

# THE REGENT STREET POLYTECHNIC:

ENGLAND'S LARGEST EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE.

BY FRED A. MCKENZIE.

THE Regent Street Polytechnic—familiarily known as “THE Poly”—is one of the most potent of the forces making for a transformed London. It is not only the largest of all English educational institutions, but has brought about a new departure in industrial teaching, and has been the parent of many friendly rivals on both sides of the Atlantic. Twenty years ago it was, in its present form, unknown; to-day it has over fifteen thousand members and students, and its influence is world-wide. For rapidity of growth and activity of work it more resembles the newer American universities than anything the Old World can show. It aims to cater for the whole man, intellectually, industrially, morally, and physically. It has revolutionised modern travel, placing the beauties of Switzerland, Norway, and Italy within easy reach of the young mechanic and shop assistant. Its athletes take foremost rank among the leaders of pure sport; its religious agencies are as lively and happy and enthusiastic as any to be found within the postal radius; and its educational work is of vast and ever-increasing extent.

“The Poly” is in a special sense the work of one man, Mr. Quintin Hogg, who started it, moulded its growth, and has given not only his fortune but himself to it. The youngest son of Sir James Weir Hogg, twice chairman of the old East India Company, he

came under deep religious influences while at Eton, and there realised that life should be spent for other than purely personal ends. In 1863, when eighteen years old, he removed to London to enter business, and here he was soon stirred to his depths by the sight of the poverty and misery of St. Giles's. He began a mission among the street Arabs who then abounded in the West Central district, but at first the boys half suspected him to be an

agent of the police, and would not enter into friendly relations. Nothing daunted, the young Etonian became himself literally a street Arab. He bought a ragged suit and a shoeblack's outfit in the New Cut, and for six months spent two or three nights every week on the streets. He blacked shoes at street corners, and afterwards crept under the market wagons, in the Adelphi arches, or aboard the river barges, and slept out with the homeless. He learned the language of the street Arabs, he got to know their tricks and ways, and equipped himself for the work he had determined to do.



From a photo by]

[Polytechnic School.

MR. QUINTIN HOGG.

He could only give part of his time to this philanthropy, for he was engaged during the day preparing for partnership in a great firm of West Indian merchants. Nor had he much money to devote to it, for he was limited to a younger son's allowance of eighty pounds a year. But he soon started a ragged school, and the boys now flocked to him. Venturing further, he opened a cheap shelter for the street lads. He and the Arabs together made the place ready, whitewashing,



painting, and carpentering it themselves. Mr. Hogg had a little room in the building, and divided his leisure time between the alley off the Strand and his father's house in Carlton Gardens.

The work soon bore fruit. The first comers were very bad. Many, if not most of them, were thieves, some had no clothes save shawls, and all were unaccustomed to any discipline. But the thieves turned honest, the rags were transformed to decent garments, and by 1868 the place had become quite respectable. Numbers of the lads were given a chance to start life afresh in Greater Britain, and of those who remained behind many were put in the way of making a good living.

The ragged school grew to a youths' institute, and larger premises were secured, first in Hanover Street and then in Long Acre. Mr. Hogg had already laid down the lines on which his work has since been carried out. He wanted to make his "boys" better men, not only morally but physically and mentally. He was a great believer in holidays, and though the Polytechnic Foreign Tours were then undreamed of, he had a very good substitute. He would take parties of his lads as his guests on his yacht, and

for membership. Many had to be constantly refused admission, and Mr. Hogg cast his eyes around to see what could be done.

In 1881, when it had been almost decided to build special premises in St. Martin's Lane, the Polytechnic in Regent Street, the famous old home of popular science, came into the market. The building was just

what Mr. Hogg wanted, and he bought it for £50,000. It was determined to transfer the Youths' Institute to here, and develop



