News 9-3-26

ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY

Comparison with Oxford

NEW TERM TODAY

N. 9

The first term of the 1926 year of the University of Adelaide began this morning. Students are assiduously cramming for the supplemsntary examinations which will take place throughout this week. These examinations constitute a second lease of life for those who were unsuccessful at the annual examinations.

Although the term began today lectures do not start until March 15. In the interim supplementary examinations are engaging the attention of students and professors. The latter are also taking the opportunity of making the better acquaintance of their prospective charges and to fit in times for lectures, classes, and experiments.

The august precincts of the office of the Registrar today resemble a miniature post office and banking chamber. Although University courses are invariably decided upon months before the closing date for entries it is curious that the necessary preliminaries such as filling in entrance forms and paying subscriptions are not infrequently left until the last minute.

The number of entrants this year is not yet available, but it is confidently expected that the total will approximate that of last year when there were 1,486, exclusive of the Conservatorium of Music. The number of students enrolled in arts was 595, of which 229 were members of the fair sex. Science attracted 67 men and 13 women; law 80 men and eight women; medicine 132 men and seven women; applied science 154 men; dentistry 28 men and two women; music 12 men and eight women; commercial 288 men, 42 women, pharmacy 52 men and one woman; and massage five men and four women.

Life at Oxford

University life at Oxford is quite unlike that of Adelaide. Oxford is a university of about 2,000 to 3,000 men living in colleges, and there are few non-college men—probably not more than 200—whereas in Adelaide the students all live in private homes or boarding houses. At Oxford nearly all the teaching is done by the colleges and not by the university staff, while in Adelaide the whole of the teaching is done by the university staff.

The experience of a new man going up to Oxford is rather a trying one. Most of the large colleges have public school traditions. For instance, Eton men will generally go to Christ Church, New, or Magdalen. Before one goes into residence caution money (about £40 to £50) has to be paid as a guarantee of good behaviour. The student is required to buy his room furniture at a valuation, probably about £50, and it is an unwritten law that he must purchase all the furniture of the last occupant. If he is lucky he will arrange for a senior man to put him down for a particularly nice room. The average undergraduate gets a bedroom and a study often with great historical traditions of men who have occupied them.

The student goes up in the middle of October, and his first experience is hall dinner, at which there are about 120 men. The seniors take no notice of him and he gets pretty much of a worm. He is lucky if he meets one or two school friends. In the evening the college "bloods" and the captains of boats, rugger, athletics and so on go round from study to study ferreting out likely material to see if it is of any value to the college or is merely studious. The following day there is a Don rag when the student appears before the college tutors to arrange about his work.

Getting Acquainted

The majority of the men are commoners paying full fees for all tuition, but every college has a large number of scholarship men who are expected to give it its greatest credit in examinations. Conditions vary much in colleges. Some have great traditions for work such as Balliol and New College; others will be particularly noted for different sports such as rowing or rugger. Men of various interests naturally go to the college which best suits them.

In a few days the students settle down and get to know the men, one of the principal means in some colleges being an opening dinner. At Magdalen it takes the form of a Sunday night dessert and wine supper, where members of the college toast one another. Very soon a man is immersed in lectures and in university games which are regarded as of much more importance than they are in Australia. The evenings are spent in social intercourse, where men of every taste and thought meet.

Oxford is tremendously cosmopolitan, particularly since the introduction of Rhodes scholarships and one may meet at a social evening Canadians, South Africans, Australians, West Indians, Negroes, Hindoos, Germans, Poles, Finns, Russians, and Italians.

In term time the Oxford University is much less a working place than the University of Adelaide. The object of the 24 weeks a year spent at Oxford is to get to know other men as well as to learn what to read, and for nearly every vacation parties are made up to do the really serious work. The college libraries are emptied and little groups of friends, armed with piles of volumes, make for the quiet districts of England and the Continent.

