

MR. LAWRENCE BIRKS.

DEATH IN NEW ZEALAND.

A brilliant career has been terminated by the death of Mr. Lawrence Birks, who occupied the position of chief electrical engineer of the Public Works Department of New Zealand. In his young days Mr. Birks was well known in Adelaide, having been educated at Prince Alfred College, as a student of which he gained the Angus Engineering Exhibition in 1892. He took the Science degree at the University of Adelaide, and in 1896 shared the Angus Engineering Scholarship with Mr. Alfred Chapple. Mr. Birks continued his training in England, under the scholarship, for five years, specialising in electrical engineering, and returned to Adelaide on the death of his father in 1900. As there was practically no electrical work available in Adelaide at that time, he took up a position with the New South Wales Government and in 1903 proceeded to New Zealand as city electrical engineer in Christchurch.

He was successively engineer to the Christchurch Tramway Construction Company, lecturer in electrical engineering at Canterbury College, engineer in charge of the Rotorua district, and in 1910 was appointed assistant electrical engineer to the Dominion Government, under Mr. Evan Parry, B.Sc. In this capacity he was responsible for the installation of the Lake Coleridge hydro-electric power plant of 8,000 horsepower capacity, the first hydro-electric installation in the Dominion, and for the development of the commercial side of the enterprise, which has proved most successful.

On Mr. Parry's resignation in 1918, Mr. Birks was appointed chief electrical engineer. This position was a very responsible one, as the statutory authorisations voted for the construction of the hydro-electric works in the North Island alone amounted to £10,300,000 for plants of a total capacity of 165,000 h.p., and about 2,000 miles of extra high-tension transmission lines to operate at a pressure of 110,000 volts. A similar system is also being laid out for the South Island. The ideal is that ultimately every home and farm in the Dominion shall have access to the State supply of hydro-electric power, though this will, of course, be modified as required by commercial considerations, the most remunerative lines being constructed first.

Mr. Birks, who was in Adelaide recently, was enthusiastic regarding the results attained in Canterbury and the Waikato district by the distribution of cheap electric power, and regarding the future prospects of revolutionising the conditions of country life, particularly by lightening the domestic labor and in operating the milking machine, on which the future of the Dominion so largely depends. While in Adelaide he was taken ill with pneumonia. He was then on his way to attend the World Power Conference, in London, but the condition of his health forced him to return to New Zealand. In addition to being a Bachelor of Science he was a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, a member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, and a member of the Institute of Mining Engineers.

MARSUPIAL BIRTH.

To the Editor.

Sir—In regard to the lecture by Professor Wood-Jones dealing with the birth of kangaroos, a report of which appears in The Register to-day (Friday), as a bushman of long experience, I, with hundreds of others, will ridicule his statement that witnesses have seen the young kangaroo, immediately after birth, making for its mother's pouch under its own volition. This, to me, is a most ridiculous statement, as the people who said this could never have seen the young kangaroo at birth, and I can assure Professor Wood-Jones that I have seen the young kangaroo, when it was absolutely only a small, shapeless thing, no bigger than an ordinary garden pea, and as for the kangaroo at birth having legs which are easily deflexed, to this I reply to scientists and all else that it is absolutely wrong. We bushmen may not be scientists, but we consider that we have sufficient common sense to see happenings of Nature which are ever before us, not once, but thousands of times. In conclusion, I would like to remind Professor Wood-Jones of the howls of derision made by scientists when it was announced that a warm-blooded animal had been found here which laid eggs and had a bill. These scientists said it was impossible, but they had to admit they were wrong when the actual animal, the duckbilled platypus, was shown them, and it is my firm conviction that there will be a similar occurrence with scientists in regard to the birth of

the kangaroo. While recognising the knowledge of Professor Wood-Jones on many subjects, I regret to say that he will have to bring forward much more proof than he has so far done, and I further ask him not to believe that the impossible can happen, as mentioned by his three witnesses.—I am, Sir, &c., J. BUXTON LAURIE.

