

Advertiser 28 JUL 1924

Register 29 JUL 1924

bold.

DUNTROON MILITARY COLLEGE.

TRANSFER OF CONTROL RUMORED.

It is proposed, according to a rumor, to place the military college at Duntroon under military control.

Sydney, July 27.

Unconfirmed rumors are to the effect that the Duntroon Military College may shortly be attached to the University and controlled by that institution. Such a proposal would mean the establishment of a country University college. If Sydney University declines the offer of the Federal Government to add Duntroon College work to its curriculum, it was stated that it was highly probable that the Melbourne University would do so. The authorities will give no information on the subject.

MARSUPIAL BIRTH.

To the Editor.

Sir—Popular interest being again awake in the old question of the birth of the kangaroo, on which it has been written that—"In spite of Owen, there's still a doubt whether it's born inside or out." I think I might change the name of the eminent geologist of the preceding generation for that of our own no less eminent Professor Wood Jones, because in my case the doubt remains, though the latter has endorsed the opinion of Sir Richard. Therefore I feel impelled to give the result of my own observation and enquiries. This determination to obey required some thought, as I am aware of the great reputation of Professor Wood Jones, who is endowed with remarkable natural powers of observation, and who has a strong love for his work, besides being fitted by long training to estimate the probable if not inevitable course of nature in the reproduction of animal life in any of its forms. At once let me say, then, that while ready to acknowledge with deep respect the luminous ability of the professor, who stands at the very apex of his division, and anxious to recognise his great services in the realm of natural history, I am still on the side of the bushmen.

Personally I have examined hundreds of kangaroos at Yalata, and I have never seen a trace of the young elsewhere than in the pouch. I have never known a case, nor has any one whom I have questioned, in which the young was not so firmly fixed to the teat that, no matter how recently born, it could not be separated therefrom without injury. One man with black assistants kangarooing on Yalata killed 30,000 in 12 months, and he told me he had never found a sign of young in the mother. Scores of such men have all held the opposite opinion to that of science. These men often live on the flesh of the animal, and are always on the look-out for points that bear upon the controversy.

When I have seen a young one so very small—not larger than a grain of maize, with no vestige of legs, not to mention claws, glued to the nipple by its mouth, I naturally doubt the statement that "the little animal has been seen to scramble of its own volition from the root of the mother's tail towards the pouch." Further, a young doe's pouch is so tight that it would be impossible for her to place the young where it is found.

Being keenly interested, I have for many years taken every opportunity of satisfying myself, and have seen or heard nothing to alter my belief that the young is formed on the teat, that it has never been in any other position, and that it develops on the teat from a fluid state.

This belief awaits correction by absolute proof of a contrary fact. Even if I could permit myself to be persuaded by Professor Wood Jones against my will, in my subconscious mind I should be of my old opinion still. Either the professor is right or he is wrong, and as a scientific man he will undoubtedly establish the truth, whatever it be. At present I think he is wrong, and I want to be convinced one way or the other. I am, Sir, &c.,

GEORGE W. MURRAY.

Sir—I went to Professor Wood Jones's lecture at the medical school of the University because an eager friend took me there. I became very interested, and without having to think too much I easily understood all his facts. Both lecture and drawings were exceedingly good and clear,

and there were beautiful specimens on the table. I was amazed at the close of the lecture that the facts the professor disclosed were doubted. I think the work of a university professor who had been chosen to fill a post which has for its object the launching of young men to do good work in the medical world for the benefit of their fellow men should be beyond doubt or question. Since the lecture I have been informed that the professor had been highly trained in zoology, physiology, and anatomy in the finest school in England, and that his reputation is world wide. And it stands to reason that a man with such a reputation would think twice before he thought of announcing any fact that was not strictly true. I am, Sir, &c.,

"A POINT OF VIEW."

