

The Royal Society of NSW – 100 Years Ago

JAK KELLY

Extract from the Presidential Address by C.O. Burge published in the Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW Volume XXXIX (1905) pp. 1–22

Yet, among the young men of our day what are the names of Kelvin, of Lodge, of Rayleigh, of Dewar, of others, beside that of a famous cricketer, or of the man who can kick a ball further or straighter than another? We may allow that mental culture cannot stand alone, it must be the outcome of sufficient physical training. The old maxim 'Mens sana in corpore sano' is ever true, but are we not overloading the latter part of the prescription? The traditional Irishman is sneered at for regarding fighting as an end, and not a means, but are not the Australians earning the reputation of confounding means and ends, in an even more absurd way? The combination is as old as Plato who laid down music and gymnastics as the twin bases of education ... but the gymnastics were regarded as means only, for the double purpose of efficiency in war, and for the training of the body, so that it should be intellectually vigorous.

The man of science is unappreciated, because his gifts are unsought, and when conferred, are rapidly rendered commonplace by constant use, and often that use does not be-

come available for some years after the invention has left the authors brain.

It has been well said that the question is not whether a man has gone through the university, it is whether the university has gone through him. Training in habits of exact observation and intelligent inference is wanted, not that interest which is expressed by the observation of a man of unscientific temperament, who once spoke of a proposition in Euclid, as a happy ending to a mildly exciting plot.

Notwithstanding the neglect, until latterly, of science in engineering, great strides have been taken, perhaps the greatest, in recent times, have been in connection with light; mechanical contrivances and energy, through the medium of electricity; and the disposal of refuse of cities. As to light, there is the question which is more one for the anatomist than the engineer, whether the human eye is developing the power to withstand, without injury, the intense brightness provided by modern electrical and gas engineers.



Kelly, John Charles. 2005. "100 years ago." *Journal and proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 138(3-4), 63–63. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.361563>.

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