

# SHOULD SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS BE ABOLISHED?

## University Professor Favours the Method Many Neglect Valuable Mental Faculties

The motion placed before the Interstate Teachers' Conference in Sydney that "This conference urges all the States to strive for the abolition of the system of external examinations in primary and secondary schools," was freely discussed by educationalists in Adelaide yesterday. Professor Kerr Grant, of the Adelaide University, held decided views on the subject.

He said that while tests were necessary to decide whether or not students were fitted to enter upon or proceed further with a course of higher academic instruction or professional training, the authorities should see that such tests took a form which imposed the least possible restriction upon the freedom of teacher and student alike.

It might be claimed that the written examination was a method of testing, and, on the whole, of testing fairly, certain mental capabilities and the possession of a certain type of knowledge on the part of the examinee. In a long experience as a teacher he could recall few cases in which the result of an examination had conflicted with a considered estimate of the student's ability and proficiency on the subject of the examination.

### MAINLY MEMORY TESTS

An examination mainly tested the power of acquiring information from the written page or spoken deliverance, of retaining, and rapidly reproducing the information thus acquired.

On the other hand, said Professor Grant, the objection was urged that whatever value might be assigned to the acquirement of knowledge and the cultivation of the memory, it would be ill to obtain that value at the expense of ignoring and neglecting other and more valuable mental faculties—imagination, originality, or inventiveness, independence of thought, and initiative in action, the capacity for persistent self-sustained effort and creative or constructive mental activity.

### TOO MANY SUBJECTS

None of these qualities, far outweighing in importance the mere power of assimilating facts, could be satisfactorily tested by the written examination; nor was it likely that their development in the mind of the pupil would be encouraged by educational methods dominated by the examination system.

The inclusion of too many subjects in the curriculum not only put too severe a strain upon the adolescent minds of scholars, but entirely prevented their exercise in more spontaneous, although none the less educational activities.

Examinations undoubtedly loomed too largely in the educational horizon. Every effort should be made by all concerned to prevent enlargement, and if possible, bring about reduction of what was baneful in its influence. That could be done not merely by action directed against further expansion of the system, but by upholding the idea of true education—the provision for such an environment for the growing mind of the child or the adolescent as would promote spontaneous and well-balanced growth of every mental faculty.

### CRAMMING INSTITUTIONS

Another teacher of much experience in South Australia, said that the question of the value of examinations was an ever-green one, and every one realized that external examinations could be harmful, especially when they dominated the daily teaching in the schools.

Whenever that happened the teacher was continually working with the one aim of bringing pupils up to the standard of securing passes, and interest in studies became secondary instead of being the prime driving force in their education.

In schools where examinations were considered the sole tests, the tendency was for them to become cramming institutions. He thought, however, that teachers to-day were better educated and better trained for their work than they were in the past, and they realized more and more their duty to the children. In consequence, the examination was being put into the background, and the interests of the child given first consideration.

### TEACHER AS FINAL JUDGE

His experience in handling large staffs and numbers of children led him to think that the present-day teacher and the examination was in the background. So long as that was the case, external examinations could not do very much harm.

He believed that in time the standard of training given to teachers would be such that the public would be prepared to hand over to them the final judgment on the work of the pupils. That would mean a very drastic reform in a State like South Australia, where examination certificates were demanded by the University, the public services, and all the more important commercial and industrial concerns.

In American schools a system of internal examination had been in operation for many years, and was gradually being extended. Candidates for the universities were examined in the schools on their work for the whole year, instead of being made to pass or fail on the results of the efforts of a few hours.

### A DEFINITE GOAL

Another prominent educationist, when questioned, said it appeared to him that it was not so much the examination system which had failed as the type of question which was frequently set, and the qualifications of the examiner to realize what was the proper standard to expect from pupils at certain ages.

In any case, standards must be set so that the pupil had, at each stage of his life, some definite goal to work for. Without that there would be a lessening of effort and a decrease in the standard of efficiency.

As far as the system of examinations in South Australia was concerned, observed this educationist, the University was not anxious to dominate the teaching of the school. The committee which set the papers for the public examinations consisted of University professors, lecturers, representatives of the Education Department, and teachers of private schools and colleges.

Whenever alterations were made in the syllabus, the professors of the University were ready to meet in conference the heads of schools and the actual teachers of the subjects concerned, and suggestions from the teachers had invariably received sympathetic consideration. The examinations, however, were conducted entirely by the University.

### TEACHERS HAVE HOLIDAY IN SYDNEY

### Teachers Have Holiday in Sydney

SYDNEY, Wednesday.

