

Melbourne Argus
July 25. 16

"A UNIVERSITY MATTER."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS.

Sir.—Referring to your subleader, permit me to close the correspondence by repeating that there is now nothing personal at issue, and no motive for punishing the University. My own goodwill to it has been shown.

The question is purely whether that institution fulfils the objects of benefactors with definite ideas. If not they may think that other institutions do so.

The University, by refusing details, is itself presumably satisfied that its own system and methods are the best for all its purposes, and should not be a subject of profane suggestion.—Yours, &c.,

F. P. BRETT.

South Yarra, July 26.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS.

Sir.—Mr. Brett is quite right in saying that he stated nothing to the Schools' Board, and I do not doubt his assertion that he did not know one existed. What I said at the meeting of the council last Monday was that when the matter came before the Schools' Board Mr. Brett's letter stated that his son had failed by only one mark. I then asked if Mr. Brett knew since that his son had failed by six marks, and not one. When Mr. Brett's earlier correspondence was brought before the council it referred the matter to the Schools' Board, which is the proper body to advise the council on all matters concerning the public examinations. The University Schools' Board contains an equal number of representatives of the University, the Education department, and the registered schools, and was instituted a few years ago to manage these examinations.—Yours, &c.,

L. A. ADAMSON.

Wesley College, July 26.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS.

Sir.—It seems to me that Mr. Brett is tilting, not at the mode of conducting the examinations of the Melbourne University, so much as at the essential nature of examinations in general, which must always make them a rather untrue test of the knowledge of the young student. But until someone, possibly Mr. Brett himself, devises a practicable substitute for the written paper as the touchstone of learning, the impersonal nature of the examination must remain as its strongest recommendation, and that implies that a definite pass standard must be adhered to.—Yours, &c.,

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July 26.

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Y 25, 1916.

A CANCELLED LEGACY.

£10,000 INVOLVED.

A UNIVERSITY MATTER.

At the meeting of the council of the University of Melbourne yesterday afternoon, the vice-chancellor (Dr. J. H. MacFarland) presiding, a letter was read, in which it was stated that for certain reasons a legacy to the University of £10,000, which had been provided for in a will, had been cancelled. The letter was the outcome of correspondence which, for the information of the members of the council, was summarised by the registrar (Mr. J. P. Bainbridge), as follows:—

In March last Mr. F. P. Brett, a member of a well-known firm of solicitors, wrote to Professor Laby concerning his son's failure in senior public physics, criticising the paper as most difficult, stating the possibility of his son's abandoning the University course, and asking if the examination result were final. He further expressed the view that, considering the different temperaments of boys, a candidate should not be failed on a narrow margin.

Professor Laby was not one of the examiners concerned, and handed the letter to the registrar.

The registrar forwarded a sympathetic reply, but pointed out that with the large numbers of candidates to be dealt with, and the need for prompt publication of results, it was necessary to deal with candidates on hard and fast lines, without considering the particular circumstances of individuals, but that naturally a candidate on the border line received special attention from the second examiner.

Mr. Brett, in replying, repeated his criticism of the paper as being "difficult to the border of unfairness," he rejected as unsatisfactory the explanation based on numbers and time available; he placed the following construction on the registrar's explanation—"a cast-iron numerical standard is fixed—regardless of the idiosyncrasies of examiners or examiners . . . and there is no machinery for appeal, revision, or consideration in any one case;" and added that he could "imagine nothing more calculated to discourage in an institution supposed to encourage." He added, further, that he might publish the regis-

Registrar's letter, "and thus I understand our desire to sympathize, but my son fortunately is able to go elsewhere."

The registrar replied that Mr. Brett was well aware that his previous letter was not written for publication, and that if it were published he would reply by publishing Mr. Brett's letter, and would reserve his comments thereon till then.

Mr. Brett, in reply, accused the registrar of ignorance and of having forgotten himself and his position, and informed him that his comments would not be of importance. He forwarded a series of questions to which he asked for replies, and asked that these and the whole correspondence be submitted to the University Council, and reaffirmed his intention of publishing the correspondence. The first of these questions was, "Who are the examiners, and what is their age, qualification, and experience?" and the last, "If time does not permit a slow examinee to attempt all questions in a difficult scientific paper, is any consideration allowed for this?"

The whole correspondence was submitted and read to the council at its meeting on the 3rd April, when the council resolved that it would not continue the correspondence.

The letter, which came before the council for the first time yesterday, was as follows:—

"South Yarra, July 4, 1916.

"The Registrar, the University of Melbourne, Carlton.

