

Dr. Ramsay Smith
 Tomorrow week, November 27, will be the sixty-eighth natal anniversary of Dr. W. Ramsay Smith, Adelaide's City Coroner and chairman of the Central Board of Health. Born at King Edward, Aberdeenshire, he distinguished himself at Edinburgh University, where he was prizeman and honorsman in the arts, science, and medical classes, and took natural science honors for the M.A. degree. He is an M.D. of Edinburgh and a D.Sc. of Adelaide.

His career from boyhood has shown that he has not been afraid to work, and work hard. It has been an illustration of Scottish ability, determination, and pluck combined with indomitable energy. His acumen in philosophical study at Edinburgh



DR. W. RAMSAY SMITH

who will celebrate his sixty-eighth birthday tomorrow week.

was demonstrated by the fact that he was elected president and then senior president of the University Philosophical Society, which, in those days, included men who have since become famous—Prof. Keith, Prof. Mitchell, Prof. Lorrain Smith, Rev. Prof. Martin, Dr. R. S. Black, and others. At that time Dr. Ramsay Smith combined his learning with teaching at George Watson's College and elsewhere.

The student's industry and perseverance were rewarded by winning the Vena Dunlop scholarship of £300 for the highest marks over two entrance examinations for the year against some of the most eminent graduates of Cambridge, as well as Edinburgh and other Scottish universities. Soon thereafter he was appointed senior assistant professor of natural science, and organised the largest biological laboratory in the United Kingdom. It used to be said that the two most omnivorous readers of the university library were Prof. Flint (Divinity) and W. Ramsay Smith.

Dr. Ramsay Smith is author of a remarkable work entitled, "Medical Jurisprudence from the Judicial Standpoint," and of a number of textbooks and works on science and medicine.

Tendency to "Cram"

Is the examination system a good one? Head masters of schools are accustomed to accept it as a necessary evil. They admit that it is an evil insofar as it encourages a tendency to "cram." But they allege three or four reasons why it is necessary. It is, they say, a check upon the children, a stimulus to the lazy child. It is also a check upon the teacher, a rough-and-ready test of the "results" of his teaching. It is, too, a comfort to the parents, who, when Johnny has passed the "intermediate," rejoice together at his increase of wisdom. Finally, it is said to be a convenience to the business community, which takes to its offices certificated children and spurns the uncertificated.

These arguments are all poor. To begin with the last of them. If business men ever imagined that a pass in the "intermediate" was a guarantee of intelligence they must by now have been sufficiently disillusioned. At best, a child who has passed this examination may be said to have proved that he is not, at any rate, subnormal.

But cannot business men secure this proof in another way? A letter of recommendation from the head master of a school should carry more weight than any impersonal certificate, and it would have the advantage of placing responsibility upon the school. At present schools may hide their failings behind the standardised cloak of the examination system. One would expect, therefore, that good schools would oppose it.

School Masters and Parents

But perhaps the good schoolmasters are frightened of the parents. It was a courageous head master who wrote on the "report" of one of his young pupils:—"Stupid. Would make a good parent." It is only the stupid parents (are they in a majority?) who trust a petty certificate more than the school which they have chosen for their children.

Intelligent parents should seek to find out what the certificate means. They have sent their children to school to be educated. Is this certificate a sign that education is proceeding satisfactorily? If it is, there is no reason why the children should not gain it. But if it is not?

A head master should know his own staff so well that he need seek no external check upon its efficiency. If he should feel the need of such a check he is a bad head master. Moreover, if a teacher cannot arouse the interest of his class, if he cannot discover and foster the natural tendency of this boy's mind, the natural bent of that boy's intelligence, then he is a bad teacher. Is it because we have many bad head masters and many bad teachers that we need the external pressure of a standardised examination?

This is, in fact, the plea put forward by the champions of our examination system. If the plea is well grounded the position is serious, indeed. Even so, will examinations give us new head masters for old, good teachers for bad?

Growth of Minds

Examinations need to be examined. What is their effect upon the mental development of boys and girls? For we may assume, I think, that boys and girls are sent to school, or should be sent to school, in order that their minds may grow. The growth of their minds will show itself especially through the growth of their interests and their capacity for thinking.

