

Marked Decline in University Passes

ARE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS TOO ABSTRUSE?

By Les C. Hunkin (President, Norwood District High School Council).

South Australian parents, teachers, and other interested persons have been seriously disturbed concerning the ever-increasing number of failures among students sitting for the annual leaving examination of the Adelaide University.

Since 1914 there has been a fall in the number of passes, as will be seen from the following figures in respect of English:—

Year	Candidates Sat	Candidates Passed	Percentage of Passes
1914	300	216	72
1915	386	242	62.7
1916	444	336	75.7
1917	520	342	65.8
1918	586	412	70.3
1919	614	412	67.1
1920	611	402	65.8
1921	611	512	83.8
1922	597	413	69.0
1923	213	94	44.1
1924	391	211	53.9
1925	510	269	52.5
1926	924	518	55.7
1927	868	335	38.6

An extraordinary feature of the position is that coincident with the decline in the number of passes in English there is an increase in the number of passes in foreign languages.

If the percentage of passes in the various subjects in the Leaving (including Senior Public and Senior Commercial) examination for the past 10 years is taken, some remarkable results are shown. The figures given below show the average percentage of those entering who have passed:—

	1918-1922	1923-1927	1927
English	73.4	49	38.5
French	59.4	59	55.7
Latin	50	52.3	51.2
History	57	60.6	56.8
Mathematics	59.9	51.8	52.9
Physics	60.6	67.4	62.1
Economics	62	69.8	67.9

The table shows that until 1922 a larger percentage of candidates was passing in English than in any other subject. In 1923 the percentage of passes dropped to 44, and since then the average has been 49. In all other subjects there has been

comparative mental retrogression of the average child; incompetent teachers; or the fact that the standard set is beyond the capacity of the average 16-year-old student.

The first and second points are disproved by the fact that progressive improvement is manifested in all other subjects, therefore we are entitled to assume that the last point supplies the correct explanation.

How the matter is viewed outside University circles is indicated by the attitude of our public school teachers. It is no secret that they are in open revolt against the standard and methods of the examiners, and representative teachers have stated that the latter are incomprehensible to them.

Each year, when the examination results are published, there are many candidates who have passed in five, six, or even seven subjects (often with credits), but who do not obtain certificates because they have failed to satisfy the examiners in English literature. The matter demands immediate attention on the part of both teachers and University authorities. It is certain that there is something radically wrong in the teaching or in the examining. Teachers are losing faith in their ability to impart a knowledge of English; candidates feel that they are subject to the vagaries of the examiners, and the general standard of literary ability instead of improving is deteriorating.

The council of the Norwood District High School expressed the opinion general among parents in the following resolution:—"That this council views with serious perturbation the large percentage of students failing to pass the University leaving examination in the subject of English, and seeing that no satisfactory evidence of comparative mental retrogression of the average child or incompetency of our school teachers is forthcoming, expresses the opinion that the standard set is beyond the capacity and the needs of the average child student, and/or the methods and demands of the examiners require serious consideration from the University authorities. That a copy of this resolution be sent to the University council."

PROGRESSIVE CURRICULUM

Proof of the inability of the responsible University authorities to arrange a progressive curriculum, carefully adapted to the slowly developing mind of the child student, is shown by the examination papers set for English literature last year. It is too long to print in full, but the following questions extracted from the papers will show the kind of material that the children have to struggle with:—

Question 2—"It has been suggested that the motive and meaning of such characters as York, Norfolk, and Aumerle are not clearly defined; in other words, that Shakespeare has incompletely explained their actions. Discuss this suggestion in relation to the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Norfolk, the attitude of York to Bolingbroke and his own son, and the behaviour of Aumerle toward Richard and Bolingbroke. Whom do you consider to have been in the right in the quarrel just mentioned?"

Question 3—"Contrast the treatment of Nature in poems such as Herrick's 'To Dianeme,' 'To Blossoms,' and Campion's 'Cherry Ripe' with that in Wordsworth's 'Lucy' poems—'She Was a Phantom of Delight,' 'She Dwelt Among Untrodden Ways,' 'I Travelled Among Unknown Men,' and 'Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower,' and Keats' 'Ode to Autumn,' or name some of the subjects dealt with in the sonnets set for your study, and show how the form of the sonnet has influenced the treatment of the subject."

Question 4—"Which of the essays set for your study resemble most the modern short story? Why are they, nevertheless, essays rather than stories, or what elements of satire and humor are to be found in the essays of Steele, Addison, and Goldsmith?"

By the practical parent anxious to equip his child for the struggle for existence the foregoing questions are viewed as unduly adulterated bunk, and quite unjustified as a test of mental competence in a child destined for, say, an engineering career.

