Reçu le, 8.3.17

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

AUSTRALIA IN GENERAL.

"A Short History of Australia," by Professor Ernest Scott; University Press, Oxford.—There is a run on histories of Australia just now, and this is one of the best. Certainly it is one of the most fascinating. It claims to give special attention to "personality," for history is "a record of the doings of men living in communities, not of blind nerveless forces." Cook, for example, though he did not discover Australia in the literal sense, as so often wrongly asserted, did more. He was the first to make it seem attractive. Dampier had been discouraging—"If it were not for that sort of pleasure which results from the discovery even of the barrenest spot on the globe, the coast of New Holland would not have charmed me much." (How many Australians, by-the-way, know that Swift's Gulliver claimed to be a cousin of Dampier, and that his Lilliput is, by proof of the map, somewhere about Cape Leeuwin?) Cook was enthusiastic and even prophetic—"We find all such things as Nature hath bestowed upon it in a flourishing state. In this extensive country it can never be doubted but what most sorts of grain, fruit, roots, &c., of every kind, would flourish were they once brought hither, planted, and cultivated by the hands of industry." And so it has proved. The value of the Sydney settlement was recognised, at a time when England still thought little of it, by Napoleon, who calmly directed the Governor of Mauritius, when in need of supplies, to "take" it. But the battles of Trafalgar and Nile had settled that question. Sea power had its usual effect, and the probable fate of infant Australia was settled at a great distance from its shores. Professor Scott is a master of picturesque phrase. Quiros, turning back from the New Hebrides, but talking largely of "Austrialia," "had never been within 500 miles of the real continent. Torres had seen it, but did not know that he had." Just as Columbus "never knew that he had found a new world. He always believed that he had discovered what we may call the back door of Asia." For 25 years after Sydney was founded, only an insignificant fragment of Australia was occupied, "not so large as is the island of Corsica in comparison with the size of Europe." Yet there was a firm determination not to let the French or any one else make a rival settlement anywhere on continent or island. "The lion lay couchant after a heavy meal, with his paws on what he intended for his supper." Sturt called the Murray after the British Colonial Minister of the moment; to-day "there does not seem to be any better reason for thus celebrating an obscure politician (who, when questioned late in 1830, did not know who Sturt was, or where the river was) than that it is too well established to be altered." Davey, Governor of Tasmania in Waterloo year, "would drink deep with those who pleased him; those who offended him he would flog or hang. He required plenty of rum and rope." So run the pleasant chronicles.

—South Australia in Particular.—

Seldom has the "ingenious and persuasive" Wakefield had his personality brought under the limelight as in this book. He appears as a kind of Defoe, whose "Letter from Sydney" quite made readers believe that he had been there, and whose "Principle was always mentioned by some journals with the reverential homage of a capital letter." The South Australian Company, with George Fife Angas as Chairman, found the £200,000 necessary to give the Wakefield Principle a working chance, and therefore was the real founder of the province; "and, of course, those who invested their money in it looked for a reward." Sir Charles Napier could have been the first Governor, but foresaw financial difficulties. And, truly, within two years from the Foundation "an orgy of land speculation had been started. Wakefield's perfectly balanced system, which ought to have run automatically like a piece of beautifully designed clockwork—land sold, labourers imported, land cultivated, more land sold, more labourers imported, more land cultivated, and so on ad infinitum—had failed to make allowance for that singular human frailty, the desire to get rich quickly and without working hard." Nobody cultivated anything! Governor Gawler had to find work for all—and paid in bills. "Adelaide was a spreading I.O.U. in stones and mortar." Torrens gets full credit for his Real Property Act, based by him on the

since copied all about the world. Of a later statesman.—

A man of haughty temper, notwithstanding his strong democratic leanings, Kingston was at his best intellectually as a draftsman of Parliamentary Bills. He spoke in a series of emphatic spasms hurled forth with a voice of thunder; but when he took pen in hand to prepare an Act of Parliament he had command of a crisp precision of phrase, and a sure sense of the value of words, that could express a meaning in the shortest and unmistakable terms. Instead of saying that any person charged with an offence against the said section in the manner aforesaid and being without reasonable cause of excuse should on conviction before a Court of summary jurisdiction be liable to a fine not exceeding £20, Kingston would write at the end of a tersely worded section, "Penalty, £20"—and, oddly enough, neither Courts nor persons affected ever had the least doubt as to what was meant.