Sir—I would commend to all "bushmen" whose minds are not hopelessly closed against reason on the subject of marsupial birth, study of Professor Wood Jones's manual on Australian mammals, of that part of it devoted to this vexed question. Even should an array of the clearest anatomical and biological facts fail to convince them of the hopeless folly of the "born-on-the-teat" theory, the book will at least offer them instruction regarding certain striking characteristics of marsupial structure which have palpably escaped their notice, and may suggest to them that Professor Wood Jones does, after all, know something about kangaroos. As I understand it, the professor is quite ready to acknowledge that he has never seen a marsupial born. In this respect, he is in very much the same position of disadvantage as a chemist who has never seen hydrogen, or an astronomer who has not weighed the moon in his laboratory balance. The evidence which he advances is mainly circumstantial, but before it is rejected on that ground alone it should be remembered that circumstantial evidence, if strong enough, is fully sufficient to hang

a man under the laws of England. The "bushmen" who deny the possibility of the birth of the kangaroo in the ordinary way of Nature, and its subsequent transfer to the pouch, declare that this process is incredible; but they oppose to scientific certainty a theory infinitely more opposed to reason and to the elements of biology. It is unarguable that the germ of life which is the origin of the foetus comes into being as a result of the fusion of the essence of male and female, and this must take place in the uterus. There is no connection, direct or indirect, between the uterus and the teat, and the transfer of these living cells, even in the earliest stage of their development, from the place of conception to the pouch, would be utterly impossible internally. And, unless such an internal transfer took place, the living organism could not be exuded from the lacteal ducts in the extraordinary manner imagined by the inept observer, and there could be no birth "on the teat." Does it not appear, in the light of these indisputable facts, that the bushmen biologists are extravagantly mistaken? They say that they have killed thousands of kangaroos, and have dissected them to boot, and none has ever found an unborn foetus—except in the pouch. This proves rather less than nothing. Their obvious ignorance of anatomy makes it extremely doubtful whether they could locate or identify the several parts of the curious reproductive system of the kangaroo, and even more improbable that, if they found it, they could recognise the foetus at an even earlier stage of its development than that at which they are wont to describe it as "a minute and formless lump attached to the teat." Many of them have probably handled specimens which to a trained observer would have been finally and utterly convincing, but, if this be so, they have been as blind as they are now certain that they have seen more than the eye of the scientist.

I am, Sir, &c., Q. E. D.

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The late Mr. Laurance Birks, B.Sc., who died at Wellington on Friday, July 24, was a son of Mrs. W. R. Birks, of Norwood, and a brother of the late Dr. Melville Birks, formerly of Broken Hill. He graduated in science at the Adelaide University in 1894. Mr. Birks had been in indifferent health for some time, and before he left New Zealand a few months



THE LATE MR. LAURANCE BIRKS.

ago to attend the World-power Conference in London his medical adviser was not altogether satisfied with his condition. Support was given to this unfavourable medical opinion by Adelaide doctors, and Mr. Birks was reluctantly compelled to return home to New Zealand. A paper prepared by him was subsequently read at the London conference. The late Mr. Birks married a daughter of the Hon. C. M. Luke, of Wellington, a brother of Sir John Luke, who was one of the New Zealand Parliamentary party which reached Adelaide yesterday.

News 29 JUL 1924

Dr. C. G. Wells was reappointed Officer of Health to the Local Board of Health for the district of Upper Wakefield at a meeting of the Central Board of Health yesterday.

The Advertiser

ADELAIDE: WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 1924.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

In making itself the guardian of the physical welfare of the people of the Commonwealth, the Federal Department of Public Health has taken as its motto "Prevention." No longer is the science of medicine limited to the extirpation of disease; it extends to the investigation and elimination of its causes. To this end an immense amount of work has been achieved in the States through their public health departments and universities; but in the co-ordination of their efforts, especially in research work, so much has yet to be done that it is impossible not to sympathise with the demand for the re-organisation of the health systems of all the States on a coherent and uniform plan. The penalty of overlapping—or what is much the same thing, the fear of it—between the State and Federal services has led to much wasted effort and neglect of profitable fields of action, and it is not difficult to ascribe largely to this cause the prevalence of diseases said to be answerable for Australians dying, on the average, fifteen years earlier than they need do, and for an estimated yearly loss to the Commonwealth of not less than £50,000,000.

