it must be thorough in the work and up to date in its methods.

The Decoration Society.

An alteration has been decided upon the system of choosing schools to provide the special items at the annual concerts of the Public Schools' Decoration Society. Hitherto schools which had established a reputation for singing were frequently called upon to supply the special numbers, but it has now been arranged that for the future the different schools will come on in rotation. Messrs. W. J. Pavia, A. Clark, and J. Fairweather were appointed a committee to draw up the plan, and having in view the musical ability of the various schools and the general monetary support from each district, they have so arranged the matter that it should give satisfaction to all concerned. The following schools will be required to supply the special items for the next three years:—1908—Lefevre's Peninsula, Hindmarsh, Wellington-road, Marryatville, Unley, Gilles-street, Kilkenny. 1909—Sturt-street, Port Adelaide, North Adelaide, East Adelaide, Parkside, Goodwood, Brompton. 1910—Norwood, Flinders-street, Nailsworth, Thebarton, Rose Park, Observation School, Walkerville, Glanville.

Boards of Advice.

The limitations imposed on school boards of advice have always been a matter for keen regret, especially in progressive country centres, and the result has been that in not a few cases the annual election of the board member goes by default. The same unsatisfactory position is noted in Victoria, and one educationalist a few days ago offered some suggestions as to the betterment of the system. "What we should aim at in this country," he said, "is to build up from our school boards of advice local boards of education, which should be invested with powers of raising money locally for educational purposes, and also with powers of spending it locally. It would be wise to blend the localised and centralised principles by finding part of the funds for education through the Government, and the remainder by local taxation. Each locality would be left with a free hand as to the amount it would raise. If it is content to scrape along on a bare Government grant, well and good. But a more enterprising district, which enjoys a local appreciation of the immense value of the best education, could go as much further as it pleased in raising money to pay better salaries, to attract better teachers, to provide them with better equipment, and to secure more teachers, so as to reduce the size of large classes in the city schools. When boards of education were found to have powers in proportion to the money they could raise for school administration, there would be an enormous development of public interest in their doings. . . . By a restoration of local responsibility we should put more heart into education in every way. The present disposition to leave everything to the department is involving the State in an educational apathy which deprives us of the very cream of education."

Victorian Schools.

The work of renovating Victorian schools is proceeding apace. Last week the Minister of Education (Mr. Sachse) and the Director of Education (Mr. F. Tate, M.A.) attended the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of a new school at Rutherglen, in the north-east. In the course of his remarks the Minister said the school, when completed, would be one of the finest in the southern hemisphere.

The Empire League.

The noteworthy event of the past week, so far as the public schools was concerned, was the annual meeting of the Empire League, of which Miss Rees George is the moving spirit. In South Australia, which was the first State to take up the movement, the league has a membership a long way ahead of that of any of the other States. There are at present over 3,000 enrolled, and it is confidently expected that this total will be exceeded during 1908, as the interest in the movement is increasing from year to year. Arrangements are now being made for the annual demonstration on May 19. In former years this has been held in the Exhibition, but as that building has been secured on lease for the whole of the winter season, the Empire League will hold their demonstration this year in the Adelaide Town Hall, where an attractive programme will be carried out. There is an impression that the league is confined to public schools, but this is not the case, and the authorities will be pleased to welcome to the ranks of membership all those connected with denominational and private schools.

The Teachers' Union.

Now that the year is moving on, arrangements are being put in trim for the mid-winter conference of the Teachers' Union. Members of the executive met last night, and discussed at length the agenda paper, which it is intended shall include many interesting subjects. Some of the country teachers have felt for a long time that too much prominence is given at these conferences to public addresses and that there is not sufficient opportunity for adequate discussion on those subjects which specially interest the teaching profession. On this matter opinion is very much divided, but it is hoped that the executive will this year be able to arrange a programme that will be mutually satisfactory. As a kind of preliminary to the big conference, a meeting of delegates from the different associations will be held on Easter Saturday to deal with questions that could hardly be brought before the general conference, but which are considered to be of vital importance to the districts concerned.