

RESEARCH INTO PLANT DISEASES. Additional work aimed at the control of plant diseases of Empire-wide importance is about to be initiated at the Rothamstead Experiment Station, England. The diseases studied will be those of a virus nature, and to that end it is proposed to appoint three investigators, one of whom will be a plant physiologist, another a cytologist, and the third an entomologist. The work has been rendered possible by a grant in aid from the Empire Marketing Board. Sir John Russell, the director of the station concerned, and who was recently in Australia, has thought that Australian investigators might desire to apply for the positions.

The Register.

ADELAIDE: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1928.

THE EXAMINATION SYSTEM.

A correspondent of *The Register*, in an indignant letter, recently drew attention to what he termed, with an excusable emphasis of alliteration, the "futile fetish" of examinations. Possibly because they were too busy preparing papers, no educationists rushed to the defence. In South Australia, the institution of competitive examinations is not a cause of controversy. School teachers occasionally lament the necessity for cramming, and then proceed to study the examination papers more intently. Parents grumble about excessive homework, and then select schools in which the preparation for examinations is exceptionally vigorous and thorough. There is a vague idea abroad in the land that a leaving certificate may not invariably prove the possession of a liberal education, or even guarantee success in the world of affairs; of what is to take its place, neither teachers nor parents appear to have even a vague idea. Meanwhile, it is rapidly being assumed that an age of intense competition is approaching, and that the only way in which children can be equipped to meet it is by fitting them out with a great many questions and answers, much as the children of savage parents undergo initiation. In the process, a fair number of them, gifted with good verbal memories and even temperaments, enjoy the stimulating effects of rivalry. A smaller number of gifted but nervous children suffer acutely; and the great and indifferent majority, perceiving that the sweets of victory are not for them, go through school life with an underlying persuasion that education concerns them not at all. The importance attached to certificates is perceptibly greater every year, and Australia is rapidly approaching within distance of the position of Germany, where not only professions, and business houses, but tradesmen demand high certificates of educational proficiency before providing employment.

In England, where educationists are more outspoken, hard things have been said recently about modern education. Dr. Cyril Norwood, head master of Harrow, roundly declared before the British Association, that the system of examinations was "indefensible." There were schools, he said, where boys did not read authors; they only did examination papers. They did not read history; they only memorized answers about names. Literature presented itself as scraps from "Ivanhoe," Genesis, "Henry VIII," and articles about the causes of rainfall. No one who is familiar with education in South Australia will deny that Dr. Norwood's satire might be applied, without undue injustice, to many schools ranking high in the examination lists. If classes do not actually confine their studies to examination papers, they spend most of the time in certain lessons taking down dictated notes, to be memorized and reproduced to represent the fruits of knowledge. The same process leaves its mark in the

higher education, with the result that every year there emerge numbers of arts graduates quite unfit for any work but teaching others on the same principle. The system is not so much a new one, as a return to those venerable principles which, in the guise of "Magnall's List of Questions and Answers," once dominated female education. The ability to memorize words is a valuable gift; but perhaps it is going a little too far to assume that it constitutes true education.

As examinations are conducted in Australia, they are disliked by most teachers, deprecated by a great many parents, and hated and feared by the majority of children. The secondary school, whatever may be its educational beliefs, must adapt its curriculum to meet the demands of the examiners; and real education frequently suffers. To denounce the examining authorities, is beside the point. The true explanation is to be found in the economic stress which causes education to be sought less for the sake of developing the mind and abilities than as a means for earning a livelihood, and the absence of any determined attempt to reconcile the two motives. Dr. Norwood has suggested that every school which has been properly inspected and reported as efficient should issue its own certificate that "A or B has attended for so many years and reached a satisfactory level of performance," and that such certificates should be taken at their face value by employers. This suggestion takes for granted a far higher status than can be claimed by many Australian schools. What professional bodies would take it for granted that so many years' satisfactory work at a specified school meant that the applicant for admission to a learned calling possessed a good general education? One remedy which seems to be neglected is an all round improvement in that period of school life which does, to a great extent, belong to the school and not the examiner—the preparatory and lower forms. It is possible that really good work in developing the mind and personality at this stage would make the later examinations an easy task, to be taken in the course of a liberal education, and not to its exclusion. As it is, there is reason to fear that these forms suffer most from the imperfections of present-day teaching. The Froebel and Montessori propaganda has resulted in better teaching of the infant classes; and, under the stress of examinations, expensively qualified teachers are devoted to the higher classes, which have to be prepared for the leaving certificate. In the intermediate classes, instruction is too often left to the inexperienced and second-rate teacher, who, with the best will in the world, wastes his excellent opportunities, and muddles and wearies young pupils for the rest of their school life. Until children come to the higher classes with a carefully developed interest and curiosity, rather than with a dull determination to memorize facts about which they care little, the possession of a leaving certificate will continue to represent, as a claim to intellectual and practical ability, rather less than nothing.

Reg. 27-11-28

The Examination System.

Sir—Your Monday leader moves me to add that it is not only in "leaving certificate" affairs that such honorific parchments represent, as *The Register* felicitously phrases it, "a claim to intellectual or practical ability, rather less than nothing." Academic honours in music, for instance, do not predicate that the possessor can play or sing otherwise than in a conventionally correct and aridly unsatisfying manner. Long suffering audiences, in South Australia as elsewhere, know what a "futile fetish" such things are. Will the day ever dawn when universities will cease awarding degrees and diplomas to instrumentalists who cannot play (and vocalists who are unable to sing), save with a deadly mechanical accuracy?—I am, Sir, &c.,

"GAMBA."