Yet this is the sort of stuff the child must surmount, or he or she is blocked from a professional career, since the matriculation certificate governing admission to any of the courses for a degree is issued to students passing the leaving examination, in which English is a com-

pulsory subject.

The increasing difficulty of this subject is appreciated and feared by every child, and the psychological effect is such that the student is beaten before he sits for the examination.

It is grossly unfair to the child, and productive of much unnecessary disappointment to anxious parents who are usually unable to question the propriety of the test to which the children are submitted, and accept failure to pass as bitter proof of the child's unfitness for a professional career, sacrifice his future prospects on the altar of economic needs, and make him take the first job that offers.

"ARTIFICIAL EXAMINATION"

Again, it should be borne in mind that the domestic arrangements of the average home preclude the possibility of special concentration on abstruse subjects, even if there were not half a dozen other subjects requiring urgent attention, and in any case, only a very small proportion of students will ultimately follow a literary career.

I am acutely conscious of the necessity for cultivated thought in the community, and for accurate knowledge, exact thinking, inspired imagination, and sympathetic interpretation of human motives. A perusal of what is termed popular literature, the advertisements of the commercial world, the widely read sporting columns of our newspapers will show how imperative is a general improvement in the English of the community, but it is nonsense to suggest that this may be effected by blocking the way to degree courses with an artificial and theatrical examination in English literature, conducted by narrow and pedantic persons who seem unable to realise that they are dealing with the developing minds of adolescents, an infinitesimal proportion of whom are likely to be prodigies, and that their policy is calculated to produce "stuffed parrots" instead of well-balanced, sound, and practical graduates.

NEWS 3.4.28

ENGLISH EXAMINATIONS

Sir Archibald Strong Reticent

MEETING TEACHERS SOON

In "The Mail" Mr. L. C. Hunkin (president of the Norwood District High School Council) criticised the course in English prescribed by the university council for the annual leaving examination of the University of Adelaide.

Mr. Hunkin quoted figures showing that the percentage of passes in English had fallen from 83.8 in 1921 to 36.6 in 1927. The article was brought under the notice of Sir Archibald Strong (Professor of English at the University), but he declined to comment on it.

"This matter," said Sir Archibald, "is one which I intend taking up with the University Council shortly. I shall also be meeting teachers representing all the schools in South Australia, both public and private, and shall discuss with them questions arising out of the public examinations in English."

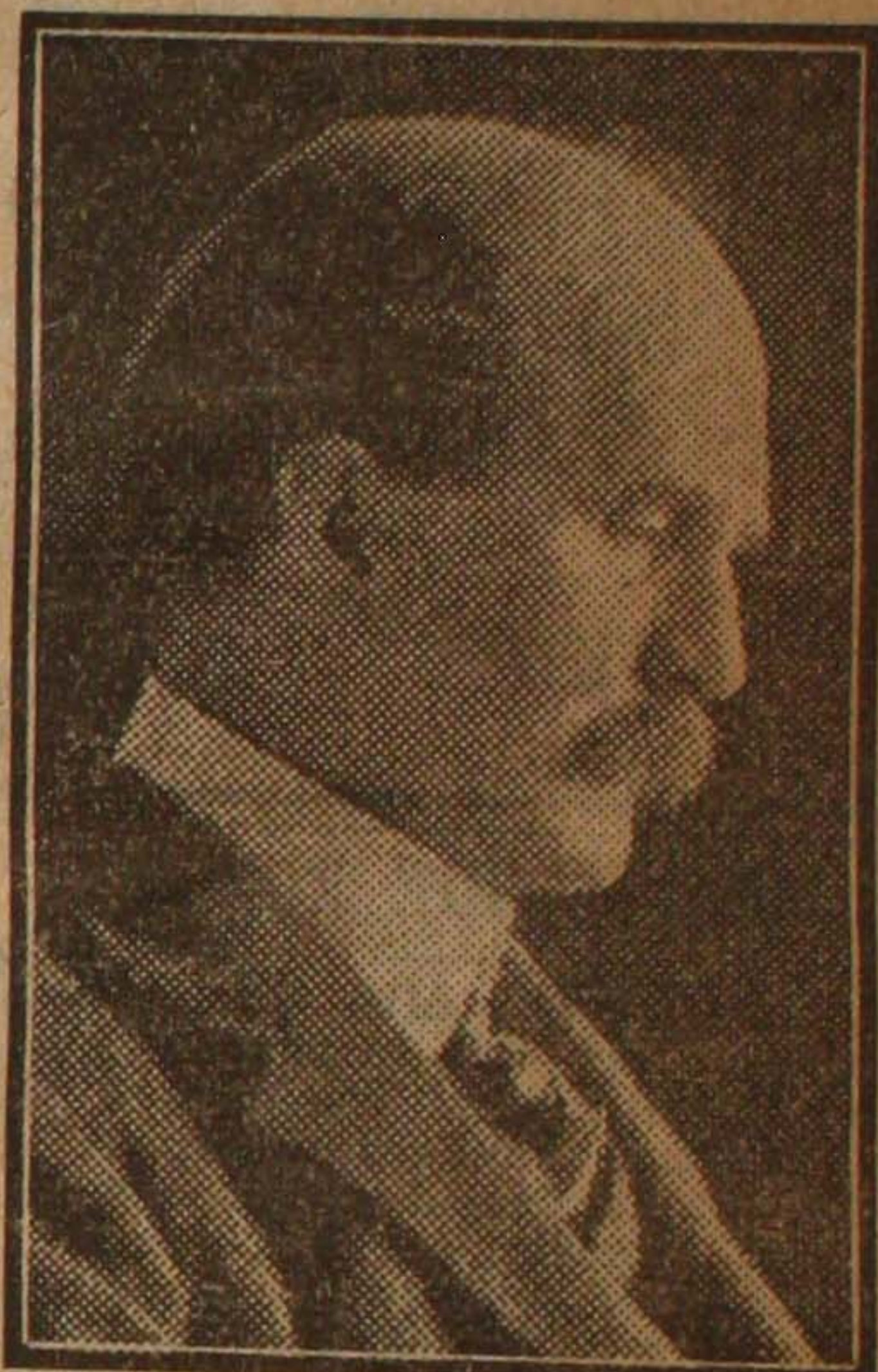
"That is all I wish to say. I have nothing further to add in reply to Mr. Hunkin, who, after all, is not a member of the teaching profession."

