

ADELAIDE:  
SATURDAY, JULY 17, 1926.

## ON THE SURFACE.

The Rev. Principal Kiek, writing in *The Christian World* for May, says, in effect, that Australians are less intellectual than the people of the Old Country, and lack the qualities produced by religious tradition. His article having been reprinted in *The Register*, a correspondent has risen in wrath to defend Australia against criticism which he assumes to have been inspired by the personal nature of Mr. Kiek's discovery that "profound and massive sermons" are appreciated only by the few. The implication that Mr. Kiek is an unpopular preacher seeking to excuse himself by condemning the taste of his congregations, is not justified by the article which has provoked the caustic comment of our correspondent. Mr. Kiek clearly writes in the plural when he says that "English preachers rarely succeed in making conquests in Australian pulpits," and that "some of the ablest English preachers fail to secure in Australia the attention and the following which in the Old Country they easily gain and amply deserve." It may be true, however, as one correspondent suggests, that this is not a very accurate measure of the intellectual level of a nation; and it is certainly hurtful for the people of Australia to be told, however politely, that they have fallen below the mental and moral level of the British stock. As a comparative study, Mr. Kiek's article is of dubious value; but, as a statement of the defects which the generality of Australians share with the rest of civilized society, it is unquestionably and painfully true. The most striking form of statistical statement is that which takes the form of a geometrical figure showing relative values in black and white. Let us imagine a large circle representing Australia's total expenditure on luxuries, and suppose it all black except that part whitened to show the outlay on works of art, for example. The figure would have very much the appearance of an ebon cheese, with only one miserably economical slice removed. And, if it were possible to present, in this graphic way, a comparative statement of the way in which the average Australian divides his leisure time between the indulgence of his senses and the exercise of his intellect, it might not appear as though the cheese had been cut at all.

Mr. Kiek is guilty of no more than a little pardonable exaggeration, when he says that he knows "multitudes of prosperous homes in which it is impossible to find a decent book." The percentage of people who derive any satisfaction from good reading, is deplorably small. Any one who has attempted, "in mixed company," to discuss a literary topic derived from a higher source than the trivialities of modern fiction, will share something of the feelings of the preacher who adorns his discourse with classical allusions, and who is advised by the blank faces of his congregation that his happiest thoughts would have been equally well understood if he had framed them in the original Greek. Modern education is designed to induce its victims to use their brains, not merely in the pursuit of bread and butter, but for the sheer pleasure of mental exercise. Why is it that our increasingly complex and expensive scholastic machinery fails to produce so few real thinkers? It is doubtful whether there is much wrong with education itself, or with the raw material submitted to its useful processes. The twentieth century

child is naturally intelligent enough; probably more intelligent indeed, than the hapless youngsters of an historical yesterday, who, from the elementary classes conducted at the knees of their mothers, passed to establishments where they were finished off across the knees of flagellant school masters. Although in the long age of pedagogic barbarism the raw material of youth was certainly no better than it is to-day, and although the scholastic machinery was admittedly much worse, the results, even of 18th century education, were by no means despicable when compared with those produced by the scientific system from which recent generations have hoped so much and derived so little. In education, we are told, is the promise of the future. This may be so; but sceptics are beginning to think that the future is still very distant.

Clearly, there are limits to education if an improved system can do no better than this with improved material; and all the devices of scholastic science are insufficient to make an appreciable percentage of children think, and if our schools consequently fail to produce any considerable number of thinking citizens. Education does its best, and possibly in the best conceivable way. It may be driving back the enormous forces of indolence and ignorance against which it is arrayed; but its progress is depressingly slow. Although the general level of learning is unquestionably higher than it used to be, pessimism must sometimes wonder whether the general level of intelligence is not, in some respects, rather lower. A hundred years ago, people had time to think, if they would; to-day, the majority have no leisure for anything which is not at once fashionable and entertaining. Society, through all its grades and castes, lives on the surface of things. Superficiality, therefore, is good form, and the "high-brow" a social outcast. Few men dare nowadays to advance theology as a topic of conversation in opposition to cricket or horse-racing, or to suggest that a university extension lecture might be better worth attending than a picture show. A man cannot invite his friends to think about anything that might give them a headache, because he would be adjudged guilty of outraging the conventions. Fashion is a hard mistress in a woman's wardrobe, but a more shocking tyrant still in a man's mind. Mental exertion is unfashionable out of school; and when children are emancipated, therefore, they cease to think, and lose both the habit and the capacity. They emerge into a world in which, in their innocence, they rejoice to find that nothing matters except cricket, or, in its proper season, football; into which they have been sent, they gather, to "have a good time." They hear much of their rights, and little of their responsibilities. They believe, at first, that the scheme of things is one great fabric of pleasant excitement and delicious ease. It is inevitable that no one should remain under this comfortable delusion for long. At the first serious check, the youth who has not already lost the power of thinking may revise his philosophy of life, and make a fresh start with better prospects of attaining to something like content; but the majority, when they find pleasure eludes them, or experience the premonitory pains of satiety, imagine that they have not pursued with sufficient energy and singleness of purpose the little things which they have grossly mistaken for the business of life. And so at last they come to a pass in which their incapacity for thought is cherished as affording an insurance against worry.