The three years slip away quickly. The final examination is in June of the third year. A few men who read for classical honors may stay for four years, but for most the undergraduate life ends in three. The graduate of his stays on has no real place either with the Dons or the undergraduates of his college. Men go down with a passionate love of their university and college with friendships and tastes formed for life, but to go back again is almost a sadness because Oxford exists primarily for the benefit and for the happiness of young manhood.

Adv 10-3-26

WOOD DUST.

EFFECT UPON WORKERS.

PROFESSOR CLELAND'S INVESTIGATIONS.

An investigation by Professor Cleland into the injurious effect of wood dust upon workers indicates that the danger may be lessened by the fitting up of effective exhausts in factories to carry away the dust. People sensitive to exposure to dust of red pine and blackwood should avoid such exposure.

Some time ago representatives of the carpenters, coachbuilders, timber workers, and furniture trades waited upon the Chief Secretary (Hon. J. J. Jelley) and pointed out that a number of employes suffered from blackwood eczema, nasal catarrh, and other complaints, as a result of handling and working with various timbers. The Government deemed an investigation necessary, and Professor J. B. Cleland, of the Adelaide University, who had had experience in research work connected with similar complaints, was requested to report on the matter. Professor Cleland has been assisted by Dr. D. L. Barlow and Dr. H. C. Nott (honorary radiologist at the Adelaide Hospital), and the assistant radiologist (Mr. H. C. Marshall).

The Minister of Industry (Hon. L. L. Hill) has now received Professor Cleland's report. This states:—The enquiries showed that the ill effect attributed to working with various woods might be divided into three categories:—(1) Ill effects, chiefly mechanical, due to the inhalation of fine particles of wood dust into the nostrils and upper respiratory passages. (2) The occurrence of asthmatical attacks after working with certain timbers, especially blackwood and red pine. (3) The occurrence of an irritating dermatitis, usually associated with blackwood.

Dust in the Nostrils.

Referring to the mechanical ill effects of fine particles of wood dust in the nostrils, the report stated that any wood dust present in a sufficiently fine state to gain ready access to the nostrils might be a source of mechanical annoyance and give rise to a discharge of mucus. Some wood dusts were more irritating than others. The establishment of proper exhausts would reduce the annoyance The application of vaseline to the nostrils or of liquid paraffin tended to lessen the irritation when exhausts were not used Similarly very light plugging of the nostrils with cotton wool, a plug light enough to allow the air easily to pass through, would prevent irritation. Gentle douching of the nose when work was over would tend to remove the wood particles and let the irritated mucous membrances return more quickly to their normal condition. No evidence had been submitted that the irritation from wood dusts persisted longer than a day or so, the symptoms disappearing as the particles were expelled in mucus. There was no evidence of any permanent injury to mucous membranes or of any special liability to pulmonary disease. The situation could be easily controlled by means of suitable exhaust apparatus.

Asthmatic Attacks and "Hay Fever."

A certain number of cases of asthma and of patients with modified asthmatic symptoms were known in the case of men engaged in the timber industry, and of others not so engaged, but who had worked with woods as a hobby. These asthmatics might be divided into two classes, viz., those who had become sensitive to some particular protein substance, such as the pollen of certain grasses, and who as a result were now unduly sensitive to mechanical causes which had little effect upon ordinary people. These patients would often have relatives who were asthmatic or suffered from hay fever, or who were subject to attacks of urticaria (an inflamatory skin disease). Exposure to any mechanical irritation, as, for instance, dust in the nostrils, might precipitate an attack of the complaint. Wood-dust inhaled in this way, whether from blackwood or from red pine, or from any other wood, might result in an attack. Similarly dusting books on a shelf might precipitate an attack, as might the inhalation of any kind of pollen. Probably the majority of the patients suffering from asthmatic and hay fever attacks, attributed to wood-dusts, were individuals belonging to this category. It was unwise for such individuals to be exposed to any kind of irritating dust. If a proper exhaust apparatus would not reduce the dust sufficiently to prevent attacks, or if the attacks occurred under circumstances where exhausts could not exercise a protective role, and if the medical attendant was unable to ascertain the original sensitising substance, and bring about desensitisation, then obviously the individual must avoid exposing himself to the risk of precipitating an attack by exposure to dust of any kind anywhere.

