

MEDICAL COURSE

FAILURE OF STUDENTS

N-9

Some May Leave for England

(By "Medicus")

A notice has been issued calling a special meeting of the Senate of the University of Adelaide for Wednesday, following the commemoration ceremonies.

It is signed by Mr. Justice Angus Parsons as warden and states that the meeting has been called "to consider the business from the council set out in the accompanying notice paper, and any other business that may be brought before the meeting in conformity with the standing orders."

The meeting will be held in the Prince of Wales Theatre of the University.

Business from the Council is set out as follows:—

Regulation VII. of the Degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, allowed on December 6, 1922, is hereby repealed and the following substituted therefor:—

VII.—The ordinary examinations shall be held in or about November, and the supplementary examinations shall be held in March. A special fourth examination shall be held toward the end of May.

Fourth Examination

The provision for the fourth examination is added to the previous regulation.

As commemoration is usually a long ceremony my first impression was that something in the nature of drastic necessity must have stirred the University authorities out of their academic leisure.

The standing orders have had to be invoked for this extraordinary meeting to add 11 words to the regulations. Now what is the reason for this proposition that hitherto unheard of liberties should be granted to medical students to get through their examinations in May when they have failed in the previous November?

I have heard disturbing reports that all is not well with the medical family at the University, and it is with the idea of eliciting the facts that I raise the following queries:—

Is it a fact that this year nine medical students have been failed, and that seven of them contemplate going to London, where they can complete their course and gain their degree more quickly than they would by remaining in the State?

Failed in Sixth Year

More than one case comes to my mind of men who have failed in their sixth year, have gone to England, passed their degrees, and returned (earning good money on the trip by their medical skill), but who if they had remained here might have spent much more time, with much less kudos, and been failed again.

For I believe that the regulations of the Adelaide University allow a student to be failed in his final year in one particular subject, and the following year he must again sit for the whole of his subjects, and risk failing in all of the subjects in which he has proved himself competent a year before.

What I want to know is whether our University authorities contemplate passing legislation for a special supplementary examination in May because they are in danger of having the bulk of their failed students establish the overruling tradition that to get justice they must go to London.

Is it worthy of the traditions of our University if it is in the right to give opportunities to rebellious students to force the hands of the authorities and make them modify their regulations?

REPLY BY REGISTRAR

Mr. F. W. Eardley (Registrar of Adelaide University) made the following comment on this article:—"I am glad to have the opportunity to correct any impression that the new examination is a supplementary one. It is not like the supplementary examination for students who must have appeared in the previous November. It is quite a new examination, and may be taken by any student who has passed the third examination not less than a year before."

NOTES ON CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

A DROUGHT-STRICKEN REGION.

By C. T. Madigan, Lecturer on Geology and Mineralogy, University of Adelaide.

The writer, in company with Sir Douglas Mawson, recently had the opportunity, long sought, of spending a month in the interior. Having had some experience as a Government official in the Sudan, a country geographically similar, being continental and in equat, though northern, latitude, and having camel-trekked that country from end to end, engaged principally in locating sites for wells, he ventures to add to the list of published impressions.

First of all, there is no longer any Northern Territory. In March of this year the Commonwealth proclaimed two new States—North Australia, with the capital at Darwin; and Central Australia, with its capital at Alice Springs. Central Australia lies between the 20th and 26th parallels of south latitude. The white population of Alice Springs is 40, and of Central Australia 200.

We spent over a week of enforced idleness at the hotel in Alice Springs, and had nothing to do between meals but remove the tough goat meat from our teeth, and listen to the conversation of these 40. Of one or two it was said by their less charitable friends, in the picturesque metaphor of the country, that they had been inoculated with a gramophone needle. Be that as it may, we certainly heard their opinions on all matters of common interest, expressed with remarkable freedom and forcefulness.

Federal Officialdom.

The destinies of these two States are controlled by commissioners, who sit in Canberra, or some other place—no one seemed quite certain where. At present there are four Government officials for Central Australia stationed in Alice Springs—the Government Resident (Mr. Cawood), who arrived from New South Wales for Proclamation Day in March; his assistant (Mr. Carrington); the Stock Inspector (Mr. Campbell), with many years' experience in the old Northern Territory; and Mr. Commissioner Stott, for 16 years in charge of the police, and now about to retire. The administration is in a state of flux, and the new officials have hardly had time to get their bearings. The Resident was absent on a long trip to Camoowal during most of our stay. If you ask the half-caste children at the school who rules Australia, they reply "The King;" and if you ask who the King is, they answer "Sergeant Stott." The old order takes some time to change.

