
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents.

The attention of younger readers particularly is drawn to the fact that letters appearing in ENVIRONMENT may contain much that is controversial and not necessarily endorsed by their teachers.

To the Editor, ENVIRONMENT.

SIR,

With reference to a very interesting article* by Mr. T. R. Mason, B.Sc., may I be permitted, if space is available, to consider from a slightly different angle the same subject, namely, "Science in Education".

Mr. Mason emphasises the value of a science course because of its "discipline, its content, and its cultural value", and with what he says one can only agree.

I would approach the subject from a somewhat different point of view.

Each one of us is a conscious unit in an environment of which we know only through our senses. Exact experiment has shown that these senses give us a very incomplete notion both as to what we are and what surrounds us. Add to this the general education which we derive from childhood from the usually misinformed and biased collection of other human beings and we will see that the ordinary individual who is not in the broadest sense scientifically trained can have but a fundamentally inaccurate conception of the truth which lies in and around him.

Almost from his mother's knee the child is fed with a false mental food. He is taught to see himself as something special and different from all other live and dead in the world.

Science, which all said and done is but organised common sense, may be at present incompletely true; but its foundations are secure, and undoubtedly give a better perspective than does a haphazard training derived from the "snap judgments" of people mostly unqualified to judge.

It puts the child in more accurate touch with the true realities of the universe, apart from definitely showing that one part of him, at any rate, is but a member of a long

* This Journal, Vol. II, No. 2, 1935.

chain of animal life which started from the lowliest beginnings.

I do not wish to introduce the question of religion, which from my point of view does not necessarily conflict fundamentally with the teachings of science; but it is undoubtedly true that many of the average human beings' notions of religion must be suppressed in view of the definite facts of science.

As it seems to me, the only three branches of education that should be compulsory from the lowest to the highest grade of school should be English, mathematics and science. All other subjects should be regarded as specialities to be taught to the individual according to whether he intends to become, for instance, a doctor, a plumber, a carpenter, or a lawyer.

It is obvious, of course, that the knowledge of one's own tongue is a fundamental. Mathematics is the very best training in logic, and science the very best training available as to facts.

With these three subjects a boy of fourteen should be able to reason intelligently from the available facts and express his conclusions in decent English.

The lawyer will be a better lawyer because of what science will teach him as to the real position in time-space of those human animals whom he may be called to defend or prosecute.

A judge who understands something of the curious make-up of human personality and who can appreciate how the animal instincts and urges affect his mind will be more easily able to sort out true evidence from false. Even the plumber will be better for his scientifically acquired knowledge of the properties of water, lead, iron, and so forth.

The appalling waste of time brought about by the idea that one cannot be "educated" without spending many tedious years at school in the study of dead languages is a matter for deep regret. In but few professions is there any concrete advantage derived therefrom.

The Greek and Latin roots are indeed helpful in teaching one to spell, but this aptitude is not materially improved by wading through "Cæsar", "Cicero", or "Virgil"—as I can personally attest as a one-time honours classical student.

There has been a great deal of talk recently about the necessity for lengthening the medical course at the

University. This could be almost entirely avoided by boys who intend to enter that profession being adequately trained in physics, chemistry and biology instead of arriving at the University sausage-stuffed with Latin and with what passes for history, and with next to nothing in knowledge of even the most elementary conception of science.

Yours, etc.,

J. BURTON BRADLEY.

69 Woniora Road,
Hurstville.

10th June, 1935.

To the Editor, ENVIRONMENT.

SIR,

May I, as an old teacher of Latin (old, I am afraid, in years as well as experience), add a little to balance the picture?

Being naturally of a quiet and even timid nature, I feel somewhat frightened by the baying of the wolves outside my classical fold; I do not feel that my destruction is necessary, and I even feel that it is most inadvisable. I am, as I mentioned before, now rather too elderly to be worried by my own destruction, but I scarcely feel that wolves are as useful to civilisation as are the classical sheep.

Let me stand with front legs braced against the foe: a study of the classics is an essential part of the education of every boy or girl. Can I say this of the sciences? Chemistry was the popular vulgarian in my younger days; aptly though vulgarly referred to as "stinks", it filled, and fills, a useful purpose for the child who needs his mud-pie manufacturing interests turned into worthier mental channels; but was then, as it is now, a specialised study. There is no reason for the teaching of chemistry in schools: modernists patronisingly declare that there is no merit in the production of Latin and Greek tags in appropriate position in text or conversation—of what value is it to know an assortment of chemical symbols and reactions? My boy "studies" chemistry and physics at his high school: a critical and unhurried consideration of his gain in knowledge and of his cultural advancement has convinced me that the chemistry could much better be replaced by a language—modern if you must have it, Latin or Greek if your whole mind is not set on economic

benefits. I admit the benefit of his training in physics—but then this is a classical subject. Must we teach our boys and girls biology? This again I consider a highly specialised study, and one which requires to be taught to an advanced standard if it is not to be dangerous. Certainly I am in accord with a course of “nature study” in the primary schools; I am strongly opposed to giving growing boys and girls more knowledge of a subject such as this than they need and wish to know. I have seen many young people ruined, and their whole lives spoilt, by their elders giving them information which it would not have occurred to them to seek. I strongly feel that we should not hold back information, even if highly technical and specialised, if the individual student really wishes to know: forcing masses of biological and evolutionary “facts” on adolescent boys and girls is wrong.