REG. 4.4.28

AN AFFECTIONATE APE.

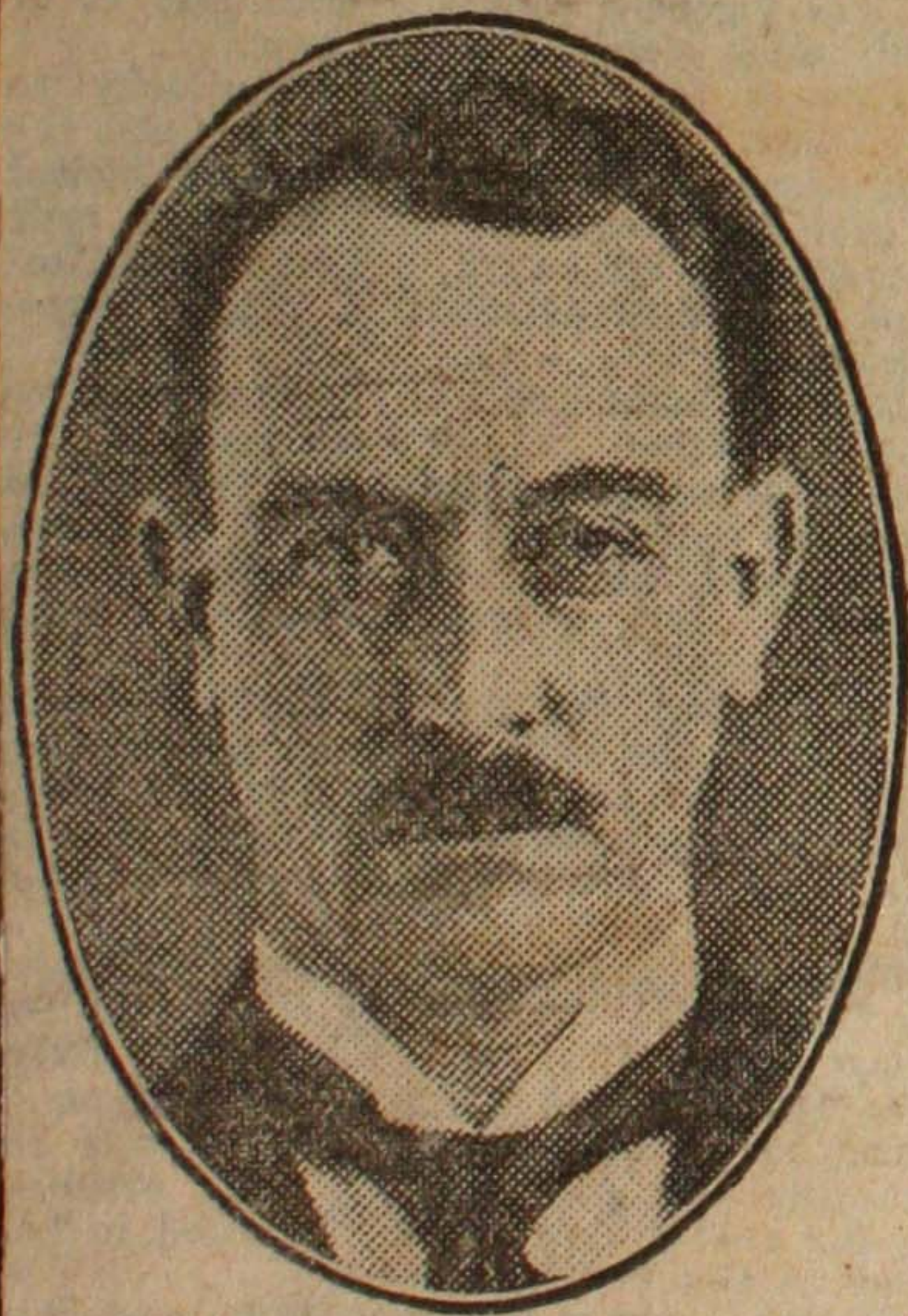
"Recent investigations of the mentality of apes suggest that they have mental and emotional processes akin to those of man," declared Professor H. H. Woollard in a lecture on anatomy on Tuesday evening. He instanced a case of a scientist at the Keyser Institute who, on one occasion, inadvertently left two apes locked out from their inner compartment. The night was cold, it came on to rain, and the monkeys got wet and uncomfortable. Later their master remembered, and opened the door and the animals at once turned to go in. When they got to the door, however, they hesitated, turned around, approached the professor, embraced him, and then went into the inner room.