It is candidly admitted that the bewildering changes in Federal Ministries about 10 years ago, when "a citizen of the Commonwealth might any morning have awakened wondering what Government was in office now" seems to the cynical observer a mere "scuffling of kites and crows." But one is to consider rather that the rival leaders were not self-seeking, but "sincere and serious leaders of opinion, who were contending for different sets of principles. The rapid rise of a new party—that is, of a new force—necessarily entailed a fresh adjustment of political relations." The first, or trial Ministry, in 1901, being made up chiefly of State Premiers, was "an army of generals, an orchestra of conductors," and that Barton was able to induce them to play the same tune during nearly two sessions is accounted to him as a fine piece of leadership. There are, of course, in a long book like this, points with which one may disagree. Melbourne University, instead of Adelaide, is unaccountably credited with having been the first to give degrees to women. The otherwise full account of the rise of Democracy might have found room for the coming of the Eight Hour Day. "Banjo" Paterson's "Man From Snowy River" is surely not the "most popular poem ever written in Australia," or even the most popular of his own. (Incidentally, Kipling, precocious as he was, was not writing Imperial verse in 1883.) But these are small points. The main is that this is a history which will keep one out of bed at night to finish it.

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selves did not last year reach the ideal which as a body they may be credited with having set before themselves when propounding their problems. Among the reports of the examiners on the work of last year's candidates at the University public examinations, none exceeded in severity of comment the report of the examiner in primary geography and of the examiner in commercial geography. The former finds in the 'mirth-provoking ignorance' and the 'discreditable answers' of the candidates 'serious reflections on the present method of teaching the subject.' The examiner in commercial geography gives a more or less complete list of 'facts overlooked,' waxes sarcastic over 'makeshifts,' 'fairy tales,' and 'plethora of instances;' and he more than suggests that for all the lapses he detected the teachers are the responsible persons. The inference he makes is not necessarily sound. We can go so far as to say that 'geography comprehends ethnology, biology, zoology, geology, economics, history, meteorology, and the rest'—as revealed from time to time in the examination questions? Geology has now become as diffuse as it was at one time restricted. Textbook writers emphasize different aspects of the huge subject; teachers do likewise. And this is where the trouble begins. It is becoming increasingly hard to make the teaching in the classroom fit in with the requirements—the whims and fancies—of an individual examiner. A candidate well trained in the principles laid down in the textbook he studies—a candidate full of miscellaneous geographical knowledge—finds himself in the examination hall face to face with a string of questions for which he is quite unprepared. As if by a witch's incantation, the teacher's beautiful swan is changed into a mud-splashed goose, to be plucked by the examiner. Why? Because the examiner has the whole world—its 'physiological and biological controls,' its economic possibilities and performances in the way of production and transport to draw on. It is only fair to the examiner in commercial grography to state that last year his questions were carefully restricted as to range. Yet in spite of that he is astonished to find 'that most of the candidates had never seen a map of our stock routes.' The bulk of the human race has never seen such a map; and, unless those 'stock routes' are expressly dealt with in the text books which all the candidates had been studying, it is not obvious why it was discreditable to any of the candidates not to be able to give better answers on that particular item of knowledge than such answers 'as might well have been supplied by children at leading London schools.' Teachers of geography can vouch that we, on our part, are agreed that the examinations in geography are open to serious criticism. The assumption underlying some of the questions is that candidates might reasonably be expected to possess encyclopedic knowledge. To make these examinations