How to improve the health service of Australia is a question on which, happily, we are not without illumination. It is to be found in a report of a sub-committee, consisting of Dr. F. S. Hone and Dr. H. S. Newland, appointed by the Federal committee on the relationship of the general practitioner to preventive medicine. There are some who see the only real remedy in the enlargement of the powers of the Federal department, and whether or not its Ministerial head fully shares this view, he is admittedly not satisfied with the powers he now wields. From being the "Cinderella" of the Federal Departments, Mr. Pratten expressed a hope this week of seeing the Health department raised to the status of recognised chief of all, as it is certainly most important of all, concerned as it is with questions of life and death. If what is sought were a mere enlargement of the powers of the Federal body, regardless of any other change, it is difficult to see how matters would be greatly improved. Rather the present danger of overlapping and intrusion into fields already occupied would be aggravated at the cost of efficiency, to say nothing of the pockets of the taxpayers. Far better than incur such a risk would it be for the States to retire in favor of the Commonwealth from the whole field of health administration; but short of so extreme a step as the complete Commonwealth control of public health administration, which, as Drs. Hone and Newland point out, would involve a "profound change in the Constitution," it is possible under the scheme they advocate to remedy all the defects in the existing system—if a system it may be called—and especially to prevent the overlapping, which they rightly regard as "a serious obstacle to progress." These defects, which are set out categorically, comprise, in addition to lack of uniformity between the States, the failure officially to utilise in the prevention of disease the ordinary medical practitioner, providing him with facilities for acquiring public health knowledge, particularly with regard to possible infectious conditions; the absence of hygienic control in the industrial field, and the waste attending Federal expenditure on maternity bonuses, subsidies to venereal campaigns, and pensions for sufferers from tuberculosis and other ailments. What is proposed by the authors of the scheme is a series of links connecting by an unbroken chain the "medical unit" (the general practitioner) with the Director-General of Health for the Commonwealth. Above the medical unit would be the district health officer, appointed as now by the municipal, district, or shire council, to whom he would notify births and deaths, infectious diseases, and alcohol

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MARSUPIAL BIRTH.

To the Editor.

Sir—Although unable to attend the lecture delivered by Professor Wood Jones on the subject of the birth of the marsupial, I read the account of it in last Friday's Register. It may appear presumptuous on the layman's part to disagree with the opinion of so distinguished an authority, but, as one who has spent many years in the bush, saw countless kangaroos and opossums killed, skinned, and dissected, and found hundreds of joeys in their pouches, I had to smile when I read where certain persons claim to have seen the young kangaroo after birth scrambling from the root of the tail towards the pouch. And how the thousands of bushmen who have had experience with the undeveloped midget, with lips grown to the teat, must smile when told that this most helpless of all living creatures could find its way by an abnormal sense of smell and enter a pouch, which at this stage is practically airtight, and can only be opened by force. My opinion is that the young grow on the teat, for until the milk period the lips and teat are connected, and the joey by this means receives its sustenance from the blood of the mother as in the cases of other unborn animals. That being so, the birth of the marsupial dates from the separation of lips and teat. Only once in my experience did I find a doe kangaroo with twins, and they were about the size of a French bean. But they had no separate existence from the mother, as their lips were connected with the teats. Another reason that has materially helped me in disagreeing with the professor's opinion is that I never found an unborn in the interior of a marsupial, neither have I met any one who has. I am, Sir, &c., "D.M.M."

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A BRILLIANT SCHOLAR.

ENGAGED IN RESEARCH.

Dr. Cecil E. Tilley, who had a brilliant scholastic career in Australia and England, returned to his native land by the R.M.S. Orsova on Sunday, and is staying with his parents at Salisbury-street, North Unley. He left for England in 1919, and was engaged in research work, principally in geology, and took home with him from Eyre Peninsula material for a thesis on which he was awarded his degree of doctor of philosophy at Cambridge. For two years he was in the Lower Highlands of Scotland studying metamorphic rocks. After a holiday in Australia Dr. Tilley intends to return to England at the end of the year, when he expects to receive an appointment on the staff of the geological department at Cambridge University. Cambridge, he said, was the home of study in physics, and Sir Ernest Rutherford, the famous New Zealander, whose work in connection with the development of the atomic theory had been heard of by most people, was in charge of the Cavendish laboratory there. The idea of harnessing the atom for industrial purposes was being modified, but Sir Ernest Rutherford was continuing his investigations into the wonderful possibilities connected with the atomic theory. Dr. Tilley expressed interest in the forthcoming Science Congress in Adelaide, and said he was looking forward to meeting Professor Sir Edgeworth David, under whom he studied in Sydney.