Dr. and Mrs. L. O. Betts and Miss B. Betts were passengers by the *Baradine* on Saturday for London.

REG-17-726

## PASTORAL COMMISSION.

### Professor Osborn's Evidence.

According to Professor T. G. B. Osborn of the Adelaide University, five-sixths of South Australia can be termed arid country, and some of it desert. The latter, however, is not unproductive of plant life, he says, but it requires careful management.

Members of the Pastoral Commission met Professor Osborn at the Darling Building, the University, on Friday morning, when the professor of botany gave an interesting illustrated chat on plant life in the arid country of the State. There were present Messrs. T. E. Day (Chairman), J. O'Connor, M.P., A. G. Rymill, F. W. Lundie, and the assistant secretary (Mr. C. F. Pavy).

Professor Osborn, at the outset, said that he spoke simply as a botanist. He was not professing to be an expert on the pastoral industry, nor did he wish the commission to think that he would get himself up to teach the sheep man his business. He was a student of plant life, and it had appeared to him very early in his time in South Australia that there was one urgent problem to study, and that was the one of vegetation in the arid parts of the State. An arid part was one that had 10 inches of rain or less annually. That being the definition, there was not less than 317,600 square miles of arid land in South Australia out of a total of 380,000 square miles, or, in other words, five-sixths had under a 10-inch rainfall. They also had included in South Australia the only part of the Commonwealth which had under five inches of rain a year. The arid problem was an Australian one, because more than one-third of it was what could be termed arid. It was no good gainsaying the fact that country receiving under five inches a year should be called desert. That did not mean, however, that no plant life grew there, but in the conditions under which it did exist it required special treatment.

#### Plant Communities.

The professor went on to mention certain features of plant life which impressed him as a botanist. He said that plants naturally grew together in communities. The type of community depended upon a number of conditions. It was just like human society. When human society existed on a desert island, for instance, conditions were very simple and primitive, but as it developed so they would have more complex social machinery. The same principle might be applied to plants. In any district plants tended to build up a society, which contained a level of complexity—a highly developed vegetation, just according to a particular set of conditions. The professor then showed a series of lantern slides showing the influence of rainfall upon flora within the arid and almost arid regions. He explained by taking a line running north from the Murray basin in toward Lake Frome, and the district over which he had worked with some amount of detail how the diminishing annual rainfall became marked. In the southern part winter rainfall was more important, but further north it was less, and they got more summer rains. This had a pronounced effect upon the kind of plant life that was produced. As one went further north the density of mallee or eucalypts disappeared, except along the water courses. Climatic conditions were too dry for dense tree growth, but there were various scrub trees, such as fine mulgas, and black oak. Going still further north they found that except for occasional bushes the plants which came in as under shrubs were the important ground covering. In between saltbush the ground was bare. The vegetation changed markedly when one got away from the country within a 5 in. rainfall.

#### Sturdy Saltbush.

The professor said that a great feature of our pastoral rain was that so much of it fell in little amounts. From investigations made he had found that falls below 25 points were three times more numerous than heavier falls. That being so the rain was practically of no use to the majority of plants. They had done some interesting work by which they had been able to demonstrate that the saltbush and the blue bushes to a lesser extent among the plants can use these ineffective falls by taking in the water, not through their roots, but through their leaves. That was why in the arid parts of Australia they had an amazingly rich natural vegetation. The rainfall in our arid country was liable to great variation, but any desert would become a garden full of bloom if it had sufficient water. Grass and herbs were of no value as permanent ground coverings, nor could they ever be under the climatic conditions that obtained in our arid parts.

