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Advertiser

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has been settled, all patients can be treated in their homes, and prominent medical men of the city are of the opinion that a separate staff of nurses should be maintained by the Government to treat diabetic cases separately. They say the question is one that the Government may have to consider before very long, in order to relieve much of the congestion at the hospital. Such a staff could be attached to the hospital and directed by the hospital authorities, for the injection of the insulin is a comparatively simple matter. It is thought that many patients could be given injections of insulin as is done in Victoria and perform the injections themselves.

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# The Register.

ADELAIDE; WEDNESDAY, JULY 9, 1924.

## AN ARCHAIC HEALTH ACT.

There is nothing more paralyzing than self-satisfaction, a state of mind much more dangerous in the community than in the individual, by reason of the greater power of the collective intelligence and the need for a common purpose in all real human progress. South Australia has long prided itself upon the fact that, in relation to several important administrative reforms, it has acted the distinguished role of pioneer; and, so long as this pleasant conviction operates as an incentive to further advancement, everything possible should be done to encourage it. But, if the State should evince a disposition to rest upon its laurels, humility is the better spirit. It is satisfying to be assured that, at the time of its passage in 1898, the South Australian Public Health Act was "one of the most advanced pieces of health legislation in the world." The authors of that measure are entitled to our thanks and to our admiration; but it was also due to them that the State should have so far followed their progressive example as to have escaped the reproach that now its methods for the preservation of public health have become "antiquated and ineffective." That, in a quarter of a century, "advanced" health legislation should take its place among things archaic, is suggestive, not only of the rapidity of scientific development, but of the danger of halting to admire a fresh achievement. The address delivered before the Public Health Association last week by its President, Dr. F. S. Hone, should have the effect of creating in the minds of the people of the State profound dissatisfaction with the existing health laws, and a desire for their speedy amendment. Dr. Hone's criticism, besides proceeding from an acknowledged authority on all matters pertaining to public health, is not merely destructive. With uncompromising candour, he directs attention to what is deficient and what mistaken, and as clearly indicates the nature of the necessary remedial measures.

The advance of medical knowledge has been continuous and rapid ever since the present Public Health Act became operative, but the Act itself remains substantially unchanged. There is at the service of society a notable accumulation of recent scientific discoveries, new medical principles, and vastly improved hygienic methods, which, so far as our health legislation is concerned, remain almost wholly unapplied. Science has outdistanced administration. When the Public Health Act was passed, its most advanced section was that dealing with infectious diseases; but, in the light of modern knowledge, it is disconcertingly plain that much of this once-admirable legislation is founded on a mistaken conception of the very nature of infection.

Twenty-five years ago, the study of the modes of transmission of communicable diseases had led almost to more error than truth, and the very basis of the methods devised to limit the spread of such diseases has since been proved fallacious. It is obviously impossible successfully to apply to the control of diseases communicated by insects and human "carriers" administrative machinery set up in ignorance of the fact that infection can be conveyed by any means other than "air, water, and soil," the vehicles named in a now defunct formula. Nor does the conclusion that the Act is now ineffective rest upon mere scientific abstractions. As Dr. Hone points out, our success in preventing preventable diseases has not kept pace with our increasing knowledge. The death rate for the State is low, but should be much lower; and, that it could be further reduced by a systematic use of the resources of preventive medicine, is indicated by the remarkable results which have followed the adoption of modern methods in other communities. South Australia is the only Australian State which is making no determined effort to lessen the incidence of venereal disease; and, at the British Medical Congress in Melbourne last year, Adelaide suffered the shame of being ranked with Hobart in having the highest death rate from pulmonary tuberculosis of all the capital cities of Australia.