The study of physics goes back to our earliest records, and is not taught today merely as a collection of facts; I am reading my children’s text books (still of Intermediate Certificate standard), and am prepared to admit that I find them a delightful exercise in reasoning, and that I have a better appreciation of articles I read in my papers, journals and reviews, because I have now some elementary knowledge of the experiments, historical development, and principles of their subject; as we must grow, and even the sheep in the fold must improve the standard of their wool if they are to be saved from the slaughter, let us by all means take physics as an essential part of the curriculum; but chemistry and biology have small claim except upon the band of specialists, whereas the classics have stood the test of time.

My card is enclosed; I fear that I am sufficiently well known to cause inconvenience to myself if you publish my name; thus I sign myself

A TEACHER OF LATIN.

Sydney University Extension Board

AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

At the request of a number of teachers and others interested in Australian Literature, a short course of six lectures on

"AUSTRALIAN FICTION UP TO THE EIGHTIES" will be given at the University during September and October, 1935.

The lectures will be delivered by

H. M. GREEN, Esq., B.A., LL.B.,

Librarian, The Fisher Library

(Author of "An Outline of Australian Literature"),

and will be held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 8 p.m.

Lecture I.—Savary, Rowcroft, Vidal, and Alexander Harris: Tuesday, 24th September.

Lecture II.—Kingsley and Catherine Spence: Thursday, 26th September.

Lecture III.—Clarke: Tuesday, 1st October.

Lecture IV.—Boldrewood: Thursday, 3rd October.

Lecture V.—Mrs. Praed: Tuesday, 8th October.

Lecture VI.—"Ada Cambridge" and "Tasma": Thursday, 10th October.

A short course such as this should be of particular interest to students of senior classes in schools, and to their teachers; to those interested in the development of Australian literature; and to those who are not acquainted with our own writers.

A charge of 1/6 will be made for admission to each lecture; a ticket for the course of six lectures may be obtained for 6/-.

Teachers may obtain tickets for themselves and for their students at 4/- for the course, on written application to The Secretary, The Extension Board, The University, stating the number of tickets required and the school concerned. EARLY APPLICATION IS ADVISED.

Tickets may be obtained from the Secretary, The Extension Board, The University; from Angus & Robertson Ltd., 89 Castlereagh Street; from Dymock's Book Arcade, 424 George Street; or from the New South Wales Bookstall Co. Ltd., corner Market and Castlereagh Streets.

ECONOMICS.

At the request of a number of teachers of Economics, it is proposed to hold a Conference at the University on Monday, 2nd, Tuesday, 3rd, and Wednesday, 4th September, intended primarily for

TEACHERS OF ECONOMICS.

A meeting such as this will undoubtedly be of great value, not only in keeping teachers in contact with recent developments, but also in enabling them to meet as a group.

The meetings would be arranged in six periods of three hours, the first hour of each period being given to a lecture, the following two hours being occupied by discussion. It is hoped also that the Conference may have a social side.

The lecturers and discussions proposed are:

<i>Date and Time.</i>	<i>Subject.</i>	<i>Lecturer.</i>
10 a.m. Monday	A Planned Economy and its Problems.	Dr. E. R. Walker
2 p.m. Monday	Monopoly.	Dr. E. R. Walker
10 a.m. Tuesday	The Use of Economic Statistics.	Mr. J. G. Crawford
2 p.m. Tuesday	Monetary Problems.	Mr. J. S. Butlin
10 a.m. Wednesday	Population Problems.	Mr. H. D. Black
2 p.m. Wednesday	Problems of Public Finance.	Professor R. C. Mills

As it will not be practicable to arrange this course unless there are at least twenty applicants, you are requested to communicate immediately with the Secretary, The Extension Board, The University, notifying him of your intention of being present.

The Conference Course has been arranged for the dates shown so that teachers throughout New South Wales may avail themselves of the opportunity of being present. A charge of one guinea would be made to attend the course.

WILL YOU PLEASE REPLY AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE?

It is regretted that it has been found necessary to raise the price of ENVIRONMENT to sixpence per copy; but it has so far been produced at a loss, and it was a matter of ceasing publication, or of raising the cost to the purchaser to the still low price at which it now appears.

Subscribers who have already paid the subscription for Volume II will not be asked to increase their subscription for that volume.

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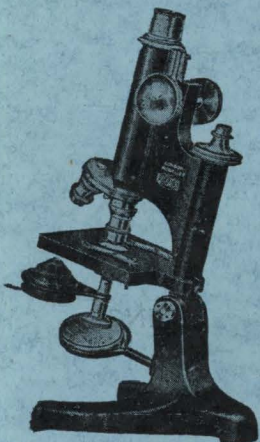
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