"Dear Sir,—Referring to previous correspondence, on what it seems to show I have received authority to cancel one legacy to the University of £10,000, on account of—

"1. The system of imposing severe examinations for entrance.

"2. The inelastic methods of testing at these examinations.

"3. The refusal to give information, coupled with the tone of your second letter.

"A much larger one (which I was instrumental in obtaining) may also be cancelled, as whatever may be the proper standard for obtaining degrees, the donor's intention was to encourage young students generally to acquire scientific knowledge, and not to benefit students specially adapted for examinations.

"Before taking any further steps please let me know whether the council wishes to add anything further in explanation, or to give any further information.—Yours truly,

"F. P. BRETT."

Professor Sir Harry Allen said that it was a question whether it would not be possible to do more than was done in the way of avoiding the hardship which occasionally in examinations fell upon particular candidates. He would like to see an advisory body appointed, under whose supervision the public examination might be regarded as one whole. By that means a candidate would not be rejected for the loss of one small point. Personally, he did not believe that Mr. Brett would do what he threatened to do. The feeling of anger would pass away when the opportunity for calmer reflection came.

Dr. Leeper said that hitherto the subject had been dealt with by correspondence only. Much harm might be done to the university if Mr. Brett were allowed to labour under his existing sense of injury. The letter showed that Mr. Brett was unwilling to take the action which he threatened. He was a reasonable man, and some member of the council who knew him might be asked to consult with Mr. Brett, and point out to him the difficulties involved.

Mr. L. A. Adamson.—Mr. Brett's son was a member of a boat's crew which was defeated in the "head of the river" races in 1915. Mr. Brett wrote to the press, impugning the umpire's decision.

Mr. Justice Higgins.—I may say that I know Mr. Brett, but I would not care to expostulate with him concerning the subject before us.

Mr. Adamson.—The question was referred by the University Council to the Schools' Board for its information, and when it came before the Board Mr. Brett stated emphatically that his son had failed for the want of one point only.

The Registrar.—The number of marks required to pass in the subject of physics at the examination in question was 36. Mr. Brett's son obtained 30 marks.

Mr. Adamson.—Does Mr. Brett understand that his son lost one-sixth of the marks?

The Registrar.—He was furnished with a copy of the report showing the number of marks obtained by his son, and the standard for a pass. Mr. Brett replied by declaring that the University had "doctored" the report.

Mr. Adamson.—Oh! that settles it.

Professor Harrison Moore.—Are we not making a mistake, and missing the point, by discussing the question of the pass standard and the marks obtained? The situation would have been the same if the boy had failed by one mark instead of six. (Hear, hear.) From a professional point of view the admissions implied in Mr. Brett's letter are serious.

Dr. MacFarland.—I should think so.

Mr. Justice Higgins.—He has influenced one legacy, and he knows of another.

On the motion of Dr. MacFarland, the correspondence was handed to the press.

It was thereupon unanimously agreed to proceed with the next business on the notice-paper.

Advertiser 16.8.16

BOTANIC GARDEN DIRECTORSHIP.

QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT.

Replying to a question by Mr. Hague in the House of Assembly on Tuesday, the Commissioner of Crown Lands (Hon. C. Goode) said he had nothing to add to his previous answer when he said that a "statement" made in asking a question was a half truth.

Mr. Hague—What were the other terms alluded to by the Commissioner and laid down by the Government with regard to the calling for applications and appointment of a director by the Botanic Garden Board?

The Minister—That the professor of botany have control of the museum, herbarium, and such portion of the library as is concerned with scientific botany, and be responsible, through the Department of Agriculture, to the Minister controlling that department; and that the Mylor orchard be placed under the control of the Department of Agriculture. The board did not accept the suggestions.

Mr. Hague—Since the Government claim the right to appoint a director for the Botanic Garden, will the Commissioner state under which clause of the Civil Service Act they have that power?

The Minister—The whole Act deals with the appointment and disposal of Civil servants. The Government are the only authority to make appointments under the Act.

Mr. Hague—On what grounds did Dr. Richards base his opinion?

The Minister—Because the director of the Botanic Garden is in the first schedule of the Act, which enumerates officers in the first class in the Civil service, and because of the provisions of clauses 7 and 8 of the Civil Service Act.

Mr. Hague—If the Government claim the power to appoint the director, do they also intend to appoint all the other officials and employes?

The Minister—No other appointments are at present under consideration.

Mr. Hague—If the Civil Servants Act of 1874 overrides the Botanic Garden Act with regard to the appointment of the director, does it override it in other matters?

The Minister—No.

Rejoinder
18.8.16

THE BOTANIC GARDEN.

