

The Mail, Feb. 15/13

THE CONSERVATORIUM.

"ANOTHER TAXPAYER" DIGS UP FIGURES.

AND SUGGESTS A ROYAL COMMISSION.

To the Editor of "The Mail."
 Sir—In your issue of February 1 "Taxpayer" asked the following questions in connection with the financial administration of the Elder Conservatorium:—
 I. Is it a fact the Conservatorium has been a dead loss from its inception to the amount of £1,000 per year? II. Is it a fact one of the masters had only five pupils during 1912, and he drew a salary of £400 for the year? III. Why is the Director allowed to conduct a society not connected with the Conservatorium, thus drawing a salary that, in common fairness, an outside musician should have a chance to get? IV. Is a retaining fee paid the amateur wind players on the staff, though they have no pupils? V. If any loss, how is it made up? Do the other departments of the University make up the shortage?
 On being approached on the matter the Registrar of the University and the "Mail" representative had the following interesting dialogue. I copy the extract:—
 "The Registrar of the University of Adelaide (Mr. C. R. Hodge), when shown a copy of the above letter by a representative of "The Mail," said:—"I cannot reply to these charges just at present, but I will consider them."
 "Later on Mr. Hodge telephoned for our representative, and proceeded:—"I have given the matter consideration, and if you refer your correspondent to us we will reply to him."
 "Are the charges incorrect?" was asked.

"I will say nothing about it, except that I cannot deal with an anonymous letter like that."

Now, Sir, as another "Taxpayer," I emphatically say that the reply given by the Registrar was lame and unsatisfactory. The point raised by the official is that he cannot take any cognisance of an anonymous letter written to the press. Is that an answer to the searching and pertinent questions asked by "Taxpayer"? Cannot he say whether these charges are shadowy myths or a gross misrepresentation of facts. He, or his executive must know "things as they are," and the taxpayers have a right to know just exactly the true position of affairs. In order that the public may have a fair idea of the financial affairs of the Conservatorium I quote the balance sheet, contained in the University calendar for 1912, and I think, Sir, it calls for more explanation than the authorities see fit to give:—

Credit Side.—Fees received by Elder Conservatorium, £2,063 19/6; concerts, £122 5/6; Mus. Bac. course and public examination in music, £300 6/6; total, £2,486 11/6.

Debit Side.—Salaries (one director at £1,000 per annum, and 13 teachers and lady attendant), £3,361 12/2; concert account, £137 15/; advertising, printing, tuning, gas, telephone, and sundries, £203 0/3; orchestra, £178 10/6; Mus. Bac. course (salaries), £600; printing, &c., £17 9/10; examiners' fees and expenses, £127 11/5; advertising and printing, £60 10/10; sundries and expenses local centres, £112 14/1; total, £4,799 7/7. Deficit on the year, £2,312 16/1.

An examination of this statement will prove interesting. Why does it cost 100 per cent. in excess of fees (as £600 is to £300) to conduct the Mus. Bac. course? What does the item, "Orchestra, £178 10/6" mean? Why does it cost £1,297 12/8 over and above the fees paid by the students to instruct them? "Taxpayer" says one professor drew £400 per annum for a half-dozen pupils. If that is correct, or approximately so, the matter amounts to a grave scandal. Did the teacher of the 'cello get four or five pounds a week salary as a member of the staff? If so, how many pupils did he teach? Is it a fact that two wind players were paid a retaining fee of £50 a year to give instruction in their department? Did they have any pupils? This is all common rumour—it may be true and it may not—but it is the duty of the authorities to effectually settle the matter. The balance sheet above quoted also states that the Government subsidies on endowments amount to £7,191 19/ in addition to over £1,500 outstanding. How much

of this money goes to make up the Conservatorium deficit? Do the comparatively small salary lists of the School of Medicine, £3,034 12/3, and the School of Law, £1,050, suffer by the drain made on resources by the Conservatorium? In conclusion, are magnificent public benefactions and Government subsidies to be frittered away by expensive and overpaid staffs? Would any private enterprise entertain the idea of employing a staff that not only absorbed the takings of the firm but annually made inroads on the capital to the tune of £2,312 16/1? We now know that there is a re-shuffling of the cards, and teachers are being placed on commission basis with the right of private practice. Will somebody enlighten the public why that was necessary, or will silence force the hand of public opinion to demand a royal commission to enquire into the recent administration of the Conservatorium?—I am, &c.