#### The Valuable Mulga.

There were tree types of plant life there—trees, herbs, and shrubs. The mulga was one of three or four important trees in the northern areas. It was a most valuable tree for holding soil, and had an undoubted fodder value, and that was a vital thing so far as the mulga was con-

cerned. He had made it his business in all his travels to look for young mulgas, but had never seen any. He had been told by one man, who should know, that the mulga never seeded.

The Chairman—I had a ninteresting experience with mulgas out in the Musgrave Ranges. I passed through a belt of country that had been burnt, and young mulgas were everywhere. Of course, there were no rabbits.

Professor Osborn said that it was perfectly clear that the mulga did seed, at seasons, but it had never had a chance to develop its seedlings since rabbits or sheep had gone into the country. He viewed the future of the mulga with great concern, because he thought it was ultimately doomed. Its total disappearance would not only spoil shelter belts, but it would also have an effect upon the stabilization of the soil. At the moment he did not see how they were going to prevent its destruction.

#### Permanent Vegetation Type.

Professor Osborn exhibited a slide showing one really important permanent vegetation type—the salt and blue bush. There were several kinds of bluebush. The white old man bluebush, which favoured the limestone country, was not a good fodder plant; but the bluebush which grew in the hard parts of the north was much better feed. Under natural conditions Australia built up a series of plant communities in which salt and blue bush were important ground coverings. Their existence had been very precarious. They always had insufficient rainfall, but were subjected to great extremes of climate. Notwithstanding that they held on, their society was relatively complex, and into it there had come certain things—grazing animals and rabbits. The incidence was just like the murderous incidence of taxation upon a State society. You could tax a thing out of existence, and you could graze a thing out of existence. Another slide of interest indicated good country on one side of a fence, and on the other side country liable to drift on account of unavoidable over-stocking, through sheep grazing down the wind. The growth of Bindyi was a result of extreme taxation of the soil. Where the saltbush was eaten out the Bindyi took its place, but it had nothing like the same feeding value. If natural flora was to be conserved it should be given time to rest and make new growth. The professor described his activities at the Koonamore vegetation reserve.

#### "Pruning" the Saltbush.

The Chairman—North-west of Port Augusta they believe in what they call the pruning of the saltbush; that is, stocking it, allowing it to be eaten down, and subsequently, after a spell of a year, it becomes a more nutritious plant. Is there anything in that policy?—Professor Osborn—I should think it would be possible from a pastoral point of view. The new growth would not be so stout, certainly. The essential thing is to adequately spell it after it has been eaten down.

The problem is how long should it be spelled before it could be stocked?—I think a great deal of the country could go on under conservative management. I have been told of a small holding that has been stocked for 25 years continuously, and the bush is in perfectly good heart.

Mr. Rymill—Do you not consider that there would be a greater likelihood of a small holding being eaten out than a large one?—If a man with a small holding desires to make a big profit out of a proportion to his carrying capacity, yes; but if he is content with a small holding, I do not think it necessarily should be so. The question of large or small holdings is a matter of policy, and not one for a botanist to decide.

The commission adjourned.

ADV. 19.4.26

## INTER-UNIVERSITY SPORTING FIXTURES.

After many alterations, the following fixtures for inter-university sport this year have been approved by the Australian University Sports Council:—Australian football, August 18, at Adelaide; Rugby Union, August 25, at Sydney; lacrosse, August 16, at Adelaide; rifle shooting, August 26 and 27, at Sydney; baseball, August 18 and 19, at Sydney; women's hockey beginning August 23, at Melbourne; women's basketball, August 26 and 27, at Adelaide. Men's hockey and cricket fixtures have yet to be decided. The proposal that the men's hockey carnival, to be held in Brisbane, should begin on August 31 is not likely to be approved by Melbourne, whose team would not be able to get back in time for the opening of the third term lectures. Melbourne propose August 23. The following sports have been decided for next year:—Athletics, May 25, at Melbourne; tennis, May 23, at Sydney; rowing, June 4, at Sydney. The council also sanctioned the following combined university matches:—Lacrosse versus South Australia, football versus South Australia, dates unfixed; rifle shooting versus New South Wales, August 28; women's hockey versus Victoria, during August. An endeavor is also being made to arrange a baseball match against New South Wales.

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