Sir William Bragg, K.B.E., D.Sc., F.R.S., one of the most eminent professors who have been connected with the University of Adelaide, will take the chair as president of the British Association, to be held at Glasgow the second week in September. The professor's address will deal with modern developments of the physical sciences and their relation to national problems. Adelaide has always had a place in Sir William Bragg's affections, for he held the chair of mathematics and physics here for 23 years, and married a daughter of the late Sir Charles Todd, K.C.M.G., of this city. Their brilliant son, Professor William Lawrence Bragg, M.C., F.R.S., who succeeded Sir Ernest Rutherford, F.R.S., one of the world's greatest scientists as Langworthy Professor of Physics at the University of Manchester, was born in Adelaide. While in Adelaide, too, Bragg the elder received his F.R.S., the blue ribbon of the scientific world. Twenty years ago Mr. Fred Johns recorded in his second edition of "Notable Australians" the following—"Professor Bragg is a recognised authority on radioactivity. His work has thrown an entirely fresh light on the properties of the alpha particles and furnished the basis of a new and important investigation by various workers in the science. It was this work which won for him the Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1907." Sir



Sir William Bragg.

William was president of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science at the Brisbane meeting prior to his departure for England. Father and son shared the Nobel prize for physics in 1915, and ever since both have gone on adding laurels to their distinguished names. For six years after leaving Adelaide Sir William was Cavendish Professor of Physics in the University of Leeds, and then for eight years Quain Professor of Physics in London University. Since 1923 he has been Director of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, Fulleren Professor of Chemistry there, and director of the Davy-Faraday Research Laboratory. He was foundation scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was third wrangler in 1884. The following year he was appointed to Adelaide University, succeeding Professor Horace Lamb, LL.D., F.R.S., who has also become world-famous. Sir William has had conferred on him the honorary degree of D.Sc. of Manchester, and an American university in 1914, Leeds in 1919, Trinity College, Dublin, in 1920, and Oxford in 1926, the honorary degree of D.C.L. of Durban in 1924, and the honorary LL.D. of Pennsylvania in 1924, and of St. Andrews in 1925. He was created C.B.E. in 1917 and K.B.E. in 1920. An English journalist wrote recently of Sir William—"He continues to distinguish himself as one of the most advanced of scientists who concern themselves with the atom, and as Director of the Davy-Faraday Research Laboratory in the Royal Institute he still leads the world in that direction. A delightful fact is that Sir William is anything but the austere scientist of convention. Actually he is one of the most genial, modest, and hospitable of men."



MR. L. C. HUNKIN

President of the Norwood District High School Council.

an increase during these years, with the single exception of mathematics, which shows a slight decrease. The decrease in English is 25 per cent.

In the kindred subject, history, there has been an increase of 4 per cent. The most remarkable fact that is disclosed by the table is that a student now has a better chance of passing in French and Latin than he has in English. If the rate of decrease in English passes continues, in 1930 no candidates will pass.

DISQUIETING POSITION

How this disquieting state of affairs has failed to attract the notice of the University Council is beyond the conception of the average plain citizen, and there is a widespread and uneasy feeling that our children are the victims of mentors, who have become mentally isolated from the rest of the community, and who are suffering from an obsession common to experts engrossed with a single matter.

There are three possible explanations of the number of failures. They are:—Com-