Scenes of Desolation.

Our visit was in November, and at the end—or, we hope the end—of a five years' drought. Mr. Campbell said half the cattle died last year, and more will go this year. Already we saw many dead and others dying, some down for the last time, some standing but unable to move, with that dreadful expression of hopelessness only seen in the eyes of dumb animals, and dingoes boldly standing about and waiting. These beasts had either been left behind by drovers as too weak to travel, or had strayed too far from water and were unable to get back. When we asked why the drovers did not put them out of their misery before leaving them, we were told that it was meant well, to give them a chance, "as it might rain next day." Curiously, it did rain the day after our enquiry, but scarcely enough to prolong their misery unless they happened to be near clay pans and could still move. This was the state of things in November. Only goat meat was available at the hotel. Rabbits were almost extinct. Their deserted warrens were frequently seen. They soon breed up again when good seasons come, however. No visitor, not even a cattle man from the south, is competent to express an opinion on the stock carrying capacity of the country. The grass and herbage are unfamiliar and the country is absolutely different in different seasons and years. When there are hard-headed men who have battled along for 40 years with cattle in the country to be consulted, it is absurd to listen to any one else.

We were told that the country round Oodnadatta was looking well, when we were thinking we had never seen anything more ghastly. There have been some gains during the latter part of the year, and in depressions where water had collected could be seen on closer inspection the withered remains of grass and the very small species of saltbush. The view as far as the eye could see in every direction is a waste of stony plain, with low rises of gypseous clay, some barren cliffs at the edge of a plateau remnant to the north-east, and not a bush or tree in sight.

Pastoral Questions.

At present the country is reckoned to carry on the average one beast to the square mile. There are no boundaries or fences in Central Australia. The leases are reckoned in hundreds of square miles, where we of the south would speak of acres, and a man refers to his country, not his land. His country is duly ruled off the map and labelled, but is in no way defined on the ground. Most of them are not quite sure themselves within a few miles where their country ends.

There are very few sheep in Central Australia. We only saw them at one place, Woodford's Well, some hundred miles north of the Alice. One reason for this is that they have to be shepherded and guarded every night on account of the wild dogs, and another is that they cannot stand drought as well as the cattle, and cannot feed out so far from water.

Two factors govern stock-carrying capacity—feed and water. In the great artesian basin, which extends in South Australia from Hergott Springs to Charlotte Waters (just inside Central Australia), and covers the whole area to the east of this line and a considerable loop to the west, the feed is the deciding factor. Given the capital, enough water can be had anywhere by boring for it, but stock cannot live on water alone. The water supply is far in excess of the feed. This area is mostly included in the Lake Eyre Basin. The rainfall is about five inches, and the country is a desert. There are worse deserts in the world, but not much worse. It is unfortunate for South Australia that the artesian water is only available in such poor country. This is not so in New South Wales and Queensland. It is hardly necessary to say that, though some bores will supply a million gallons a day, it is not practicable to irrigate on any scale with it. The quantity is insufficient, and even for vegetable growing, a small patch of ground soon becomes too saline for use. The artesian basin only extends for a short distance into Central Australia, and the Charlotte, a pump well, is the most northerly bore in it.

The position is reversed in North Australia, where the feed is in excess of the water. The rainfall improves as we go north from Charlotte Waters, where it is five inches. At Alice Springs it is 10 inches. The trees and herbage become steadily better, with large gums in the water courses, and desert oak and bloodwood plentiful in the more sandy regions, mulga and spinifex everywhere. Saltbush almost disappears at the MacDonnells, and to the north of them tall grasses such as Mitchell grass come in. Much of the best country seen was between Alice Springs and Barrow's Creek, our most northerly point. Beyond the Barrow and as far as Tennant's Creek the country is said to fall off badly again, to improve out of all comparison as the northern part of North Australia is reached.

Getting Water.

