

FUTURE OF THE ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY

RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE TO BE ERECTED

MR. T. RYAN'S VIEW.

During the past 20 years few men have been so persistently concerned in the struggle for university reform than Mr. T. Ryan, who when Labor member for the District of Torrens secured the passing of the motion for the establishment of a Royal Commission (of which he was subsequently elected chairman) to enquire into all branches of education. In that capacity he visited the universities of Australasia. To a representative of "The Daily Herald" he yesterday expressed his views on the vexed subject of a university residential college, which was announced some time ago as having been decided upon after a conference held at the Adelaide University between Sir Samuel Way (Chancellor), Mr. C. R. Hodge (Registrar), Mr. R. Barr Smith, Mr. A. H. Peake (Premier), and Sir R. Butler.

"I viewed the announcement with a considerable amount of interest," observed Mr. Ryan, "realising that when residential colleges are established the greatest need in the education system of the State will be filled."

How do you connect a university residential college with the State education system? Is it not a private institution?

"There is a danger that residential colleges may, as with many other branches of university education, be considered private institutions, whereas, as a matter of fact, the major portion of their revenue, like that of the university, would be derived from State taxation. So far as my memory serves me, I think Mr. Barr Smith has promised £10,000 for the establishment of residential quarters, with common rooms. When I spoke on my motion in the House of Assembly for the appointment of an Education Commission on October 30, 1909, the need for a residential college was very great. When I again addressed the House on July 27, 1910, on my motion for the appointment of a Select Committee to report on the best methods to be adopted to make available the facilities for higher education at the Adelaide University a little—but very little—had been done. The position at that time I explained in the following words:—'Take, if you will, the question of university buildings. I speak with the greatest confidence when I say that the conditions forced on university students owing to the inadequacy of its buildings is such that it could not be tolerated in the factory life of the community. If you visit the building you will find that its most learned men—those whose every investigation is of public interest—are so environed that their best work cannot be done. Many of the rooms occupied by the professors are such that no decent workman would use them for his workshop. They are buried in cold stone cellars. I do not think there is in that building to-day a decent room common to all students which is so necessary. I do not think for a fagged student or teacher there is such a thing obtainable as a cup of tea or a decent place to take in company the midday lunch. I believe it is true that many of the professors are so circumscribed in the accommodation available that their specimens so very necessary in the teaching of chemistry and other sciences, cannot be unpacked! That is practically the position to-day.'

But how will a residential college overcome that difficulty?

"The Education Commission visited all the universities in Australia, paying particular attention to those of Melbourne and Sydney. A feature of these institutions is the residential colleges, which are situated within the university grounds, thus forming a valuable auxiliary to the universities and providing as they do 'a home from home' for the student. To realise what this means you have to remember that the great flaw in education today is not to have a University of Adelaide, but a University of South Australia, situated in Adelaide. You cannot take the university to every little hamlet, but there is no reason why every effort should not be made to bring deserving students to the central university. But what mother or father would care to allow their boy or girl, just at that age when they are needing the most attention, to come to the city, and as tired, overworked students take their chances in city boarding houses?"

What is the general idea of the scheme?

"The general idea of the residential college is that every student shall pay from £70 to £120 per annum for board and residence. In most cases a separate bedroom would be provided for each student, although two students might share in common a bedroom and sitting or studying room. The supervision of the college would include to a great extent the giving of lessons, perhaps in advance, or the course of study upon which the student would be examined. In this connection these colleges have come to be looked upon in some quarters as to use a familiar term, 'cramming' hostels. This is a mistaken view, for nowhere else can the desired scholastic environment be so well obtained as by communion with kindred spirits under good supervision."

The question of supervision, then, is the essential of a successful college?

"That is largely the case; but there is another factor. Let me illustrate the point. On the occasion of the visit of the Education Commission to one of the foremost residential colleges in Australia, I think it was the present Premier (Mr. Peake) who raised that point. The reply of the witness interrogated was to the effect that the men and women in the colleges became very largely the guardians of the reputation of the institution. He illustrated the point with a story. He stated that some time previously he had reason to believe that one or two of his men students had been overstepping the mark in the matters of keeping late hours. On the afternoon of one holiday several of the older men in the institution told him that if he heard a little extra noise during the night he was not to worry, as it would be all right. He agreed. Towards early morning there was a terrific noise. He did not intervene, but at breakfast enquired the cause, and was informed that some of the students had waited up for a 'night bird' and had forcibly impressed upon him the fact that he was the guardian of their reputation as well as his own by immersing him in a water trough and keeping him there until he found repentance by 'seeking it diligently and with tears.'"

