

MR THEODORE FINK

THANKED BY PARLIAMENT.
SKETCH IN THE HOUSE.
AN EXCEPTIONAL CEREMONY.

DIGNIFIED AND GRACEFUL.

"It is not the habit of the House (nor would it become such an Assembly) to render its thanks idly, or on slight occasions."

The Speaker, as he uttered these words in the Legislative Assembly of Victoria yesterday afternoon, indicated the rare value of the compliment the House was paying to the honorable Theodore Fink in giving him, within the bar of the House itself, the thanks of Parliament for the splendid services he has rendered the people as President of the Royal Commission on the University of Melbourne. The pleasure or caprice of a king "can make a belted knight a marquis, duke, and a' that;" the thanks of the people are not influenced by mere caprice or passing fancy, but are given jealously and sparingly, and only when richly deserved.

The setting to the ceremony, and the ceremony itself, were in keeping with the importance of the event. They were dignified, yet simple. Nothing extraneous was obtruded, and there was no straining of unmeaning compliment—only, and for a brief half hour, the representatives of the people honored, in a fashion which the people best approve, a servant who had been unstinting in his devotion and zeal on their behalf.

The notice paper of the Assembly had but "one order of the day"—"The honorable Theodore Fink, President of the Royal Commission on the University of Melbourne, to attend the House (at half-past four o'clock)." Half an hour before that time the galleries, all reserved on this occasion for the Speaker, and reached only by special invitation, had begun to fill. Art, science, commerce, and learning all found representatives, and with the leaders in each came ladies whose smart costumes and sober-gay bunches of violets caught up the bright sunshine which streamed in from the head lights of the chamber, and danced playfully to and from the shining brass chandeliers in the ceiling.

The Warden of the Senate of the University, Dr McInerney, arrived early, and seated himself in the front row of the top gallery. Alongside him were Professor Spencer (President of the Professorial Board), Professor Allen (Dean of the Faculty of Medicine), Professor Nanson, Professor and Mrs Moore, the Warden of Trinity College and Mrs Leeper, and the Registrar, Mr W. E. Cornwall, M.A., and Mrs Cornwall. Other educational institutions were represented by Mr G. E. Blanche, principal of the Church of England Grammar School, and Mrs Blanche; Mr W. S. Littlejohn, principal of the Scotch College, and Mrs Littlejohn; Mr F. Tate, Director of Education, and Mrs Tate; the president and secretary of the Head Teachers' Association; the secretary of the Lady Teachers' Association; Mr Swindley, Chief Inspector of Education; the secretary of the Teachers' Union; and Mr C. R. Long, editor of the State School Paper, and Mrs Long.

The Law found representatives in Senator Best, Mr James Moloney, Mr James Westley and Mrs Westley, Mr Wolfe Fink and Mrs Fink, Sir Matthew Davies and Lady Davies, and Mr and Mrs L. S. Woolf.

Of those engaged in varied professions, in commerce, etc., there were a host, amongst whom were noted Mr S. V. Winter, Mr A. H. Massina, Mr Marc Fink, Mr Joel Fox, Mr W. J. Skewes (secretary of the Technical Commission, of which Mr Fink was president) and Mrs Skewes, Mr and Mrs A. Rotheram, Mr A. G. and Mrs Hall, Dr Joske and Miss Joske, Dr Felix Meyer and Mrs Meyer, Mr George Cartwright, Mr Ernest Collins, Mrs S. Leon, Mr Marsden (Public Works Department) and Mrs Marsden, Mr and Mrs George Isaacs, Mrs J. A. Boyd, Mrs T. G. Watson, Mr, Mrs and Miss J. Joshua, Mrs T. G. Watson, Mr and Mrs J. H. Reilly, Mrs J. E. Mackay, Mr and Mrs J. H. Bowman, Mrs George Swinburne, Mrs A. W. Craven, Mrs T. Aitken.

In the Speaker's galleries were Mrs Theodore Fink and other members of the recipient's family, Mrs Frank Madden, Miss Madden, Miss Watson, Miss Webb, Senator Best, Mr J. M. Davies (Attorney-General) and Mrs Davies, Mr Sachs, Minister for Education, and Mrs Sachs, Mrs Blasby, daughter of the Premier, Hon. W. L. Ballieu, M.L.C., Mr Carl Pinschof, Mr E. L. Baillieu, Mr D. M. Barry, Secretary of the University Commission, and Mrs Barry, the Hon. Mr Knox, M.P., Mr Thompson Moore, Mr R. Bloomfield Rees, M.L.C., Mr N. Levi, ex-M.L.C., and others.

Three minutes to the half-hour, when

the bells were set ringing, the spectators were seated, and the members began to troop in. Mr Bailes, of Bendigo, intent on the resumption of the debate upon the Mises Amendment Bill, in which he was to lead off, came early, in a slouch hat of brown, followed by the leader of the Opposition, Mr Prendergast, in a slouch of grey. Mr Mackinnon, a colleague of Mr Fink's on the Commission, was resplendent in a vest of blue, under a bowler of black, and set off with a ruddy smile, which told of the pleasure he was experiencing in the honor that was to be done to the leader in the labors in which he had assisted. While the Opposition members were silently taking their places Mr Bent, in black, only relieved by the glint of his spectacles on the top of his head, preceded the Ministry, and presently found himself backed and flanked by a solid body of Ministerialists. Sharp on the tick of half-past four o'clock the Sergeant-at-Arms, in "shorts" and ruffles, and weighted by the golden mace, strode majestically into the chamber, and announced, "Gentlemen, the Speaker." In sober black gown and full wig, and lacking the magnificent yellow slashed gown affected by Mr Bent when he filled the chair, Mr Madden bowed to the honorable members, who had risen to greet him, and then took his seat.

