

THE UNIVERSITY COMMISSION.

INTERESTING EVIDENCE.

A meeting of the University Commission was held at Parliament House on Tuesday morning, and there were present the chairman (Mr. T. Ryan), the Hon. A. W. Styles, and Mr. T. Green.

Mr. Charles Bronner (headmaster of the Goodwood School and president of the Headmasters' Association and the School Teachers' Union) said he had been engaged in teaching for 31 years, and there were 850 names on the roll of the Goodwood school. There were probably between 8,000 and 10,000 fewer scholars in the public schools now than there were eight or ten years ago, and the reports showed that the private schools had not gained in number to any large extent. The falling-off in the number of children in the State schools was due to the fact that fewer children remained there after they were 13 years of age. For example, in his own school there were 160 children over 13 years of age 10 years ago, but now there were only 46, and he was satisfied it was because the children were wanted to earn money to assist in keeping their homes that a large number of them left school. Another factor was the desire of the children themselves, and particularly boys, to become wage-earners. Difficulty had been experienced in securing teachers, and probably the reason why young men and women preferred other branches of work was that the immediate monetary benefits were greater outside the education service, and the immediate benefits were, naturally, more attractive than the prospect of returns years hence. The teacher required a special qualification, and in connection with schools of 1,000, with high schools, infants' schools, and domestic centres attached to them, such as the Norwood school, the salary of the headmaster should be much greater than it was at present. So far as the provisions of the Education Bill introduced to Parliament last year and the proposal to bring schools of mines under the control of the department were concerned he thought it would be better if all education agencies from the primary schools to the University could be placed under one authority, but he would require a lot of time to consider the matter before expressing an opinion one way or another on the subject of the University being given the control of all educational work in the State. He thought the high schools and technical schools should be open to the whole of the pupils of the State schools who showed special capacity for learning, but the University was a different institution, and could not be placed in the same position, because as it was at present constituted, with no residential quarters, it must be largely a centre for the leisured and professional classes.

By Mr. Styles—He was entirely in favor of making it compulsory on children to attend school every day the school was open, and he would extend the compulsory age to 14 years. The Wednesday half-holiday was a disturbing factor in connection with the attendance of children, as parents took them for pleasure trips on the half-holiday, and for that reason he was strongly in favor of the Saturday half-holiday.

By Mr. Green—He would like to see some provision for the continued education of children who left school at 13 years and went to work, as was done in Switzerland, his native country, where such children were compelled to attend school on certain afternoons each week.

The Commission has decided to meet in future on Tuesdays and Fridays when necessary, but no meeting will be held next Friday.

The Adelaide University council on Friday resolved to ask Professor Bragg to represent the University at the centennial celebration of the King Frederik's University at Christiania in September next.

At a meeting of the University council on Friday, on the recommendation of the board of examiners for Elder scholarships, the following awards were made:—For violoncello playing, to Harold Whitridge Davies; special scholarship for tenor voice, to Frank H. Smith; for organ playing, no award. With respect to the singing scholarship, the examiners reported that Gertrude Primrose James and Kathleen Mary O'Dea had exhibited conspicuous merit, and they were unable to separate them. As no scholarship was being awarded for organ playing, the award of an additional scholarship for singing, under Regulation III. of the Elder scholarships, was recommended. The report of the examiners was adopted, and two scholarships were awarded for singing to the candidates named.

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THE ITALY OF THE SOUTH.

Sweet-Voiced Australians.

The Elder Scholarships.