Examination Ordeal

"Hard to Say," Kensington:—I read with much interest in "The News" of Saturday the views of Prof. Kerr Grant in regard to examinations. In almost all respects I agree with him. However, I wonder if the professor will in turn agree with me in turning round one of his lecture axioms, "What is gained in speed is lost in power." I should also like to remind him that for a machine to work reversibly there should never be an appreciable departure from equilibrium. But how many students work under conditions approaching equilibrium?

Adv. 27-11-28

RHODES SCHOLARSHIPS.

NEW REGULATIONS PROPOSED.

DO NOT AFFECT AUSTRALIA.

Melbourne, November 26. The Rhodes trustees announce that they are promoting, in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, a Bill enlarging the powers conferred upon them under the will of Cecil Rhodes. The reason for the Bill is that owing to changes of circumstances and in methods of education which have occurred since the testator's death, there is a risk of the main purpose of the will being frustrated, unless the powers of the trustees to determine the administration, tenure, and distribution of the scholarships as they may from time to time consider necessary are enlarged. The principal purpose of the Bill is to enable them to carry through a re-organisation of the method of choosing Rhodes scholars in the United States, so that four scholars will be chosen annually from eight districts of six States each, instead of one scholar being chosen every two years out of three from 48 States. The Bill does not alter the allocation of scholarships to the different States, provinces, or schools in Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Rhodesia, or Newfoundland. It gives the trustees power to determine the tenure of the scholarships in any way they may think necessary, in order to give effect to the testator's purposes, and it authorises them to create a capital reserve fund behind the scholarship system.

Adv. 28-11-28

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

The intermediate, leaving, and leaving honors examinations, which also include commercial subjects, began in the Exhibition Building yesterday morning, and will continue until December 10. The number of students entered for the examinations exceeds that of last year by several hundreds, and at 9.30 yesterday between six and seven hundred scholars from the different secondary and high schools took their places at the desks. The subject was physics. The centre and western annexes were occupied by the intermediate students, and those sitting for leaving and leaving honors (considerably less in numbers) were in the eastern annexe. Although the ages ranged from 13 to 17 years, many looked younger, and only a small percentage of the number was girls. A heavy silence, peculiar to such occasions, reigned, and everyone appeared to be intelligently occupied. The bright and airy nature of the building makes it eminently suitable for the purpose, and although the eastern side was somewhat warm, and a number of the boys had removed their coats, a current of air was constantly passing through. The large doors in the western wall were thrown open, and a canvas screen placed in front so that there should be no distractions from without to disturb the workers. The subjects for the examinations include physics, geography, mathematics, history, English literature, bookkeeping, arithmetic, French, mathematics II., Latin, chemistry, Greek, geology, agricultural science, typewriting, shorthand, botany, economic history, German, and modern and ancient history.

The Advertiser

ADELAIDE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1928.

A PLEA FOR THE LEAGUE AND ITS WORK.

The excellent practice of the South Australian branch of the League of Nations Union in holding periodical luncheon hour meetings at which matters cognate to the League's work are discussed has been productive of many admirable addresses, but of none surpassing in interest that delivered yesterday by Professor Hicks. His subject was "Our Responsibility," meaning the responsibility not of the union alone, nor of the League, nor of any country in particular, but of mankind, as represented not so much by those in authority as by that best-known and most talked-of person, "the man in the street." For, as the professor was anxious to emphasise, the duty of saving mankind from a recurrence in an aggravated form of the horrors of the Great War rests primarily with public opinion. And even in the most righteous cause popular enthusiasm is not easily kept at fever heat. Enthusiasm has been defined as "a kind of mental excitement based on a conviction of truth." But whatever its occasion, there are periods, too many and too long, when it wears somewhat thin. And it is here that scope exists for those ardent spirits, "fit though few," who, like the prophets of old, keep the lamp steadily burning in the conviction that the masses will some day see their way by its light to the truth that shall "make them free." No citizens are more to be honored than those who with tongue or pen, or by pecuniary or other means, are waging war with popular indifference towards that holiest of human causes, the extirpation of organised and wholesale bloodshed.

By many the illusion may still be fondly cherished that enough was done to end war when the nations established a world power that would reverence right, protect small States and oppressed peoples, and give the aggressor new and prodigious, if not insuperable, obstacles to surmount. Large powers are at the disposal of the League. It can keep the dogs of war in the leash, if not permanently, at least long enough to save the victim from being taken unawares, and to enable him to rally to his help the friends of justice and peace. The League has made well nigh impossible those lightning strokes by one of which Germany had France and the world almost at her mercy; for if the signatories of the Covenant are loyal to their pledges the aggressor will have their united strength to contend with should he venture to strike before he has allowed time for his case to be impartially examined. All the attractiveness would thus appear to have gone out of a war of conquest. But is the millennium any nearer? On the contrary, statesmen are as busy as ever with thoughts of war, and at their instigation preparations for a new war are proceeding on a scale that startles people who think at all; and, as Professor Hicks too truly observes, civil populations have now to reckon with the certainty of destruction either by gas or lethal germs the moment those who have the ordering of these matters cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war." The time has, in fact, arrived for which John Stuart Mill sighed when the poor conscripts doomed by sex and age to service in the trenches are not compelled to bear alone the full brunt of war. Mill thought it would be a great gain to the cause of peace were non-combatants made to feel, as far as possible, the rigors of war, at least at sea; for, said he, the mercantile classes had only to suffer sufficiently to be made converts to any peace movement. Non-combatants not merely at sea but on land, too, are now faced with the