more satisfactory to teachers and to candidates, the examiner—more particularly in commercial geography—should announce beforehand the extent of the ground that his questions will cover (this the examiner did last year) and that he will strictly confine his questions within the limits he has laid down (this the examiner will not undertake to do). In short, in view of the immensity of the subject, the examiner should prescribe a textbook, and should base his questions upon the contents of that book alone. 'For,' as an authority has it, 'a candidate who proves in his answers that he has thoroughly mastered one branch of the vast subject, treated in a certain way, and that he has an intelligent grasp of it, will prove his capacity to master more of it—he knows how to approach the problems which the subject presents. And that, after all, is the essential thing.' I should like to ask whether the long list of 'howlers,' carefully compiled from the papers of mostly youngsters, could not be dispensed with in the 'Manual of Public Examinations?' We are all aware that candidates make mistakes; even grown-up people have been known to do the same thing. We are not all of us walking encyclopedias! Besides, many a man owes his reputation for accuracy to the accessibility of good reference books. That aid the examination candidate cannot call in. Moreover, examinations would not be examinations if a certain proportion of those who sit did not make mistakes and fail. But need every little error of every hapless youngster be paraded?"

Register 8.3.17

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS AND HOWLERS.

From G. G. Newman:—"Whoever the pedagogue is who has veiled his personality under the pardonable anonymity of the two simple words 'A Teacher' he is a credit to his profession. His well-worded letter proves his intimate knowledge of the teacher's art. He can come down to the level of his pupil. His suggestion that these howlers should be eliminated from the manual is one that I have advocated for some years past. What I suggested was that in their place the examiners might well print the best essay in senior or junior English literature, or the best answers given by the Tennyson Medallists. Instead of continually exhibiting faults, it would be productive of better results if candidates and their teachers could all get some idea of what an examiner wants. Can the professor answer all the questions himself? In mathematics let them print in full the complete working of (say) the most difficult problem as set out by the candidate who secured the top place in honours. This would act as an incentive for weaker students, and prove useful as a guide. And when the professor sends his list of questions, let him also supply complete answers to each. While on the topic of University examinations, I would very much like to call attention to a flaw in the method of setting text books. Why not let the Latin text books stand (say) for three years? This year, for example, the leading booksellers have sold completely out of senior Latin books, and say openly that they do not intend to order any more copies from England. Is it a fact that some of the colleges have no copies of Ovid at all? What about the poor unfortunate students who are thus situated? If the books stood for three years, booksellers could order enough for two years, and then there might be a possibility of securing a few secondhand copies. This privilege is denied this year. I have sent both to Sydney and Melbourne for secondhand copies, and there are none. Now in senior history the same text book has been set for I should say from memory at the very least 12 years. There is no difficulty in obtaining these text books either new or secondhand. Why not classical text books the same? Or, as I suggest, three years? This would be enough to overcome their staleness, and would satisfy the craving for variety."

STANDARDS OF EDUCATION.

The recent publication of examination "howlers" and the protest of correspondents that these are not necessarily confined to students, again draws attention to the inadequacy of public examinations as a test of educational ability. They have been as whole-heartedly condemned by prominent educationists as they have been regretted by students who have failed. Ill-set questions and stupid answers are minor aspects of a greater problem. More important is the question whether our modern systems of education are not themselves largely "howlers:" whether we are not too much inclined to build on tradition than on common-sense. Too often a pass, or even a credit, for an examination in any particular subject, denotes rather a capacity for cramming than one for the steady absorption of knowledge, and even more frequently a feat of memory that has carried a student through an examination has as little definite meaning for him as the questions have for the students who perpetrate the "howlers." Might not it even be claimed that the mere fact of giving such answers denotes an attempt on the part of the student to draw from his own intelligence the explanation that is expected? The extraordinary views so often expressed by children prove the existence in the undeveloped mind of ideas that are startlingly original, and even the worst "howlers" may have a basis of common sense if open to analysis. A correct answer pat from the text book is not so much a sign of intelligence as of the possession of a retentive memory. But a departure from the text book is a breach of examination etiquette from which many degree holders gained such useful experience in youth that they adhered rigidly to rules after one or two failures.

