

EDUCATION COMMISSION.

PROFESSOR HENDERSON EXAMINED.

EXTENSION OF SCHOLARSHIPS FAVORED.

The Adelaide University and Higher Education Royal Commission met at Parliament House on Friday morning, when there were present Mr. T. Ryan (chairman) and Messrs. Peake, Styles, Cowan, and Green.

Professor G. C. Henderson, B.A. Sydney, M.A. London, professor of history at the Adelaide University, gave evidence. In reply to a question by the chairman, he said there were generally two ways suggested for extending the influence of the University so as to make it more effective—one by means of free education at the University and the other by the extension of the scholarship system. He favored using the scholarships scheme as liberally as possible. He was opposed to free education at the University; he said that because he had been a poor boy himself and had had to struggle for his University education. If it had been free he could not have gone to the University, because his parents could not have afforded to keep him. He had been able to go through by means of the scholarships he had won. Poor people who had children that showed some desire to get knowledge usually had a good deal of trouble until the boys were about 14 years of age, and then pressure of circumstances obliged them to send them to work. In the vast majority of cases working people had to yield to that necessity. A free system of education at the University would not therefore meet that difficulty. On the other hand, he thought it would defeat the ends which it was intended to serve. It might look at first sight as if it would help poor children, but it really would help the rich more than the poor. The rich man had no strain which compelled him to send his children to work early, and could pay for their education. Free education simply would relieve him of the burden of fees, while the poor man could not take advantage of the concession. Not sufficient facilities were offered to enable the poorer children to get to the University. The scholarship system should be extended widely. He believed, and his colleagues agreed with him, that those students who had come from the primary and secondary schools to the University were the best. They wanted as many of those as they could get, because there was a large field there for selection. If the scholarships were extended more assistants would be required at the University. In any extension of the benefits of the University to country students they had to be careful that the high University standard was not lowered. If they robbed the degrees of value they would be doing an injustice to those who had graduated. It was far better for students to study at the University proper than to read by themselves in the country. They should hear the professors explain the work. They would obtain under the direct guidance of the professors a knowledge of method, and would meet and argue with each other in the various societies. The athletic part of the life of the University, which not merely strengthened the muscles, but also taught the students to work together for common ends, should be considered. The man in the country, who prepared for examination through books, might get a degree, but it was what they called a "thin" one.

In reply to Mr. Peake, he said the University was something greater than a college, as it had the power to confer degrees and helped, on the side of intellectual attainment, to something higher than a college life could reach.

Mr. Peake—At the present time is not the University most largely availed of by people who are going in for professional work?

Professor Henderson—Yes; they wanted to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and so on. He thought it would be fatal to make the matriculation easier of accomplishment. To adopt that course would not make the University a democratic institution, but would simply lower the standard. They wanted men with brains, whether they had money, or not. It would be a waste of public money to make it so that the great majority of boys could go through the University. Besides wasting the time of many of the students, it would be a great injustice to them to encourage them to continue at the University. The professors would simply talk over the heads of a lot of the boys, who would not have the capacity to assimilate what was being told them. The country would not be developed by throwing the doors of the University wide open. A smattering would be of little use. Most students went to the University for the purpose of preparing for a profession; some, however, did so for the love of education. The latter were the most satisfactory. They had a stimulating influence on the class itself.

Mr. Peake—in regard to the matter of scholarships, does it not seem to you that there may be many students close to the top in the examination, and yet only one can get the scholarship? If there were no fees the parents might strive to keep their children at the University for a few years.

Professor Henderson—I say still that up to a certain point that could be covered by scholarships.

Mr. Peake—If you extend the scholarships so greatly as to admit a large number of students, are you not closely approaching the same point as the abolition of fees?

Professor Henderson—The University has been, and must be, a costly undertaking. The University student up to the age of about 22 years cannot do any remunerative work.

The University is only within the power of the man whose parents can afford to keep him until he is about that age.

Mr. Peake—Is not that what we have been trying to break down?

Professor Henderson—That is why I want scholarships.

Mr. Peake—When what you call a child of poor parents does get through, is he not really the child of the middle-class—son of a business man, schoolmaster, clergyman.

