ADV. 10-8-29

STATE DEPRESSION

A Puzzle to Professor Copland

Professor D. B. Copland, Professor of Commerce at the University of Melbourne, arrived in Adelaide yesterday morning. He will return to the Victorian capital this afternoon.

When interviewed, Professor Copland stated that the depression existing in South Australia puzzled him. The record of the State in the past years had been one of prosperity, except for the last two years, when unemployment had been considerably increased.

Professor Copland was a member of the Tariff Committee appointed by the Prime Minister (Mr. S. M. Bruce). He said the work of the committee was finished, and their report was selling well. The first edition of 3,000 volumes had been sold, and another edition was being printed. He said the committee

Professor Copland

believed that the traffic question was an important one in the development of Australia, and they were anxious to hear criticism of a constructive nature.

Speaking of the study of economics in Australia, Professor Copland said that in the past Australia had been impressed with the benefits of development, but had not paid sufficient attention to costs entailed. He said the establishment of a Faculty of Commerce in Melbourne had given great assistance to the study of economics. Adelaide and Birmingham Universities shared the honors of having been the first to construct a Faculty of Commerce. Economics was concerned with an estimation of the balance of costs and development, and an adequate study of each development contemplated would safeguard the community against possible losses. The method may make errors of conservatism, but in the past mistakes had been made in the opposite direction. Projects were launched for which the costs had ultimately proved in excess of the benefits. As a result those projects remained as a burden on the community. If the matter of costs were emphasised some works which might ultimately pay would be neglected. But an error on the right side would be made. Great advantage was to be gained from a study of economics.

ADV. 12-8-29

PURE ENGLISH

THE AMERICAN MENACE

By a Member of the International Phonetic Association

The Council of Public Education have been discussing in Melbourne the probable evil effects of the American talking pictures upon the speech of Australian children, and a question has been asked on the same subject in our own Parliament. The Director of Education in New South Wales (Mr. [illegible] Smith) reported to the council that if we are to preserve the purity of the English tongue drastic steps will have to be taken to keep out of Australia those American talking pictures which violate the Saxon speech. The [illegible] and successful efforts we are [illegible] in Australian schools to maintain a high standard of spoken English will fail if our young children hear much of the execrable pronunciation of English which distinguishes some of the American talking pictures. We want legislation to enable our censors to exclude all talking pictures which desecrate the canons of pure speech as practised among the educated classes in British communities."

This is good strong language, and naturally the question arises, What are the distinguishing features of American speech? Well, principally the Somersetshire r and certain vowel differences—peculiarities still represented in the bucolic tongue of south-western England, and perhaps formerly common to the whole of southern England. The Somersetshire r is to modern British ears a harsh and unpleasant sound, which, under the growing influence of "standard English" is disappearing in the western counties, although it may still be heard, strong and racy of the soil, in the remote villages and on the farms. By phonetists it is called the "retroflexed r," because it is pronounced with the tongue turned back against the palate. It is not known elsewhere in Europe except in one of the Scandinavian languages, but it is found again in the Dravidian languages of Southern India, and it occurs, along with the rolled r, in most of the native Australian tongues. Its great vogue is in the United States of America, to which it was carried by the Pilgrim Fathers and other early immigrants some 200 years ago. It has persisted and flourished there, while it is almost dead in all other English-speaking countries, with the exception of Canada.

Another striking American peculiarity is the change of the short o into the short, broad a, as heard in the German "Mann" or the Scottish "man," which latter always appears in the English comic papers as "mon," in order to give some idea of its pronunciation. The result is that in America "doctor" becomes "daaktehr," and the object which is said to excite most veneration in the United States is not there called "dollar," but "daalehr." (The combination rh is here used for the Somersetshire r, in default of any single letter to represent it.) The story is told of two young Americans who had come to Broken Hill to study Australian mining. They were describing the progress of some man "who went across the floor haap, haap, haap." "What do you mean by harp, harp, harp?" asked one of the Australian audience. "What I'm telling you," replied the visitor, "this guy had only one sound trotter, so he crossed the floor haap, haap, haap." "Now I see your drift," said the Australian; "you mean hop, hop, hop. But if that's so, how in the world do you say harp?" "That's jest what I've been saying to you." "No, no," cried the Australian, "We want to know how you call a big musical instrument with a lot of strings across it." "Now I guess you've got it across to me," said the American, "we call that thing a harhup."

