

Register 22nd July 1891

THE UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS.

The proposed abolition of the University scholarships established in connection with the Education Department will come before the University Senate to-day on a motion by Canon Poole protesting against the step as calculated to impede the progress of sound learning in the colony. It will be remembered that in his speech on the Education Bill the Minister of Education threw out the hint that the Ministry were contemplating a change by which the funds now devoted to these scholarships would be diverted to the maintenance of a new system of evening classes in connection with the University. Hitherto it has been the object of the educational authorities to offer facilities by means of which any child attending one of the public schools, no matter how poor his parents may be, can have an opportunity, if successful in the competitive examination, of going on with his studies, first at one or other of the intermediate schools or Colleges, and afterwards at the University. For this purpose six bursaries and six exhibitions were established, and also three University Scholarships of the annual value of £50, tenable for three years. The University calendar for the present year shows that during 1890 there were eight courses of evening lectures conducted under the care of five of the Professors and Lecturers engaged on the ordinary staff of the institution, namely, four courses in physics, two in chemistry, one in geology, and one in biology. The numbers of the attending students varied from five to fifty-five, and on the whole the system was more than self-supporting, as the interest on endowment, together with Government subsidy and fees from students, came to £243, while the fees paid to lecturers were only £160.

Having the facts before them with reference to the two systems our readers will be in a position to judge whether it is advisable that one of them should be abolished entirely in order to make more abundant provision for the other. No doubt if plenty of funds were available it would be a good thing that both of the laudable objects aimed at by the scholarships and the night classes should be encouraged by further subsidy. But if in order to extend the scheme of evening lectures it is found that it would be necessary to abandon the system which throws the higher education open to the poorest children, no matter in what locality their parents may reside, then it seems to us that the change proposed by the Minister of Education would be a decided mistake. The benefits to be derived from the extension of the courses of evening lectures would be almost entirely confined to those young people whose parents reside in or near the city; while the advantages of the exhibitions and scholarships are subject to no such limitation. Perhaps it may be shown that in the past only a small proportion of country children have gained exhibitions and scholarships, and that the opportunities afforded in the city for schoolmasters to coach up clever pupils in special subjects will usually give the city an advantage over the country in an open competition. But it is by no means certain that if the competition were strictly confined to the ordinary scope of the State school curriculum the benefits of the system

would not be much more equally distributed than they are at present. At any rate the people of the colony will naturally demand very good and substantial reasons for the abandonment of a system which has found great favour in other parts of Australia, and which has been the means of bringing into prominence in the world of learning many students of marked ability but little command of worldly wealth.

There is at present only too much of the feeling abroad that the University with its annual Government subsidy of over £3,000 is an institution of which the benefits are chiefly available to those who can well afford to maintain and educate their children until a mature age has been reached. In the past also it has been found, as we pointed out some time ago, that moneys granted to the University for the encouragement of evening classes are in the end diverted to purposes of general revenue, part of them having simply gone to help to clear off the debt on the building. On

the whole, therefore, it appears to us that this proposal of the Minister of Education is of a very doubtful character. It has only been put forward tentatively, and perhaps the Ministry may never attempt to transmute their vague ideas on the subject into definite action. Undoubtedly at the present juncture the opinion of the Senate of the University would carry great weight, and it is well on this account that a direct motion is to be proposed which will bring the subject under the notice of that body.

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MEDICAL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

The MINISTER of EDUCATION (Hon. J. G. Jenkins), to Mr. SCHERK, said that the Education Department had practically no power over the Council of the Adelaide University, but he would communicate with the Council with the view of seeing whether some arrangements could be made by which the medical students should pay their fees quarterly the same as other students, instead of for the year in advance in one sum.

FEES OF MEDICAL STUDENTS.—In the Assembly on Wednesday Mr. Scherk raised the question of the fees paid by the medical students at the University. The Minister of Education (Hon. J. G. Jenkins) said that the Education Department had practically no power over the Council of the Adelaide University. He would, however, communicate with the Council with the view of seeing whether some arrangements could be made by which the medical students should pay their fees quarterly the same as other students, instead of for the year in advance in one sum. That payment, according to Mr. Scherk, is not subject to rebate should the student be unable to pursue his studies throughout the year on account of illness or for any other reason.