The House having been constituted, the Special business of the day moved forward with precision and celerity. "I beg to move that a chair be placed on the floor of the House for His Honor Sir John Madden, the Chancellor of the Melbourne University," said the Premier. "I second the motion," announced the leader of the opposition. The ayes had it, of course, and the chair having been placed on the right of the Speaker, the Chancellor, wearing his splendid black and gold robes of office, and carrying his cap in his hand, entered, escorted by the Sergeant at Arms, still bearing the mace, and having bowed ceremoniously, seated himself. The Vice-Chancellor, Sir Henry Wrixon, was to have attended, and to have also been accommodated with a chair on the floor of the House, but, as announced by the Speaker, his medical adviser had ordered him out of town for the benefit of his health, and he was therefore unable to be present.

Thus far it was Hamlet without the Prince, and the eyes of the galleries were fixed on a vacant easy chair which had been placed within the bar of the House, alongside the seat next the gangway on the front Ministerial corner bench—the seat which Mr Fink had occupied prior to his retirement from politics. The chair did not remain long vacant. The Clerk (Mr Watson) read the order of the day, the Sergeant at Arms came in bowing from the rear door of the chamber, announcing that "the President of the Royal Commission on the Melbourne University," was in attendance; the Speaker ordered, "Admit him," and then, heralded by the mace-bearer, Mr Fink entered. The House rose, Mr Fink standing at the bar, bowed, first to the Speaker, and then to the members on either side, and took his seat in the empty chair, when bade to do so by the Speaker. The Sergeant at Arms with the mace "grounded" and upright, stood beside the distinguished "Stranger," who was dressed in a frock suit of black, and sat with his hands clasped, a picture of nervousness, in marked contrast to his wonted easiness of posture in the days when he was not a "stranger" in the Chamber, but "the honorable member for Jolimont."

The Speaker's address in presenting the thanks of the House was an effort worthy of the occasion. Justly proportioned in length, generous, but not fulsome, in praise, comprehensive in its grasp of the magnitude of the task which the honorable member had performed, and intelligent in its appreciation of the benefits which the accomplishment of that task had conferred upon the community, the address voiced accurately the obligation of the House to its late member, who had been set in a place of difficulty, and had acquitted himself with distinction. Naturally, education was the dominating note. "In the midst of many things to which your strong and skillful hand and mind were given, you made conspicuously your own that noble and valuable subject, which has always been the hope and engaged the anxious consideration and commended the generous liberality of our Parliament—the universal education of our people. When all have labored at it, you have been in a full sense its self-sacrificing devotee." Sentences such as these, packed full of solid worth and having all the eloquence of the Chief Justice himself, the Speaker gave fluent expression to, winning the hearty applause of the House, and, had they been able to show it, of the audience also. A copy of the vote of the House—"That this House desires to express its appreciation of the valuable services performed by the Hon. Theodore Fink, and the members of the Royal Commission on the University of Melbourne," and

"That the Clerk be directed to enter upon the journals of the House that the foregoing resolution was passed unanimously"—engrossed upon vellum, was then handed by the Clerk to Mr Fink, who returned thanks.

Beginning with obvious nervousness, which even the cordial reception of the members could not overcome, Mr Fink expressed his great gratification to the House for its appreciation of the labors of himself and the members of the Commission associated with him. Gathering confidence as he progressed, he pressed home upon members the vast importance to the future of the country of the subject of education. "Industry and commerce cannot be served by half-trained people, and Parliament should continue to encourage educational study in a way to develop the greatest of national resources—the characteristics and faculties of children—so that well disciplined hands might be added to well informed minds." Such advice as this, backed by the fulness of knowledge gained in a patient and intelligent investigation of the question of education, the world over, Mr Fink gave, and this latest address of his on the subject is not unworthy to supplement that other one which he made in Parliament, and which lives in the recollection of those who heard it as one of the finest delivered within the walls of the House.

There followed a characteristic speech from Mr Bent, promising "a good time" for the University, and for education generally, a brisk address from Mr Prendergast, with a clarion note at the end—"Education should be free, secular, and compulsory, and extend from the A.B.C. of the lowest schools to the highest learning within the walls of the University"—and some remarks from Mr Mackinnon, in which occurred the declaration, "That nothing that the Premier said during his election campaign had pleased him more than his constantly repeated expression of opinion that the poorest child in the community should have an opportunity, by education, of rising to the highest possible position in the land."

It was to have been expected that Mr Mackinnon would not content himself without a classical quotation. He contented himself with one, an apt one, generously extended to embrace his president, "The finger marks of all men are on all knowledge, and the finger marks of Mr Fink will remain on Victorian education for all time."

The speeches of the Speaker and of Mr Fink were ordered, on the motion of the Premier, seconded by Mr Prendergast, to be printed on the records of the House, and the memorable ceremony, which lasted half-an-hour, was over, Mr Fink was escorted from the chamber by the mace-bearer, the members rising, and remaining standing while he departed.