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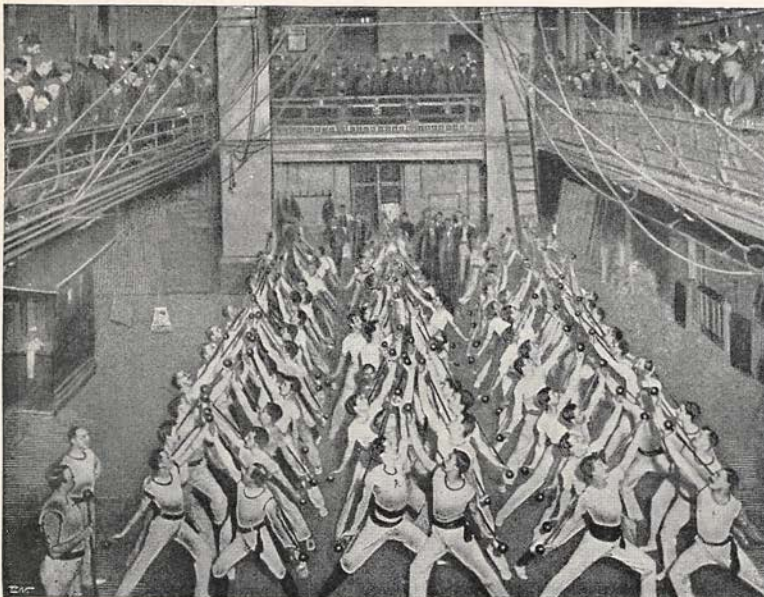
[Fradelle &amp; Young.

DR. H. S. LUNN.

(Chaplain to the Polytechnic.)

it into a young men's club and educational centre. On the 25th September, 1882, the new premises were opened, and, rashly undertaking the rôle of a prophet, Mr. Hogg declared they were "so extensive as to afford scope for almost any possible development in the future." He little knew what was before him. On the opening day over a thousand new members joined, and Mr. Hogg was kept busy to five in the evening till after one in the morning receiving

the new comers. He wanted to see each of the fellows himself, but after over eight hours of greeting them he had to give in.



From a photo by]

[W. H. Bunnnett.

A POLYTECHNIC DRILL.

carry them away to the Mediterranean for a few weeks. The difficulty now was how to accommodate the large numbers of applicants



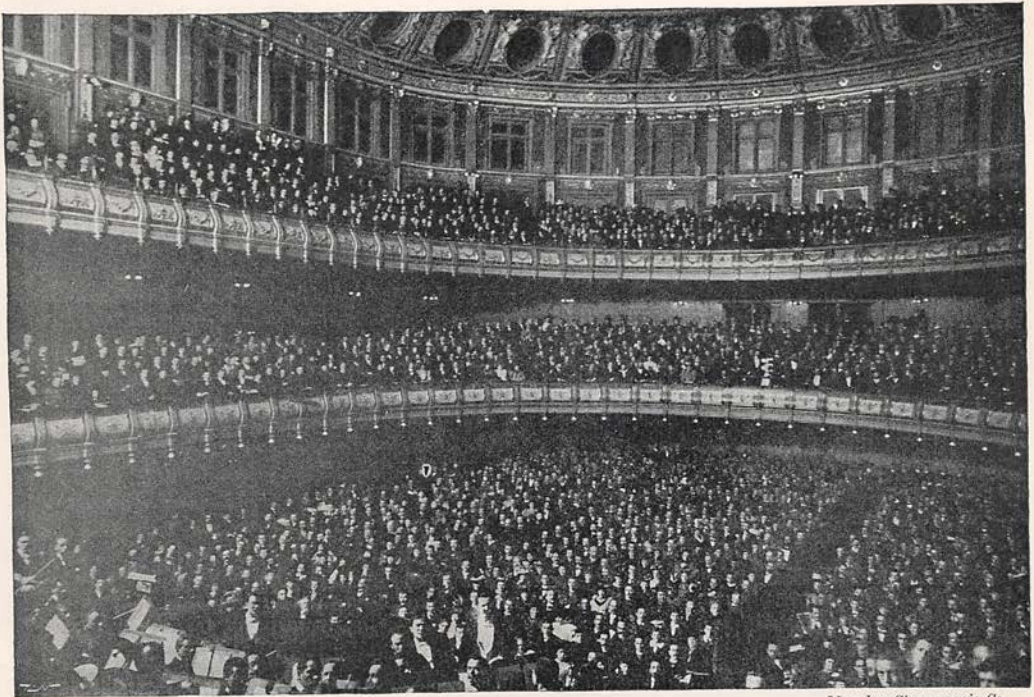
From then till now the Polytechnic has never had room enough. Extensions and enlargements of premises have been undertaken at great cost, but the work grows so quickly that the accommodation lags ever behind. Houses to the right and left and rear have been absorbed, several storeys have been added to the original house, a new large hall has been built, and further houses in the neighbourhood have been rented for branches of the work.