Professor Henderson—Many people are straining themselves to keep their children at the University.

Mr. Peake—Would it not be better to relieve them of the strain?

Professor Henderson—If you can relieve them and not other people.

Mr. Peake—But the wealthy people assist the University in other ways.

Professor Henderson—Yes. He thought it highly important that Parliament should have direct representation on the University council, and agreed that there should be closer acquaintance between the Government and the University. He had been struck with the misconceptions there were about the University, and he thought the misunderstanding would be removed if there were on the council members of Parliament. The University needed representation in Parliament. The question of State control of Universities was a difficult one for him to reply on. The fear in the minds of some of the University people was that if the State entirely controlled the University that the importance of keeping up the standard might be overlooked.

Mr. Peake—I think we all regard the management of the University as being properly vested in the University council.

Professor Henderson—Then the matter may be worth talking over.

Mr. Peake—At the present time, as managed by the council, it appears irresponsible to the Government or anyone except public opinion and the graduates. The University is too big a thing to be dependent for its upkeep upon benefactions. The State, for finding the money, should have more control.

Professor Henderson said he agreed that there should be members of Parliament on the council.

Mr. Peake—I mean that the council should be appointed by the Government.

Professor Henderson said he was of the opinion that the governing body of the University should be appointed by two constituencies. The first was the graduates, because they understood the work; the other constituency should be the Parliament, because it was only right that the State should be able to refer its problems to, and expect answers from the University experts in the matters of agriculture, mineralogy, geology, and so on. But he did not agree that the University should be controlled entirely by the State, as it would be if Parliament was to have the sole power to elect the council. In regard to the matter of country students, he knew that London gave degrees without residence, but thought that University was on quite the wrong track.

The Chairman—Would a constitution like this make for University efficiency:—A council of 25 members—three elected by the professorial staff, two by the undergraduates (one female), five by the graduates (one female), five by the whole State voting as for senators, four by both Houses of Parliament, the president of the Trades and Labor Council, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the president of the Chamber of Manufactures, the 22 to elect two others, and a principal appointed by the Government.

Professor Henderson—I do not like it, mainly because when you get one representative of the Chamber of Manufactures and one for the Trades and Labor Council on a Government body, each has a special obligation, and would make the council too political. There would be danger of log-rolling—for instance, the representative of the Chamber of Commerce may want a chair of commerce and neglect something else.

The Chairman—Should the professorial staff elect three or five?

Professor Henderson—I like the idea.

The Chairman—You agree that the professorial board should be represented.

Professor Henderson—We have no professorial board. I wish we had.

The Chairman—Have you any objection to the undergraduates having two representatives?

Professor Henderson—It would be better to keep it down to the graduates.

The Chairman—You agree about the graduates?

Professor Henderson—Yes, but I would rather not have women. It would be better to allow the people's representatives in Parliament to appoint the representatives than to leave it to the people.

The Chairman—And give the Parliament nine representatives?

Professor Henderson—Well! yes. In a council of 25 that would not be too many. There is no principal in any Australian University. If you can get the right man it is a splendid thing. Whether the Government should have the right to appoint a man is another matter.

In reply to Mr. Green the professor said it would cost about £70 a year to go through the University, perhaps more, in medicine. That sum was mentioned as based on what had kept him while at Sydney University. He had had nothing to spare, and he did not think students ought to have anything to spare when using scholarship given by the State.

Mr. Green—Is the knowledge gained at the University of any benefit in a utilitarian sense? What is the use of educating a man for the purpose of making him a mere ornament?

Professor Henderson—A mere ornament! Education does not make a man an ornament. I am afraid I don't understand. If you educate a man, no matter what use he puts his knowledge to, he becomes a more valuable and interesting person.

In reply to Mr. Cowan, Professor Henderson said he thought it would be wise to establish the college system of residence at the University, so long as the college spirit was subordinate.

The Chairman—You agree that the University is the property of the nation?

Professor Henderson—Yes.

The Chairman—Would any ordinary working man be a worse man for having a year or two at the University?

Professor Henderson—He would be very much better.

The Chairman—Ah! That is the point. We want to give a chance to every person who qualifies for a University education.