In a recent number of "Harper's" a writer, in opening up another aspect of education, condemns the teaching of grammar in elementary schools "What shall we do with this thing called grammar?" he asks. "It is an abstract science, highly technical, however it may be tempered for forcing into the minds of ten-year-olds, and it is afflicted with a terminology as obscure and meaningless to the young as would be that in the pharmacopeia. Of course there is mental discipline to be gained from close application to the study of it, but let us use it, then, frankly for that purpose, and not persuade inexperienced and incompetent teachers that it is a means to the attainment of oral and written expression in English." Tyndall held that the study of grammar was an intellectual discipline of the highest kind. "The piercing through the involved and inverted sentences of 'Paradise Lost:' the linking of the verb to its often distant nominative, of the relative to the distant antecedent . . . was a source of unflagging delight." But Tyndall's was essentially an analytical mind, and to such the appeal would be found in the mental discipline obtained, or in the logical sequence discovered. The study of grammar would no more have helped him to express his

theories in passable English, than the study of algebra or Latin has helped a commercial man to business success.

Some of the finest writers of English poetry and prose are totally ignorant of the rules of grammar. They are concerned neither with substantives nor predicates, nor whether a clause is a principal or a subordinate one. But their technical ignorance does not prevent them from exercising a power of self-expression in purest English that would be impossible to a professor with every detail of technical grammatical knowledge at his finger tips. It is a common experience of teachers in elementary schools that a pupil will correctly parse or analyse a sentence, conjugate a verb, and correct grammatical errors in the written language, and immediately reply to a question, "I never done it." Pupils will learn by rote with perfection that "we were" is the plural of "I am." But that does not prevent their persistence in the private use of "we was." The great necessity of the developing mind, says the writer already quoted, is a plentiful vocabulary relating to ordinary life. Just as a French baby learns to speak French, and an English one English, so the ear of the growing child adapts itself to the language with which it is surrounded for the greater part of its life. Given a "plentiful vocabulary" and an ear trained to the use of correct speaking, the power of self-expression is at once set free. School curricull are so overcrowded that every possible elimination should be considered, and if, as Hoyt said in 1906, "the extended study of technical grammar does not enable one to use better English either in talking or writing," in the interests of teachers and children alike the question is ripe for discussion.

Rejected 12.3.17

THE "SHOP" AND THE TECHNICAL SCHOOL.

CLOSER CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO.

The council of the School of Mines and Industries, acting in conjunction with associations and societies representing employers and employes, recently appointed committees to advise upon matters affecting the trades classes of the school. The inaugural meeting of the advisory committee for the metal trades classes was held at the School of Mines on Friday. Those present were:—The President of the Council of the School of Mines (Sir Langdon Bonython), the superintendent of technical education (Mr. C. Fenner), the principal of the School of Mines (Mr. F. W. Reid), Messrs. S. Perry (representing the Iron Trade Employers' Association), Thompson Green, M.P. (the Metal Trades Federation of S.A.), G. W. Dobberfield (the Amalgamated Society of Engineers), E. S. Moulden (the S.A. Institute of Engineers), and J. D. T. Walters (instructor in charge of fitting and turning department).

The President stated that the object the council had in view in forming such a board was to secure the active co-operation of those engaged in the trades. The committee's expert advice and assistance would be of great service to the council.

The following resolution was carried unanimously:—"That in the opinion of this board the whole system of education in the State should be co-ordinated, so that the best results may obtain, and that the increased co-ordination of the technical schools and the workshops is heartily affirmed as a necessity for the future welfare of the State."