Quite a number of Australians, despite the comparative youth of the country, have already won fame in the musical world, and as the conditions for cultivation improve, the list will be greatly added to. The quality and volume of the voices to be encountered in the Commonwealth have frequently been commented upon by visiting musicians, and surprise has also been repeatedly expressed at the frequency with which they are met. Doubtless the favourable climatic conditions, combined with the healthy outdoor exercises indulged in by the average Australian youth are the main contributing factors in the development of the vocal organs, while the clear air and bright sunshine experienced during the greater part of the year maintain a true and even adjustment of the human chords. When the comparatively meagre population of the Commonwealth is considered in conjunction with the number of singers who have gained fame in the old world on the operatic stage and the concert platform, it must be acknowledged that the number of Australians at the head of the profession is remarkable. Madame Melba has been regarded for years as the leading soprano of the world; Madame Ada Crossley occupies a foremost position among the contraltos, while in Madames Amy Sherwin, Lalla Miranda, Minna Fischer, Frances Adler, Amy Castles, Dolly Castles, and numbers of others, the States have supplied some of the foremost vocalists of their day. While these singers gained prominence by the possession of a wealth of natural talent, followed by a strenuous period of training and study, there have been hundreds of voices also born under the Southern Cross, which would have won a place in the first flight but for a lack of opportunity.

—Australia's Past Disadvantages.—

Considering the youth of the country, Australians have done well in securing so many coveted positions in the musical world, but the future should witness the winning of many fresh laurels. In the past those who possessed voices worthy of cultivating to the highest standards of training have worked under serious disadvantages, as difficulty has been experienced in securing the best tuition, and even when good masters were obtainable many of those who desired instruction were not in a position to pay the required fees. Consequently they entrusted their rich gifts in the keeping of those totally incapable of developing them, and by this means numerous promising voices have been totally ruined. Then, again, those students who gained a certain degree of prominence locally have never succeeded in getting beyond the stage of mediocrity through the absence of the right environment. From time to time Australians have had the opportunity of hearing the leading singers of the world, but a closer association is necessary to acquire that polish which indicates the true artist. In this connection the aspiring vocalist of the old world has had a decided advantage.

—An Improving Position.—

Europe is, however, being gradually brought nearer to the Commonwealth by the improved methods of ocean transport, which must have a beneficial effect on the conditions of study in the future, and the prominence gained by Australians in the past is inducing the establishment of a higher standard of teaching. Through the generosity of wealthy citizens scholarships are now also open to all classes, which afford considerable periods of suitable training to those who would otherwise not be in a position to undertake such a course. In this connection the late Sir Thomas Elder did much during his lifetime to improve the position of singers in South Australia, and by his liberal bequests a school of music is now established in Adelaide, which should be the means of giving further proof of the superior qualities of the voices in the Commonwealth.

—Valuable Scholarships.—

During the past week the board of examiners at the Conservatorium have been engaged in determining the allocation of several new scholarships for singing and instrumentation, and the report of the examiners has been approved by the council. The Director of the Conservatorium (Dr. J. M. Ennie), who was one of the examiners, in conjunction with Miss Meta Buring and Mr. John Dunn, informed a representative of The Register that in the competition for the scholarship for singing there were 23 candidates, and the general standard was extremely high. All the voices showed great uniformity, and the musical intelligence displayed was of exceptional merit. He expressed the opinion that Australia paralleled Italy with regard to the prolific growth of good voices, and that with the improving methods of tuition more vocalists from this country would in the future make their mark. It had been decided to award the singing scholarships to Miss Gertrude Primrose James, a dramatic soprano of exceptional quality, and to Miss Kathleen O'Dea, a young and promising mezzo-soprano. They had both exhibited conspicuous merit, and the board of examiners were unable to separate them, and as no scholarship was awarded for organ playing the granting of an additional award for singing was recommended under regulation 3 of the Elder Scholarships. This recommendation was adopted. The special scholarship for tenor singing was awarded to Mr. Frank H. Smith, while that for violoncello playing fell to Mr. Harold Whitridge Davies, a son of Dr. E. Harold Davies. These scholarships would entitle the winners to three years' free tuition at the Conservatorium. The examination of scholars for the piano was proceeding while the council was sitting; consequently the recommendation of the examiners for these scholarships would have to be confirmed at the next meeting of the council.