Sensitisation.

In a smaller number of cases the sensitisation was apparently due to the wood dust itself, the sensitisation resulting from some idiocyncrasy on the part of the individual. Here again the same remarks applied, and the soundest solution was for the individual to abstain from running the risk of exposure.

It was not always possible, however, for the victims of these asthmatic attacks, whatever their original cause, to prevent themselves being exposed to wood dust. Several volunteers who had suffered from a good deal of inconvenience from asthmatic attacks following on exposure to red pine or blackwood dust, had been subjected to X-ray exposures, usually at intervals of about a week. All the individuals concerned experienced some amelioration of their condition in spite of further exposure to dust. They considered it worth while to attend weekly for the necessary exposure. Though a cure in these cases could not be expected, it seemed unquestionable that such X-ray treatment lessened decidedly the discomforts experienced by the patients.

Skin Rashes.

The question of skin rashes, more particularly those attributed to blackwood, had given rise to much difficulty in interpretation. From time to time in certain individuals an irritating eczematous dermatitis developed in the exposed parts of the forearms and face, especially on the parts which sweated freely in hot summer weather. The experimenters, however, were unable to produce any inflammatory reaction at all on themselves by applying pads of various sawdusts mixed with various fluid substances such as lanoline, spirit, weak acid, &c., or with extracts of various wood dusts. Various tests were carried out to see whether this form of dermatitis might be an expression of sensitisation to, say, blackwood or red pine. Although at first sight it was expected that this would be the explanation of the rash, they had been unable by skin tests to say that such was likely to be the case.

They were driven thus to the conclusion that in some individuals during hot weather, especially if perspiring freely, fine particles of blackwood dust were capable in some way of causing dermatitis. It was well known that some individuals were more susceptible than others. Thus repeated exposure to formalin might start up a dermatits in one person, whereas in another more extensive and more repeated exposures might be quite without result. Something similar occurred in the case of those men who developed a blackwood dermatitis. A blackwod dermatitis did exist, although cases of it were not numerous, and only a small percentage of those working with the wood developed the rash. It did not seem clear, as far as Adelaide was concerned, that other wood dusts were also responsible for rashes. Once such a rash developed, removal from further exposure should lead to a fairly rapid recovery. Persistence of the rash for a long period of time would suggest either error in attributing it to the blackwood dust, or that some other irritating factor was allowed to operate in the patient's home or in his surroundings, which prevented a return to the normal condition. Proper exhausts should lessen the liability for the sawdust to cause this irritation. They were not satisfied that greasy applications such as vaseline or lanoline, to the parts likely to be affected would prevent the occurrence of the rash. It was possible that hardening of the skin by means of methylated spirits might lessen the liability.

X-Ray Treatment.

During the course of the enquiry, Dr. L. Bull, director of the Adelaide Hospital laboratory, informed them that he had at one time suffered from a formalin dermatitis very similar to blackwood dermatitis, which resisted all forms of treatment until he tried X-rays. At this time a case of blackwood dermatitis was brought under notice where there was an extensive rash on the forearms and the face was also affected. The individual concerned was anxious to continue this work with blackwood so as to finish the job he was dealing with. By arrangement with Dr. Nott, areas of skin, first on the forearm and then on the face, were subjected to X-ray exposure. In spite of being severe, the dermatitis soon cleared up in the areas exposed to the rays. Moreover, healthy skin areas exposed to X-rays and a few days afterwards exposed to blackwood dust, failed to show a dermatitis. In this particular patient it was clear that a severe blackwood dermatitis was rapidly cured by suitable treatment with the X-rays, and that by X-ray treatment beforehand blackwood dermatitis could be prevented from occurring for some time. No danger could follow the very small doses of X-rays required in these cases.