To the Editor.

Sir—We regret to see that in the discussion that has taken place with regard to the directorship of the Botanic Garden there has been a tendency to make the attack on Professor Osborn personal, to the extent of questioning his professional qualifications and the efficiency of the Botanical Department over which he has control. This is much to be regretted, and seems to us, his colleagues on the Faculty of Science, so very unjust that we should like, with your permission, to say a few words in his defence.

In 1912, in return for a subsidy to the University of £600 per annum from the Department of Agriculture, the University agreed to found and equip a department of botany, its services to be "available for consultation by the Department of Agriculture in such problems of plant pathology as arise from time to time in connection with rural industries." Under this arrangement, Professor Osborn was appointed in 1912, on the recommendation of a committee of selection in England, of whom Sir Francis Darwin was one; and all those familiar with Professor Osborn's work since his arrival in South Australia will agree that the selection has been a fortunate one for the University, and that Professor Osborn has proved a capable and enthusiastic teacher and organizer. It was never intended that the proportion of his time that Professor Osborn should devote to the work of the Department of Agriculture was to be the same as the proportion of his salary represented by the special Government subsidy. His first duty was to found, organize, and maintain a University department of botany; and the Minister recognised that "only a moiety of the time of the Professor of Botany could be devoted to the department's work." But in spite of the fact that teaching work and the organization of a new laboratory have necessarily taken up a large part of his time, Professor Osborn has already, in the short time he has been with us, done other work of scientific importance. As one result of his efforts the University Herbarium, which is absolutely necessary for the identification of specimens, has been reorganized, and is now the only one

in the State properly arranged for consultation, and maintained in working efficiency. It is constantly growing by collaboration and exchange with other herbaria. It is frequently consulted by local botanists, and by visitors from other States. A considerable amount of research work has been done, and for the short time that Professor Osborn has been here he has published quite a considerable number of papers. Researches are at present in progress in the laboratory on take-all fungus, a canker of apple and pear trees, a root rot of lucerne, besides other more technical problems. In addition to this, all enquiries submitted by the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Brands Department, Department of Chemistry, and numerous individuals have received attention. In all 121 plant pathological specimens have been reported on to various Government departments and correspondents; and 564 specimens of weed plants have been received for examination. Of these 53 consisted of leaf or root fragments, or were otherwise too incomplete for botanical determination, but the remaining 511 have been named, and information furnished on their value or otherwise as asked. A paper by the Professor, read before the Royal Society, records some 40 species of fungi not previously noted in the State. Altogether the record of his work is such that it appears to be the height of injustice that questions should be asked in Parliament which suggest that Professor Osborn has proved either incompetent or inefficient in the work with which he has been entrusted.

With regard to the general question of the control of the Botanical Garden, we should like to say that if the State spends, as it has been doing, from £8,000 to £10,000 per annum on the Botanical Garden, while it spends only £12,000 on its University, then it has a right to insist that the Botanical Garden should be something more than mere pleasure grounds. There is no reason why good scientific work, helpful to the progress of the State should not be done at the Garden without diminishing in the least its popularity as a pleasure resort; and the famous Kew Gardens, the most excellent of their kind, are a notable illustration of such a combination. The direction of these gardens, we might mention, has always been in the hands of a scientific botanist. Professor Osborn has indicated in a memorandum to the Government the ways in which the Botanical Garden may be made more efficient from a scientific point of view, and there can be no doubt that, if the Garden is to be something more than a mere pleasure resort, the general lines of progress he has pointed out are the ones that must be followed.—We are, Sir, &c., E. C. STIRLING, KERR GRANT, R. W. CHAPMAN, EDWARD H. RENNIE.

Register

18. 8. 16.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE AND UNIVERSITY.

Removals Recommended.

The first progress report of the North Terrace Reserves and Railway Centres Royal Commission was laid before Parliament on Thursday. The questions into which the commission had to enquire were (a) the allotment and future use of the public reserves on North terrace; (b) the railway traffic arrangements in the metropolitan area; and (c) the need of exercising economy and obtaining efficiency in the disposition and management of the railway centres of the State. A request from the Government that early attention should be given to the question of the adequacy of the area possible to be allotted on North terrace for University purposes led to attention being focussed first upon it. The evidence showed that the area dedicated for University purposes was $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres, and the possible area available for extension, excluding any portion of the Exhibition Building, was approximately five acres. An additional area of approximately two acres, occupied by the Destitute Asylum, could be allotted, and by that means the whole area available could be made approximately $11\frac{1}{2}$ acres. "The evidence tendered by the