If space permitted I believe that I could show that the examination system, with the stress which it lays on mere information, kills interest and the capacity for thought, and therefore cuts short the development of minds.

For example, what is the effect of the examination system upon the teaching of history? A good teacher would know how gradually to unfold to his children the story of mankind, reaching back from their own time and their own country to other times and other countries, helping them to appreciate the growth and the meaning of the civilisation into which they have been born.

But for an examination there has to be a textbook. And years before that examination is held teachers, terrified by the fear of not getting "results," take their classes over and over the ground marked out by that textbook until at last the miserable chil-

dren are as sick of King John as King John was sick after his feed of peaches. Their minds have become soggy and dead; they hate history.

Label Hunters

All our professions—medical, legal, and even the teaching—are full of uneducated persons, who have passed innumerable examinations. They have the label they wanted (a label with a money value), and they have killed their minds by "cram." Even their technical efficiency is often doubtful, for how many persons remember what they have "crammed"?

Some labels are, of course, necessary, for the university must defend the community from the professional ministrations of the totally unfit. But why should we begin fastening labels on the children? Why should we make them label hunters?

First, let us give their minds a chance to grow. Then perhaps they will be able even to take a university degree without running the risk of making themselves stupid for life.

REC. 21. 11. 27

Professor R. W. Chapman, C.M.G., Professor of Engineering at the University, has returned to Adelaide after a visit to Sydney. Professor Chapman went to the New South Wales capital in order to attend a meeting of the general council of the Institute of Engineers of Australia, at which representatives of all the States in the Commonwealth were present. The President (Sir John Butters) occupied the chair. Matters of interest to engineers were discussed, and it was decided to hold the next annual general conference in Canberra, in February. It was announced that a private Bill for the registration of engineers was being introduced into the Victorian State Legislature, and steps to a similar end were being taken in Western Australia and Tasmania.

REC. 21. 11. 27

CENTRALIAN MINERALS.

Sir Douglas Mawson (Professor of Geology at the Adelaide University) and Mr. C. T. Madigan (lecturer in geology), who have been touring for the last month in Central Australia, returned to Adelaide on Sunday evening. Sir Douglas said they had travelled through a considerable area north and west of Alice Springs. The object of the visit had been to examine the minerals prospects of the country in relation to the study of geology.

REC. 22. 11. 27

A UNIQUE DISCOVERY.

Wealth of Central Australia.

Potassium Nitrate Deposit.

Sir Douglas Mawson (Professor in Geology and Mineralogy at the University of Adelaide), who, in company with Mr. C. T. Madigan (Lecturer in Geology), has been on a visit to Central Australia, returned to Adelaide by the East-West express on Sunday evening. The professor, when seen by a representative of The Register on Monday, was looking bronzed after his trip, which he said had been a hot and strenuous one. Asked how the country was looking he said that between Farina and Alice Springs it was too barren and sandy to interest any one but a geologist; but from Alice Springs northward there was going to be some fine pastoral country opened up. At present much of the country was not allocated at all, and other portions were held by handfuls of settlers, most of whom had not the capital to make proper use of their holdings. Before much was done it would be necessary to find water. There was herbage sufficient for a considerable amount of stock, but wells would have to be provided at frequent intervals. At present most of the settlers were watering their stock at Government bores along the telegraph route, with the result that all the feed was eaten off near the bores, and it was necessary to go further back to get grass.

The heavy freight on goods (said Sir Douglas) was a severe handicap to settlers. Freight on ordinary merchandise by rail to Oodnadatta was £25 ton, and when the £30 ton cartage (to Alice Springs) was taken into account it would be seen that it cost something to live. That was a great brake on development. It was hoped that when the railway was

completed the Commonwealth Government would do its best to bring about the cheap rates absolutely necessary if the mining and pastoral industries were to progress. As an instance of how the heavy freight affected commodities Sir Douglas mentioned that beer cost 6/3 bottle, or 1/6 for a nobbler, which was hardly sufficient to wash the dust out of one's mouth.

Incredible Waste of Money.