If there were no Public Health Act in South Australia, or if the existing Act were abreast of the times, statistics of this kind would involve the medical profession itself in discredit; but there is every reason to believe that the standard of medical knowledge is as high in this State as anywhere else, and that the best results possible in the circumstances are being obtained. A surgeon equipped only with a rusty carving knife would not be altogether blameworthy for the failure of an operation performed with that primitive instrument. Except the need were desperate in the highest degree, he would refuse to operate at all unless better supplied. The medical faculty generally does not refuse to function under the South Australian Public Health Act; but there are directions in which the doctors, individually and collectively, are powerless to struggle against its limitations, and to this extent the existing legislation is instrumental in the actual prevention of the development of medical science. At the University, increasing attention is being devoted to the teaching of preventive medicine, but the public health administration is such as largely to deprive the community of the benefit of this important advance, and to discourage, among the younger men of the profession, the application to practical affairs, or the further elaboration, of principles which should lie at the root of all public health activities. It is urgently necessary that the Health Act should be so amended as to afford every encouragement to the practice of preventive medicine, the ideal being to make every doctor a preventive, rather than a merely curative, agent. The machinery of the Health Department must be entirely reconstructed, to permit of the inauguration of the new era of "safety first" in public health; and to make possible a co-ordination of effort along a settled line of policy. Dr. Hone's arraignment of the Local Boards of Health is sweeping, but amply justified, if only because of the evident failure of the system of which the Local Boards are the chief instrument. A degree of co-operation now altogether impossible between the practising profession and the administrative authorities is highly desirable; and, as a preliminary to this joint campaign against disease, the weapons to be employed to defend society against its most implacable foe

must be furnished with all the improvements suggested by 25 years of unexampled scientific development. There is no reason why South Australia should not only lead the van once more in relation to the enlightened character of its health legislation, but furnish to the world convincing proof that nowhere is there a healthier people or a better climate than in this State.

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## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PLANTS.

### Their Native Haunts.

The Prince of Wales Theatre, Adelaide University, was crowded on Tuesday evening, when Professor T. G. B. Osborn, D.Sc., delivered the second of three illustrated extension lectures on "South Australian plants in their native haunts." In the first of the series he dealt with the plant life of the hills and plains. On the latter occasion he spoke on scrub lands and islands.

#### In The Bight.

The islands referred to were Pearson, Franklin, and Flinders, all of which are situated in The Bight. Professor Osborn emphasized the idea of the building up of plant communities, to which he had referred at length in his opening lecture. He explained the flora of the islands named, and said that the main type of plant there was scrub and chiefly teatree. Scrub, he added, was a term familiar to most people, but difficult to define exactly. By scrub was implied a vegetation consisting of woody plants that did not attain the height or proportions of trees. It might grow no more than four or five feet high, but 10 to 12 feet was the average. In South Australia the people were most familiar with that form of vegetation in mallee scrub. There the term scrub was used correctly, and it would be understood in that sense the world over. In parts of New South Wales and Queensland the word scrub was misapplied when used for the dense sub-tropical forest, the trees of which might reach 200 feet in height. Scrub as they understand the term was developed where conditions of soil or rainfall were unfavourable for tree growth. The Mount Compass area mentioned in the first lecture, was an example of scrub development in what would be forest were it not for the unsuitable and shallow ironstone soils. Such soils were sodden in winter and baked dry during the summer months. Tree development was possible only in the valleys where the streams had cut away the ironstone soils and exposed the good soil beneath. There were large areas of such country on Kangaroo Island and parts of Eyre Peninsula also. All such soils were most difficult for exploitation, and in the present state of the development they were practically useless. Very little grass grew upon them naturally, and even burning did not produce much permanent grass. The natural products of that land were few, the yacca gum of Kangaroo Island being one of the most notable.

#### Sand and Lime.

Another type of scrub-bearing soil was composed of sand rich in lime, in which travertine limestone developed. Where the travertine was close to the surface only dwarf mallee grew naturally. By constant burning, grasses could be encouraged, but the destruction of the natural vegetation frequently promoted drift of the sandy soil. That type of country, like the ironstone soil areas, was practically useless. An entirely different state of affairs existed where scrub was developed on good deep soil, but in a district where the rainfall was too low for forest growth. There were still great areas of that type in the mallee lands on Eyre Peninsula, Yorke's Peninsula, and east of the Murray, though vast acreages had been cleared for farming. Once the scrub was rolled and burnt the soil was quite suitable for the growth of grain, and wherever the rainfall during the wheat-growing season was sufficient those places formed some of the most valuable agricultural areas. One of the problems was water conservation.

#### The Illustrations.

An excellent collection of lantern slides added to the educative value of the lecture. The photographs were taken by Professor Osborn during his travels. In addition to scenic tidbits from the islands in the Bight, there were views from Kangaroo Island, especially concerning Flinders' Chase (he being secretary of the Fauna and Flora Board), and from Monarto South, Pinnaroo, and Minnipa.