There are other differences between American speech and the King's English, such as "noo" for "new," "institooshun" for "institution," the short in-stead of the long a in "dance," "can't," &c. The dwellers in the biggest city of the United States call it "Noo Yarhk." In fact, many words have drifted so far apart in pronunciation that in such cases English and American can stand as far apart as, for instance, German and Dutch. Were the two forms of English speech printed phonetically they would have the appearance of distinct languages. It is the common retention of the old spelling which chiefly enables them to hold together. These fundamental dissimilarities between English and American pronunciation constitute one of the reasons why proposals to modernise our language phonetically meet with so little success.

Most English phonetists are of the opinion that the Somersetshire r and probably many other peculiarities of American speech were formerly predominant in the south of England, and that these, and especially the unpleasant sound of the letter r, have, with the growing refinement of speech, faded out during the past two centuries until they are now almost or quite extinct. Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, and other West Country heroes doubtless used the Somersetshire r, and it is quite probable that in the Elizabethan era all the natives of the South of England, high and low, did the same. It is worthy of notice that in a line from Shakespeare's "All's Well that Ends Well"—"A young man married is a man that's marr'd"—the play on the words is more effective when they are pronounced in the provincial English or American way than when they are quoted in standard English.

Scottish and Irish influences have not left the slightest trace in the pronunciation of American or Dominion English. Energetic and ubiquitous as the Scottish are, they have been too few in the stream of emigration to make any phonetic impression, and the great Irish exodus, which first started after the potato famine of 1845, came far too late. All the linguistic evidence goes to show that the predominant current of emigration to North America and the Dominions has been South-English. No doubt, in the African and Australasian Dominions the prestige enjoyed by standard English, which is really the cultivated speech of London, has had some influence in determining the pronunciation.

Speaking generally, it is certain that American pronunciation and intonation are unpleasant to British ears. It may be quite true that their speech contains in a fossilised condition some sounds and some words of old English descent, but that fact cannot be claimed as a recommendation, because these archaisms are really defects which a more highly cultivated sense of sound has rejected and which the British peoples have happily outgrown. That the local pronunciation is recognised even in the United States as provincial appears clearly from the efforts which picture stars in Hollywood are making to acquire standard English for use in the "talkies," and it is not going too far to say that the peculiarities of American speech are barbarisms which have been gradually discarded in the evolution of pure modern English.

The Advertiser

ADELAIDE: MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 1929

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF SCIENCE?

Science, as we must all acknowledge, has laid us under a heavy debt of gratitude for many things. But if we may accept a pledge on its behalf by Professor Brailsford Robertson, of the Adelaide University—and he is as well entitled as anyone to speak in its name—there is no end to the achievements that may be expected of science if but the conditions be granted which he lays down in last month's "Hibbert Journal." Everywhere around us—in the laboratory of the chemist, in the study of the economist and the philosopher, in the workshop of the mechanic and the electrician—men are climbing to a height of discovery and invention which is startling enough to take away the breath of anyone with sufficient brains to comprehend even a fractional part of the achievements of science. The savants have mapped and measured the heavens with all the certitude that lies in mathematics. They have compassed the earth, and plucked out its secrets as Hamlet said the players would the heart of his mystery; they have harnessed the lightning, conquered the wind, and ridden the tide, till, to quote again the Danish Prince, they threaten to "circumvent God." Indeed, Professor Brailsford Robertson foresees a time when the mind of man will "absorb the infinite," its capacity by that time being so enlarged that the mind will become "identified with the infinite itself." The ascending paths of science and religion converging on the summit of the mountain up which the professor, speaking as a scientist, says he is "crawling painfully," will afford to both the same prospect, ending for ever all dispute between them as to what is to be seen there.