The Responsibility of the Industry.

The question to be considered was whether this dermatitis was a true trade dermatitis or not, and also how could cases of dermatitis due to blackwood be distinguished from other skin rashes due to other causes. It was necessary to point out that the dermatitis was attributable to an undue sensibility on the part of the patient. When blackwood dermatitis first developed in a patient, the industry should be responsible for restoring him to the normal condition. He should receive such treatment, including rest from work, as might be deemed necessary to enable a quick return to the normal state. Such treatment should not be necessary after removal from the exciting cause for a period of longer than a few weeks (say six). If a rash continued after a period of two months, they would be inclined to view the case as not having been blackwood rash originally, or as no longer having any association with the patient's occupation. It must be the patient's duty to see that in future he was not exposed to conditions where blackwood was used, and where the dust was likely to affect him. This susceptible person could not have any permanent claim upon the industry on account of his unusual susceptibility. Undue susceptibility was a fault in the individual's make-up rather than the result of some special irritant in the wood dust. Inasmuch as the persons who were going to develop a rash from blackwood could not be recognised beforehand, each patient in his initial attack should be entitled to be returned to a state of normal health at the cost of the industry. Thereafter it was the business of the patient to protect himself.

Summary.

(1) Mechanical irritation of the nostrils could be reduced to a negligible quantity by the fitting of effective exhausts.

(2) Asthmatic attacks might occur in sensitive people when exposed to the dust of red pine or blackwood. Such individuals should avoid exposure to dust of any kind as far as possible. Suitable X-ray treatment reduced the severity of the conditions decidedly, as it did in asthma due to other causes.

(3) In occasional cases a dermatitis resulted from exposure to wood dust, blackwood dust in particular. This was due to a special idioyncrasy on the part of the patient rather than to any special irritant in the wood concerned. Experiments seemed to show that a true blackwood dermatitis could be rapidly cured by suitable X-ray exposures, and that similar exposures might prevent the dermatitis developing for some while afterwards.

Reg 10-3-26

WOODWORKERS' DISEASES.

Report by Professor Cleland.

R. 10.

In October, 1924, representatives of the Carpenters, Coachbuilders, Timber Workers, and Furniture Trades Unions waited upon the Chief Secretary (Hon. J. J. Jelley), and pointed out that a number of employes suffered from blackwood eczema, nasal catarrh, and other complaints as a result of handling and working with various timbers. The Government deemed an investigation necessary, and Professor J. B. Cleland, of the Adelaide University, who had had experience in research work connected with somewhat similar complaints, was requested to investigate and report on the matter.

The professor was assisted in his investigations by Dr. D. L. Barlow, Dr. H. C. Nott (honorary radiologist at the Adelaide Hospital), and Mr. H. C. Marshall (assistant radiologist). The Minister of Industry (Hon. L. L. Hill) has now received Professor Cleland's report. It states that any wood dust present in works in a sufficiently fine state of division to gain ready access to the nostrils might be a source of mechanical annoyance and give rise to a discharge of mucus. The establishment of proper exhausts would reduce the annoyance by fine wood dusts, and the application of vaseline to the nostrils would tend to lessen the irritation when exhausts were not used. Similarly, very light plugging of the nostrils with cotton wool—a plug light enough to allow the air easily to pass through—would prevent irritation from the dust. Gentle touching of the nose when work was over would tend to remove the wood particles and let the irritated mucous membranes return more quickly to their normal condition. No evidence had been submitted that the irritation from the wood dusts persisted longer than a day or so, the symptoms disappearing as the particles were expelled in mucus, and there was no evidence of any permanent injury to the mucous membranes or of any special liability to pulmonary disease.

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