He was glad that the Commonwealth Government had started on a forward policy. They had an administrator, with a secretary, and an inspector of stock, and were building residences for the Government officials at Alice Springs. The contractor, an Adelaide man, arrived with his men while Sir Douglas was there and started with the job. A curious feature struck him (Sir Douglas). Although unlimited broken stone was handy, with unlimited quantities of sand, and a wonderful supply of limestone, suitable for converting into lime on the spot, yet big supplies of cement had been brought from Adelaide to be cast into blocks for the building of cement and sand houses. In addition to the cost of the cement there was an enormous freight to be added. He had never seen such wonderful limestone deposits as those adjacent to the Alice Springs township.

Mineral Deposit.

As to the object of his visit to the interior, Sir Douglas said he was specially interested in a deposit of potassium nitrate reported to exist 120 miles west of Alice Springs. There was no road, but they went out by motor and pushed through the scrub, and found the deposit. It was extraordinarily rare to find potassium nitrate occurring naturally; indeed, it was practically unique. The nitrate deposits of Chili were sodium nitrate; but potassium nitrate was a much more valuable substance, and was probably worth £60 to £90 ton. It was used in the manufacture of gunpowder and other explosive compounds, as well as in the arts.

A Blackfellow's Discovery.

The facts leading up to the discovery were interesting. A blackfellow reported in Alice Springs that he knew of some earth which if you threw it on a fire made it blaze. In consequence a prospector went out from Alice Springs, found the substance, and concluded that it was earth saturated with crude oil. He sent it to Adelaide to ascertain if it were an indication of oil, and when Professor Mawson saw that it was a white crystalline compound, he decided to go and see the deposit.

Richest Fertilizer Yet Discovered.

Asked if it had been found native in any other part of the world, Sir Douglas said he did not think so, although in India some soils were impregnated with it. There was an industry in that country, which consisted of leaching the soil and the liquor then crystallized. This was the original source from which gunpowder was manufactured. This would be the richest fertilizer yet discovered. Geologists had always hoped to find nitrate and potassium deposits in arid Australia, and here were both compounds in one mineral. He was sorry they were not able to visit the goldmine at Tennant's Creek, and not having seen it he was unable to express an opinion regarding the gold-bearing nature of the reef. A fair amount of mica mining was going on in the Hart Ranges, but most of the successful mining in this connection was being done by a private individual. The rocks in the vicinity of Alice Springs were geologically speaking, nearly identical with those of Broken Hill, and with the advent of the railway, mining in the district should certainly look up.

REC. 22. 11. 27

Professor E. Harold Davies, Mus. Doc. (Director of the Elder Conservatorium of Music) contemplates taking a brief trip to England and the Continent. He will make the voyage in the Mooltan, which will leave next Thursday. It will be a hurried visit, as Dr. Davies desires to return to his duties at the Conservatorium in March. He will leave the vessel at Marseilles, and take the train journey to the battlefields. Then London will be visited, and various musical matters arranged, including the appointment of a successor to Mr. Clive Carey. A brief respite will be taken in order to attend any musical performance of note and to meet again professional friends. Foremost upon the list will be Dr. Davies's brother, Sir Walford Davies, a gifted musician, whose compositions are world famous. Upon the return journey to Australia the professor will cross to Paris, and visit centres of musical importance in France, Germany, and Switzerland. The happiest relationship exists between the members of the Bach Society and their founder and conductor, as was indicated on Saturday evening. Prior to the commencement of "The Messiah," Dr. Davies was asked to go to the banquetting room of the Town Hall, and there the company bade him bon voyage. Dr. Davies appropriately responded.

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EXAMINATIONS

(By Prof. W. K. Hancock, University of Adelaide)

Possibly there exist a few curious children who delight in sitting for examinations. Here and there there may be even examiners who take a morbid pleasure in reading through hundreds of examination papers, laboriously adding up marks and tabulating results. Possibly there are brutal examiners who grin with savage joy every time they scrawl "Fail" on the outside of a paper, and benevolent examiners who gather the "Passes" with anxious love, as old-time shepherds gathered the sheep into their fold.

I have never met these strange creatures. The majority of examiners look forward to examination time with a terror far exceeding that of the miserable children whom they examine. Nobody who has not examined can imagine the deadly, grinding monotony of reading through the attempts of hundreds of ordinary children to give the same answers to the same questions.