As the chairman of the commission you approve, then, of the residential college idea?

"I approve strongly of the establishment of a residential college, but I would be sorry to think that such an institution would be so governed as to perpetuate the curse of caste which has so long helped to damn our educational institutions. Though the generous donor—Mr. Barr Smith—might donate the amount necessary to erect the building the people of South Australia will not only have to give the land, but will from time to time, in view of the commission's recommendations, be held responsible for the

adequate upkeep of the university and all buildings attached to it, and will ultimately have to spend many more thousands on the college. And rightly so. I should like to see the true spirit of educational reform maintained by making the college one in which, provided there is room, a home could be made available for those of our country teacher-students who at present complete their courses at the university. Further than that, there is no earthly reason why students of the School of Mines should not be allowed to share in the advantages of the college, or why country boys and girls who win scholarships should not be also allowed to avail themselves of the privilege of such a home. Failing this, I hesitate in my welcome to this new domicile. Not long ago many of our country scholarships were not availed of. Parents would say that not even for the satisfaction of their children having a successful scholastic career would they send them, especially girls, to the strange city life. We have passed the day when any differentiation should be made between one student and another. The University of Adelaide is easily first in the hearts of the people as far as the universities of Australia are concerned, and deserves the praise for the wonderful work done by its students and professors. Yet it is a fact that every student

such rare privileges because the taxpayers of this State pay three times as much towards his or her personal education as they do for the students in State schools.

So that, after all, there is unlimited free education?

"Hardly unlimited. The Education Bill introduced some 20 years ago has been wrongly looked upon as the inauguration of free education. All that Bill did was to rearrange the distribution or allocation of the educational grant. I want to repeat, however, that every student at the university has three times as much expended on his or her education as the State school child, and it is well, I say, that this is so. The university has benefited largely from grants. The commission first loaned it £12,000, which will never be repaid; then set aside £100,000 to increase its endowment fund, and will be compelled within the next five years to increase the grant by £8000 or £10,000 per annum, as its yearly grant must be increased to £25,000. I don't see how it will be possible for the institution to exist on its limited means, and unless the proposed residential college is large enough to accommodate all students requiring a home it must mean the establishment of another college to accommodate the Education Departmental students, which will cost anything up to £15,000. Then who will say that the religious denominations will not want their denominational residential colleges, for which the Government will at least have to find the land? They have these colleges in the other States."

You have some misgivings concerning the success of the venture?

"Not altogether misgivings; but I extremely regret that the proposal seems likely to be the termination of the habitation of the Adelaide University—that is, in its present locality. There is no doubt that at Mitcham, or even as near the city as Parkside, from 40 to 80 acres of land could be found which would be ample for the accommodation of the University and those corporate collegiate institutions which are such strong factors in educational extension."

Will the everyday rank-and-file students feel the need for university home life?

"Yes. Do you know that since the visit of Mr. Mansbridge the working classes have devoted more attention to university life than ever. We are realising what university life means in the general leadership of the people. The Oxford Conference quickly realised that home life was the great factor in education extension. I have a report which shows that out of 727 students who matriculated at three universities on the Continent 112 were sons of working men earning on an average less than 6/ a day. These students availed themselves of the municipal grants. All the great American colleges have housing facilities, and it is realised that a university training is an essential to successful leadership. What the university is doing for the community is revealed by the examination of the history of the occupants of the 975 most eminent positions in England, the figures being culled from the magazine 'Nature.' We find it revealed that the universities are responsible for training as follows:—Oxford 382, Cambridge 177, Scotland 76, foreign universities 112. The remaining positions are occupied by men who have not been trained in a university. The American statistics, however, reveal to a greater extent the influence of the universities on the country's progress. Investigations conducted in America and Canada reveal the fact that of the 8144 most successful men 5775 held university degrees, 1240 had passed through the high schools, and 313 had been privately educated. Of the 8144 positions only 808 were held by men who had stopped at the primary schools."

A last question—You think then that a residential college would result in an extension of university life in this State?

"It would certainly be forced to do that owing to the fresh distribution of scholarships as recommended by the commission, for these will at least be doubled. The commission decided that a number of these should be set aside for State school children and a number for children educated at private institutions. I did not hold with the suggestion, as I consider that the gift of the taxpayers should not be earmarked for one section to the exclusion of another. The university ought to step out and do something in this connection itself. The most alarming discovery I have made is the comparatively small interest taken in the university by its own graduates. The institution is wisely governed, I will admit, but largely so by a few men in Adelaide who will sooner or later be forced to institute the reform of voting by post for all elections for university positions. Then it will be availed of