The business of the conference having been completed, delegates of the State School Teachers' Federations will spend a day or two in visiting places of interest in and round Sydney, and will be entertained on trips on the harbour.

The council of the federation will meet to attend to the resolutions adopted by the conference.

### CANADIAN EDUCATIONIST

### Report on Australian Tour

Near the end of last year Professor W. F. Osborne, of the University of Manitoba, visited Australia and lectured in most of the capital cities under direction of the National Council of Education and the Overseas Education League. His report on the tour, with an introductory note by the executive secretary of the National Council of Education (Major F. J. Ney), has been received in Adelaide. In the foreword Major Ney says:—

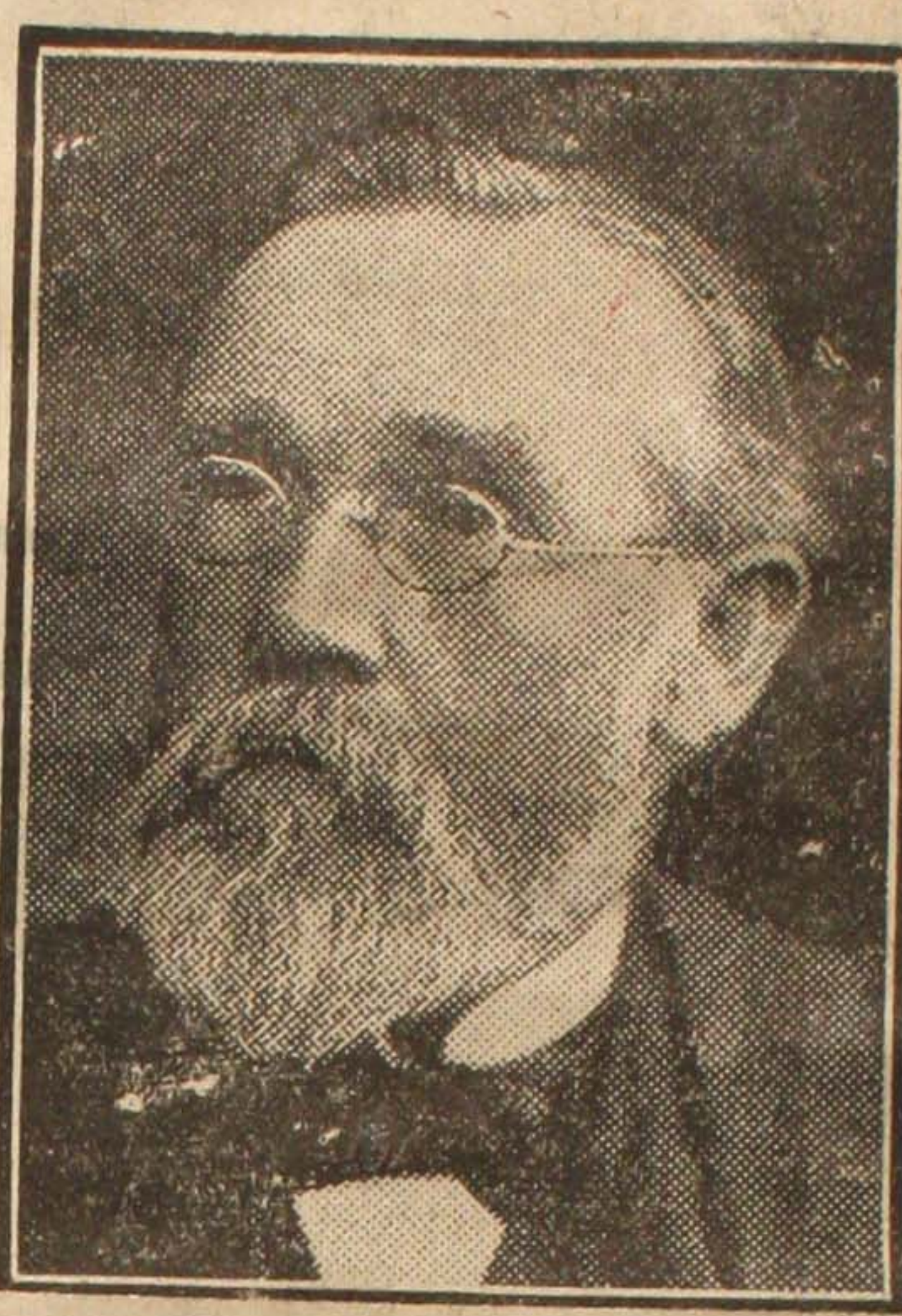
"The co-operation of the British dominions in the Pacific is a matter which must appeal to the imagination of the citizens of these three dominions. In such co-operation there must essentially be mutual gain.