ANOTHER TAXPAYER.

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R. BARR SMITH'S MUNIFICENCE.

THE QUESTION OF EXPENSE.

PROMINENT PUBLIC MEN.

REPLY TO DOUBTING THOMASES.

"I think," said Mr. Thomas Ryan, who, when M.P. in 1909, moved a motion for University extension, which, at the request of Mr. Peake, was defeated, but on the return of the Labour Party of 1910 succeeded in carrying a resolution for the appointment of a royal commission to enquire into and report upon the University of Adelaide and higher education, which he, as chairman, visited every University in the Commonwealth, "that Mr. Barr Smith's offer and the request accompanying it will mean the expenditure of at least £60,000 to £80,000."

"Can you tell us why?"
 "Mr. Barr Smith made it on the condition that the requests of the University be acceded to. These requests made pub-

lic a few days ago mean the spending of £60,000 to £70,000, to which we are to add another £10,000 in going cash."

"It is doubted in some quarters whether the Government is justified in accepting Mr. Barr Smith's offer on the ground of expense."

"I think the advantage of University expenditure is obvious. I think the time has arrived when it is not a matter of how much we can afford to spend, but how much we can afford to do without. As I pointed out when asking for a special vote for the University in 1909, the artisans and the men who make our clothes, the men who carry us on our railways, are asking for University help, not to enable them to be transferred from the conditions of life in which they find themselves, but rather that they may be helped to overcome the troubles they are faced with. We quite understand that the University has only up to the present been beneficial to a few, and 'The Mail' is to be commended for drawing attention to this aspect; but we are hoping, as I have always hoped, that the University would, from within, help those who are struggling from without, to make it a University of South Australia situated in Adelaide rather than a University for Adelaide situated in South Australia. Professor David, a big University man of Australia, in giving evidence, laid down as an axiom that a scheme of University government, which I proclaimed in my electioneering campaign of 1906 was essential. Part of that scheme has been carried out, by which five members of Parliament are elected to a seat on the University government, but no provision has yet been made to complete the scheme, which provides for representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Manufactures, the Hospital Board, and the Trades and Labour Council. This, I am sure, will be done before long, as no system can be made complete until there are brought to the University Council a versatility of interest."

"So you approve of Mr. Barr Smith's donation?"

"As a member of the University Council I know something about it, but that, at present, is not publishable. Speaking for myself, I am of opinion that the gift of a site like Torrens Park would have been a hundredfold more valuable than the donation which will anchor the University where it is. However, now that it is, those of us that feel it is a mistake will be the first to realise the splendid spirit of generosity on the part of Mr. Barr Smith, and will do all we possibly can to encourage the people of South Australia to the last shilling. There are three essentials to the development of a country—primary, technical, and university education—and on these three neither donor nor Government can spend too much."

Mr. Lewis Cohen preferred to reserve his opinion, as he had not studied the matter. "However," he said, "it is a most munificent gift. The University is regarded as one of the prestige institutions of this State, and this donation, supported by a promise from the Government, must necessarily extend the influence of this institution."

"We have not the right," said Mr. Smeaton, M.P., "to look a gift horse in the mouth. Mr. Barr Smith never gives a gift without thought, which means more than the average man thinks. Those who talk about not accepting the gift are not thinking of the future of the city. People do not seem to realise that Adelaide is only in its infancy, and that the University so planted may not be in the centre of the city one hundred years hence. And we must think of one hundred years hence. People judge Adelaide by its park lands, whereas in the future those lands will only be parks in Adelaide."

"Then you think the Government is justified in accepting the offer?"

"I think they are justified in accepting it."

"Would you sooner see the University out of Adelaide?"

"Yes, I would like to see it moved out to Torrens Park, because a time comes when the extension of a city requires certain land to be taken advantage of. As a case in point, I might mention that the old University of Glasgow was in the heart of the city for some hundreds of years, but the time came when it had to be moved out several miles, as the site was wanted as a central station. So you see we have examples of older cities to save us from making mistakes."

"And what is your opinion of the people who believe that the £10,000 could be spent to better advantage?"

"I don't think that people have a right to express such an opinion. Such an institution has its special claims. It is folly to make a comparison—a piece of impertinence on the part of any one to suggest that the offer be not accepted."