The last lecture, which will be on "The saltbush," will be given on July 15.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PLANTS.

### SCRUB AND SCRUB LANDS.

The second of a series of three extension lectures on "South Australian Plants and their Native Haunts," illustrated with lantern slides, was delivered at the University on Tuesday evening by Professor T. G. B. Osborn, who dealt with scrub and scrub lands. He explained that scrub was a term familiar to most people, but difficult to define exactly. By scrub was implied a vegetation consisting of woody plants, which did not attain the height or proportions of trees. They might grow no more than 4 ft. or 5 ft. high, but from 10 to 12 feet was the average. In South Australia they were most familiar with that form of vegetation in mallee scrub. In that case the term scrub was used correctly, and would be understood in that sense the world over. In parts of New South Wales and Queensland the term scrub was misapplied when used for the dense sub-tropical forest, the trees of which might reach 200 ft. in height. Scrub as they understood the term in South Australia was developed where conditions of soil or rainfall were unfavourable for tree growth. The Mount Compass area, which was mentioned in his previous lecture, was an example of scrub development in what would be forest were it not for the unsuitable and shallow ironstone soils. Such soils were sodden in winter and baked dry during the summer months. Tree development was only possible in the valleys where the streams had cut away those ironstone soils and exposed the good soil beneath. There were also large areas of ironstone soils on Kangaroo Island and parts of Eyre Peninsula; all such soils were most difficult for exploitation. In the present condition of the State's development these areas were practically useless. Very little grass grew upon them naturally, and even burning off did not produce much permanent grass. The natural products of that land were few, the yacca gum of Kangaroo Island being one of the most notable. Another type of scrub-bearing soil was composed of sand, rich in lime, in which travertine limestone developed. Where that limestone was close to the surface only dwarf mallee grew naturally. By constant burning, grasses could be encouraged, but the destruction of the natural vegetation frequently promoted drift of the sandy soil. That type of country, like the ironstone soil land was practically useless. An entirely different state of affairs existed where scrub was developed on good deep soil, but in a district where the rainfall was too low for forest growth. There were still great areas of that type in the mallee lands on Eyre Peninsula, Yorke Peninsula, and east of the Murray, although vast areas had been cleared for farming. Once the scrub was rolled and burnt the soil was quite suitable for the growth of grain. Whenever the rainfall during the wheat-growing season was sufficient those formed some of the most valuable agricultural areas.

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## UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

### Dramatic Society Formed

In the South Hall at the Elder Conservatorium last night the Adelaide University Dramatic Society held its first meeting. Mr. Paul McGuire (president) occupied the chair.

Professor Strong in a review of some of the work done by amateur actors and actresses in Australia, with especial mention of the Repertory Theatre movement, said that there should be in all the capital cities of the Commonwealth close connection between the University Dramatic Societies and the Repertory Theatres. Adelaide, through the efforts of Mr. Bryceson Treharne, had initiated the movement in Australia, and Mr. Grogan McMahon had been responsible for its establishment in Melbourne and Sydney. He deplored that the poetic drama had fallen lamentably into decay, but he would not advise the newly formed Adelaide University Dramatic Society to begin on anything so ambitious. Light comedy might lead through drama and tragic comedy up to poetic plays.

A reading of "Becky Sharp" was then given with the following cast:—Becky Sharp, Miss Verna Hackett; Amelia Osborne, Miss Annie Robjohns; Rowdon Crawley, Mr. Basil Harford; George Osborne, Mr. Beasley Kearney; Joseph Sedley, Mr. Kiernan.

The officers of the society are—Patron, Professor Mitchell; president, Mr. Paul McGuire; vice-presidents, Professors Strong, Coleman, Phillipson, Darnley, Naylor, Wilton, McKellar, Stewart, Osborn, Cleland, and Harold Davies; committee, Messrs. Basil Harford, Beasley Kearney, Misses Elsie Wigan, and Winnall; minute secretary, Mr. B. Webb; treasurer, Miss Margaret Cheadle and Mr. Jack Fox; general secretary, Miss Hope Crampton.