The water problem is simple but costly inside the artesian basin. In Central Australia it is much more difficult. There is plenty of underground water, but it requires an expert to choose favourable localities and minimise the risk of sinking costly and unsuccessful wells, which may so discourage the landholder as to prevent him from trying again. As an instance of the want of advice one may quote a man who declared that if he did not strike water in his country at 20 ft., it was no use going further down. He was convinced of this beyond all argument. There are good wells all along the telegraph lines at about 30-mile stages. They were located more from consideration of where they were wanted than of specially favourable localities. They are all from 50 to 100 ft. deep only. The water is shallow and of much better quality than artesian water. The well system could be greatly extended in Central Australia, and the stock-carrying capacity of the country increased, chiefly by preventing the enormous losses sustained in dry seasons. At present the tendency is to depend on a few good wells only, and while we were there urgent requests were being made to be allowed to bring stock in to the Government wells, supposed only to be used for travelling stock. Every landholder could have several equally good wells in his own country. Many of them realize this, but have not the capital to sink wells, and in a few cases only, not the energy, and always there is the fear of much expensive and wasted labour. Again, there is the idea that a small well is useless. This has been fostered by the custom of watering big mobs at good wells, and the influence of flowing bores. In the north-west of Western Australia the country is dotted with shallow wells with automatic windmills, tanks, and troughs with balcocks, and this plan is being followed in the Laverton district. The cattle can be broken up into smaller groups, and watered separately. This is the one critical suggestion the writer ventures to make, namely, that the 50,000 gallon a day well should no longer be regarded as essential, but its place taken by several smaller wells.

Permanent Geologist Wanted.

To make this possible, of course, capital and labour are required, but, above all,

In our opinion, the Government should appoint a permanent geologist, who could make a thorough study of this most interesting region, and thus be in a position to advise with confidence on well sinking. The saving to the Government and the people would provide a whole geological department. In addition, the mineral resources of the country alone warrant such an appointment.

The railway from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs is proceeding apace. About 30 miles is completed, and work is in hand up to 80 miles out. The line has just reached the Alberga River, which is being



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bridged. This is the usual wide stretch of sand and gravel, which may or may not carry a torrent once a year. About 300 men are employed. It seemed to us that there would be little to be gained in carrying the railway beyond Alice Springs. The road is much better beyond this point, in fact, motors can travel for long stretches at 50 miles an hour. The troubles of overlanding motorists cease at Alice Springs, and up to there they consist only of the Finke crossings and the "Tragic Mile." The Depot sandhills have been circumvented by a new track. There is some heavy sandy going, but any car can do it, properly handled.

Transport.

The present freight on ordinary merchandise from Adelaide to Alice Springs is £55 a ton, £25 on the railway and £30 by motor truck from Oodnadatta. The motor truck takes two days. Camel transport can be had as low as £12 10/ a ton, reducing the cost to £37 10/ a ton, but the time taken is three weeks, and the damage to goods is considerable. When the railway is through, on the same basis as to Oodnadatta, the freight will be about £38 a ton. The railway will help to alleviate the lot of the inhabitants, but any immediate magic metamorphosis of the interior is not to be looked for. It is bound to be a heavy loss for many years, but at least its construction shows a spirit of progress and a determination to wrest what we can from our great unused areas. At present Central Australia appears to be cattle country only. With increase in water supply, an increase in stock is possible, but the benefit from this is not as easily and quickly obtained as might at first appear. Markets must be arranged and economic difficulties overcome. The fate of Vestey's in North Australia, and the Carnarvon Meat Works in Western Australia is not encouraging. A railway is not essential for moving cattle. It will allow favourable opportunities of selling to be taken quickly, but such a long rail journey has great disadvantages. It is said in the country that certain cattle men will never see the east and west, are no nearer to Alice Springs than they are to Oodnadatta.

Mining Country.

As to mineral resources, there are possibilities here. The railway to Alice Springs will stimulate prospecting. None of the known mineral lodes are within a hundred miles of Alice Springs, so that the railway does not altogether solve their transport problems. Substantial railway concessions would need to be made to make it profitable to shovel pure lead on to trucks at Alice Springs. At present only mica is profitably mined. There is a lot of highly mineralized country, and another Kalgoorlie or Broken Hill is more possible than an oil gusher in Australia. Only such a discovery would bring thousands into Central Australia, a mining field that would support a railway and a city.

An Unexplored Desert.

An entirely unexplored area lies for 300 miles to the south-east of Alice Springs, down into the corner of the State, the corner occupied by the artesian basin. No white man has crossed it and the natives deny any knowledge of it. It is evidently waterless. Mr. J. O'Neill, one of the discoverers of the Stuart's Range Oval Fields, did a 10-day "peris" in the area with camels, but had to turn back for

A presentation was made on Wednesday afternoon of pipes and tobacco pouch to Mr. W. Fuller, of the Medical Students' Society, on his retirement from the Adelaide University staff. Mr. A. D. Smith (secretary) expressed the admiration and gratitude of the students for Mr. Fuller's services during the many years he had taught them. Mr. Fuller, replying, wished them all success in the profession they had chosen. A few days previously a gift of a gold-handled fountain pen was made by the third-year students, as a special mark of gratitude for Mr. Fuller's help to them in the last two years.