Sir—I observe that Professor Wood-Jones says that marsupial birth takes place in the ordinary way. I have seen and handled thousands of opossums. At one time I had two tame opossums which had their native freedom. On one occasion I noticed something. After that I put the female in a cage. In 21 days there was a joey in the pouch not larger than an ordinary house fly fixed on the teat. The pouch is a pocket well forward on the abdomen, with an opening about 1/2 in. long, and almost imperceptible. Will some one tell me how the mother puts the joey in the pouch? I have more to say on the matter. If Professor Wood-Jones would like further information, he can find me at the People's Palace, Pirie street.—I am, Sir, &c., JAS. TEMPERLY.

STEFANSSON'S TRIP.

ANOTHER CAR BREAKS DOWN.

Parties Rearranged.

No. III.—By Vilhjalmur Stefansson. (Copyright.) HORSESHOE BEND, Wednesday.

About one mile beyond the Horseshoe Bend crossing of the Finke River a breakage occurred in the magneto of the Government car, driven and owned by Mr. Johannsen, of Deep Well, near here, and carrying as passengers Mr. Keith Ward (the Chief Geologist of South Australia) and myself. On taking the magneto apart it was found that the break was beyond repair. Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Osborn then generously volunteered to stay behind at Horseshoe Bend until the party returns. Mr. Dutton thereupon gave the magneto of one of his cars to Mr. Johannsen, so as to allow the Government car to proceed. Horseshoe Bend has a small bush hotel, where those left behind will stay, and there is a village of half a dozen aboriginal families nearby. Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox expect to spend much of their time on horseback or in camel journeys radiating from Horseshoe Bend, and they may decide, for the adventure of it, to travel back towards Oodnadatta by camel train. Mrs. Osborn was a botanist even before she married Professor Osborn, and has, on occasions, carried on the work of the department of botany in the Adelaide University during the absence of her husband. She says she really welcomes the stay at Horseshoe Bend, for it will enable her to make a fairly extensive botanical collection in that locality, while her husband expects to do his main collecting on the Burt Plains, beyond the Macdonnell Ranges.

Two Bad Crossings Ahead.

The rearranged parties, consequent on the breaking of one Ford car axle and the giving out of one Dodge car magneto, are now as follows:—The Countess of Stradbroke and Capt. Keppel Palmer in a Ford; Mr. Neville Fraser and Dr. Herbert Basedow in a Ford; Miss Freda Sternberg, Mrs. James Burns, and Mr. Stanley Driver in a Ford; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Dutton and Professor T. G. B. Osborn in a Dodge converted lorry; Mr. Keith Ward, Mr. Johannsen, and myself in a converted Dodge lorry. Mr. Ward's car is in the lead. The parties of Lady Stradbroke and ours will do well if they get to Deep Well to-day (July 23) as we have two very bad crossings of the Finke ahead. Everybody says the sand is the worst for cars in years, because of the unusually dry season.

VICTORIAN GOVERNOR TO FOLLOW MELBOURNE, Wednesday.

The Governor of Victoria (the Earl of Stradbroke) will leave Melbourne shortly for Central Australia, where he will join the Countess of Stradbroke. Sir Leo Cussen will be Acting Governor during the absence of His Excellency.

A DESERT OF OASES.

THE "DRY HEART OF AUSTRALIA."

Overland Parties Impressed.

No. IV.—By Vilhjalmur Stefansson. (Copyright.) ALICE SPRINGS, Thursday.

The combined Commonwealth Government, Stradbroke, Sternberg, and Dutton parties arrived here at 3.30 p.m. to-day, after a 50-mile run in three hours, from Deep Well, where we had all been guests overnight at the station owned by the driver of the Government car (Mr. Gerhard Johansen), who has 1,000 square miles of fair grazing land. Yet, he is able to use only about 200 square miles of his lease, but he expects gradually to put in use more and more of it, by boring extra wells as his herds increase. He has 1,000 head of good stock.