"The education systems of Australia and New Zealand differ very considerably from those of Canada. The exchange of opinion and ideas, therefore, which the Vancouver conference will make possible, should be of great interest and advantage to all.

"Through the development of those high ideals common to the people of these three British countries, there must also be advantage to the world at large. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the Vancouver conference will witness the beginning of closer relations between Canada and the dominions in the South Pacific. In so ably representing the council's purpose and hopes in this respect during the conduct of his mission, Professor Osborne has rendered a very notable service."

Professor Osborne reports that he spent about eight weeks in Australia and New Zealand, and delivered about 36 addresses. In Australia he approached the Federal and three State Governments. During his visit Lord Mayor's committees were formed in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide.

Professor Walter Howchin, F.G.S., of Hyde Park, will be 85 to-morrow. Born at Norwich, England, on January 12, 1845, he is a son of the Rev. R. Howchin. He was for many years associated with the University of Adelaide, and is one of the oldest and most eminent scientists who have lived and labored in South Australia. He is one of the greatest authorities on geology in the State, and has achieved world renown through his research work concerning the glacial period. Professor Howchin was lecturer on mineralogy at the South Australian School of Mines from 1899 to 1904, from 1902 he was lecturer in geology and palaeontology at the University, and in 1918 he re-



Professor W. Howchin.

ceived the appointment of honorary professor of geology. He resigned that position in 1920, when he was permitted to retain the title of honorary professor. Subsequently he was appointed Emeritus professor. Professor Howchin was for some time a Methodist minister, but later devoted his attention to geology. Australian science has benefited much by his researches, which have been perpetuated in a series of articles which have had a wide and appreciated circulation in scientific circles. Among other positions which he filled for a number of years was the secretaryship of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, and also the Adelaide Children's Hospital. The Clarke Memorial medal was awarded to him by the Royal Society of New South Wales; the Geological Society in London specially recognised his work; and the coveted Ferdinand von Mueller medal was bestowed upon him by the Association for the Advancement of Science. Since his retirement from active work in connection with the University, Professor Howchin has continued to follow the latest discoveries in palaeontology and geology. He is the author of "The Geology of South Australia" and "A Geography of South Australia and the Northern Territory," and of numerous papers on palaeontology and geology.

# EXPLORING CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

## MR. C. T. MADIGAN MAY BE PARTY LEADER

### AIR SURVEY FIRST

Following the announcement by the president of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Mr. A. A. Simpson, C.M.G.) at the end of May last, that it was intended to send a properly organised expedition to explore unknown portions of Central Australia, Mr. C. T. Madigan is now awaiting the arrival of a suitable plane, with the idea of first making an aerial reconnaissance of the land to be explored.

Mr. Madigan, in his lecture on Central Australia, under the auspices of the Royal Geographical Society in Adelaide, at



MR. C. T. MADIGAN, B.A., B.Sc.

which the Governor (Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, V.C.) was present, revealed that there was an almost unexplored area in the south-eastern corner of Central Australia, equal in size to Tasmania.

### PRELIMINARY FLIGHT

The object of the reconnaissance is to find out whether it would be worth while to send the proposed expedition, which, the society hoped, would be led by Mr. Madigan, to explore the region on foot by camel.

The preliminary flight will enable Mr. Madigan to decide whether the nature of the country warrants a closer examination.

Arrangements cannot be completed at the moment because of the absence of definite knowledge whether the plane will be available.

There has been talk of Capt. Grosvenor (A.D.C. to the Governor) piloting Mr. Madigan in the interior; but, after Capt. Grosvenor's recent experience on his attempted flight to Darwin, it is realized that it would be useless to make the trip in hot weather, as the terrific dust storms make conditions impossible for flying.

### RAIN NEEDED FIRST

After a good fall of rain would be the best time to make the flight, "if they ever get any rain up there," said Mr. Madigan.

He thought the trip should be undertaken at the end of the summer, the most favourable months being March or April, when rain is supposed to fall there, or even during May or June, in early winter.

Mr. Madigan said he was expecting to make the trip as soon as arrangements could be finalized, and he was hopeful that the plane would be available for departure at the most opportune time.

### EXPEDITION AROUSES INTEREST

The proposed expedition has aroused great interest among South Australians, and it is realized that to secure proper equipment to explore the largest remaining blank space on the map of Australia is no easy task.

Arrangements have had to be made with the Federal Government, from whom it is expected support will be forthcoming, as anything of economic value which might be discovered, must benefit the Commonwealth, to which the unexplored territory belongs.

Mr. Madigan considers there are unlimited possibilities for mineral development in that region and oases capable of settlement might be discovered.