But for this convergence the conditions must be granted which Professor Brailsford Robertson postulates. Industry has taken science under its patronage; so have other departments of human activity—war, for example, the business of transport, and even the business which concerns itself with the amusement of the multitude. In the sphere of education science is not the Cinderella it once was, though too often it is subordinated to what is called the classic side of teaching. But apart from certain utilitarian aspects, the national life knows little of it. To gain the patronage of the State science must show itself fruitful in "practical" results. This is not the science in whose progress Professor Brailsford Robertson exults, and on whose final triumph he bases passionate hopes. Indeed, he scathingly remarks, "If the purpose of investigation were solely to discover little tricks whereby other people may make a lot of money, personally, I will state frankly, I would prefer to make the money myself and let others discover the tricks." He confesses with regret that not all seekers after knowledge are of the same mind. We live in a commercial age, and even the savants cannot all be proof against its influence. Some have never entered the sacred temple of science in the right spirit to begin with. Having by their cleverness done well in the schools, they have been "cajoled into science by bribes of salary and position." Their work is often exceedingly useful. Only the unthinking would close their eyes to the value of material progress. Against even the "toys" which science places in the hands of the multitude the professor makes no complaint. Pascal found in man's incapacity to "sit still in a room" evidence of his inherent corruption. The mind inevitably preys on itself in the absence of occupation, or, as commonly said, becomes bored, in which fact Pascal found conclusive evidence of its corrupt nature. It is an extravagant inference, because, as Fitzjames Stephen shows, one might as well say of the body that it is necessarily vile because, confined in one unvarying posture, it becomes unhealthy. The tendency of the mind to prey on itself in the absence of employment is proof of anything but inherent corruption. It is proof of a healthy appetite for activity, a normal form of which is a fondness for enjoyment, an activity to which science is as much entitled to minister as to any other.

But what the moralists say about the inordinate craving for pleasure, Professor Brailsford Robertson says about the employment of science in ministering to its indulgence. It is a dedication to unworthy ends of sublime powers. At best the contrivances with which it ministers to wealth and leisure are superfluities; and holding the exalted views he does about the true functions of science, the professor insists that even the claims of commerce on science have definite limits. And this leads him into an interesting discussion of environment and its effect on those subject to its influence. Our present environment is commercial, "blatantly commercial" is his description. And he has no difficulty in multiplying instances of the extent to which society is permeated by thoughts of money. "Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys." Not only assault, but even theft and fraud may be expiated by a monetary penalty, and there is no salve like a pecuniary one for the bruised heart of a jilted maiden. "The trail of commercialism sullies our religion, education, marriage, the administration of justice—every department in fact, of human life in our day." But Professor Brailsford Robertson finds relief in the thought that the "ideals of the counting-house and the market place" will not endure permanently; for the spiritual world has its "ages" like the material world, and just as there have been stone, bronze, and iron ages, so the commercial age was preceded by a military age, a feudal age, and a religious age. The military age ceased because the bravest and most ferocious were slaughtered, leaving as survivors only the weakest and least bellicose of their kind; the feudal age went with the creation of secondary industries, and the consequent rise of democracy; while as regards the religious orders, by their revolt against the fundamental instinct of sex and elevation of celibacy into the rank of a cardinal virtue, they simply "bred themselves out of existence" as a governing power. And there are laws which threaten economic ability no less powerfully. Apart from that on which Herbert Spencer so strongly insisted, according to which genesis varies inversely with individuation, or in plainer words, brain power is developed at the cost of fecundity, and the greater the energy absorbed in mental, the less is there to spare for reproductive purposes, there is another law which on the average operates as certainly. Even if the offspring of the