We have now seen 350 miles of country from Oodnadatta. If this be a desert, we must have been travelling through an oasis the whole way. Not that the country resembles the oases of popular imagination—the little verdant paradises on earth—but rather it looks like the oases of reality, as, for instance, those found by the Mormons in Utah (U.S.A.), and eventually made productive by their skill and industry. This is the best possible time to form an opinion of the country's drawbacks, for this season is already one of the longest dry spells on record in some places, and the longest in others. Sgt. Stott, perhaps the best-known man of the interior of Australia, who has been in the Northern Territory for 40 years, is emphatic that it is the worst season in his experience. In ordinary years, he says, there are good rains as late as March, but this year there has been none since January. Nevertheless, Sgt. Stott says there will be no loss of stock anywhere near Alice Springs, even if no rain comes for another six months. Everyone considers that rain before then is a certainty. We have heard the same opinions from stockmen all along the route.

Since we left Oodnadatta we have encountered, accidentally perhaps, two dozen mobs of cattle and horses. One lot each of horses and cattle was noticeably thin, but the others have ranged from presentable to fat.

It seems to me the chief reason why people dispute so much whether Central Australia is a desert must be that they do not agree on the meaning of the word. It is a country, too, in which it is in many places easy to deceive with photographs. Face the camera in one direction, and you get a view of stones and sand only, but turn it the other way, and you get a view of handsome trees and tall grass, or perhaps mulga and shrubs. All of us are enthusiastic about the beauty and variety of the scenery, and we find it easy to understand why every one we meet here says he or she remains because the climate and country are better than any other on earth. Doubtless there must be dissatisfied persons here somewhere, as in other places, but none of us seems to have met any of them as yet.

Our parties are separating here. The Countess of Stradbroke expects to remain with her party as the guests of Sgt. and Mrs. Stott until the arrival of His Excellency, Lord Stradbroke. It is probable that the Dutton and Sternberg parties will decide to-morrow to follow the Government party northward towards the Burt Plain.

THE STUDY OF CANCER.

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY MOVEMENT.

Sydney, July 25. The Cancer Research Committee of the University has decided to appeal for the sum of £1,000 to purchase a cancer library, the formation of a university cancer bureau to undertake administrative work and to keep records of local results.



Mr. C. Gibb B.E.

Who was awarded the Angus Engineering Scholarship at a meeting of the Adelaide University Council yesterday.

ANGAS ENGINEERING SCHOLARSHIP.

The Council of the University has awarded the Angus Engineering Scholarship to Mr. Claude Dixon Gibb, B.E., for a thesis on "Metallography and Heat Treatment of Some Iron Alloys." Mr. Gibb, who graduated in 1923, is at present continuing his engineering studies in England. Mr. Carl F. Koerner, B.E., was placed proxime accessit by the examiners.

At a meeting of the Adelaide University Council yesterday, Mr. Claude Dixon Gibb, youngest son of Mr. John Gibb, the well-known Port Adelaide carrier, was awarded the Angus Engineering scholarship. Mr. Gibb, who was born at Queenstown 26 years ago, was educated at the Alberton and LeFevre State schools, and won a scholarship which entitled him to a course at the School of Mines, where he won a gold medal. He joined the Adelaide Cement Company as an electrician, but at the age of 18 he enlisted in the A.I.F. as a motor mechanic, subsequently being appointed lieutenant in the Australian Flying Corps. Upon his return to Adelaide after the war, Mr. Gibb became instructor at the School of Mines, later transferring to the University, where he obtained his B.E. degree. Last January he left for Great Britain to join the staff of the Parsons Turbine Company at Newcastle-on-Tyne. The thesis which won him the Angus scholarship was written before his departure. After two years' experience with the Parsons Company, Mr. Gibb intends to go to America to study the latest developments in electrical engineering.

COMMUNISING THE UNIVERSITIES.

New Decree by Soviet Government.

The latest decree of the Soviet Government concerning the Universities orders the restriction of the number of students, on the ground that it is impossible for the Government to find employment for a large part of its University-trained citizens during the coming years—a rather strange admission by the Government of a country which needs for its reconstruction above all trained technical and intelligent men and women.

The fact is (says the Moscow correspondent of the London "Daily News") that there are no State funds available to maintain the pre-war standard of University training or the present number of university students (150,000 distributed in 19 universities, 12 higher education establishments, 25 agricultural high schools, five medical colleges, 20 polytechnics, and a number of music and art schools), and that in any case such funds as are available would be better employed in fostering primary education in Russia, which is practically non-existent.