For some years Mr. Hogg has been mainly aided by two assistants, Mr. Robert Mitchell and Mr. J. E. K. Studd. Mr. Mitchell's

His activity, his power of making friends, and his capacity for work need to be known to be believed.

Mr. J. E. K. Studd, the famous cricketer, is, like Mr. Hogg, an Etonian. He came to the Polytechnic in 1885 as hon. secretary, and has since freely devoted himself to its work, attending his office day after day, and night after night, with a regularity that the closest business man could hardly rival. His departments are mainly the athletic, recreation, and tourist sections, but there is no very strict division between the different branches.

Mr. Hogg leaves practically all the regular



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[London Stereoscopic Co.

THE QUEEN'S HALL FILLED WITH ITS USUAL SATURDAY NIGHT AUDIENCE AT A POLYTECHNIC CONCERT.

connection dates back to the time of the Long Acre Institute, where he was for some time honorary secretary. The work there becoming so great, Mr. Mitchell was induced to devote his whole time to the Institute, and when the Regent Street buildings were taken, it was he who drew up the scheme of technical education which has proved so successful. Mr. Mitchell devotes himself mainly to the educational work of the Polytechnic, but his hand is seen everywhere. All who have met him will bear me out in saying that he is as alert, genial and "wide-awake" a director as could be desired.

work of the Polytechnic in the hands of Messrs. Studd and Mitchell, and devotes himself to finding the necessary financial aid and cultivating personal acquaintance with his "Poly boys," as the members are called. He seems to know the names and affairs of almost all of the thousands who throng the rooms, and no one can witness his contact with his "boys" without realising that to them he is as an elder brother. He lives in Cavendish Square. There is a covered way from his house into the Polytechnic, and almost every leisure moment finds him among the young men. "I have seldom been



in any of the other Polytechnics, except the one at Woolwich," he once told me. "I refuse almost every invitation to speak at outside meetings. My work is here in Regent Street, and I believe it is only by concentrating oneself on one's own work that a man can hope to make it really successful or obtain the best results."

The Polytechnic differs from most of its English imitators in being distinctively a religious institution. Religion is forced down no one's throat, there is no button-holing of members and inquiring as to their spiritual condition, and any man is at perfect liberty to be a member or attend classes for years, if he wishes, without once going near a religious meeting. Nevertheless, Christianity is the pivot of the whole, and the leaders regard it as the great factor of their success. It supplies a rallying point for workers, it induces men to take an interest in other than their own particular hobbies, and it gives an enthusiasm and disinterestedness which it would be difficult to otherwise obtain. The Polytechnic religious services

wards. Religion there is essentially a bright and cheery thing.

The educational work of the Institution, which began with one or two classes in the ragged school, is its side which has been most widely copied. There are large middle-class day schools for boys and girls, and



MR. R. MITCHELL.

special schools of art, engineering, photography, arts and crafts, and shorthand. The evening classes embrace almost every possible subject. The classics and purely literary studies receive comparatively little attention; but there are numerous groups for modern languages and commercial studies. Science and art are given special prominence, but the chief part of the educational work is the trade classes. Such subjects as tailoring, engineering, and carriage building (to name a few out of many) are expounded by masters of the crafts, in both technical and practical classes. The classes are carried on in such a way as to secure the approval of the trade authorities, and none are admitted to them but those actually engaged in the particular callings taught. The Polytechnic authorities have neither time nor inclination to give a smattering to amateurs; they aim to make the actual craftsmen masters of their trades.

These trade classes are an interesting sight. It is curious, for instance, to watch a band of young plumbers studying brazing and joining in one of the lower rooms, learning the scientific reasons for the different processes, and at the same time themselves actually performing the separate stages of the work. Still more interesting is it to see a class of from sixty to seventy young tailors, each with cloth and chalk and rules before him, following the instruction of a great master cutter from a leading West-end house. It may seem strange that young fellows who have been at work from eight in the morning till seven at night should then hurry away to attend a class on their own work. But the students have very



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[Alice Hughes.

MRS. QUINTIN HOGG.

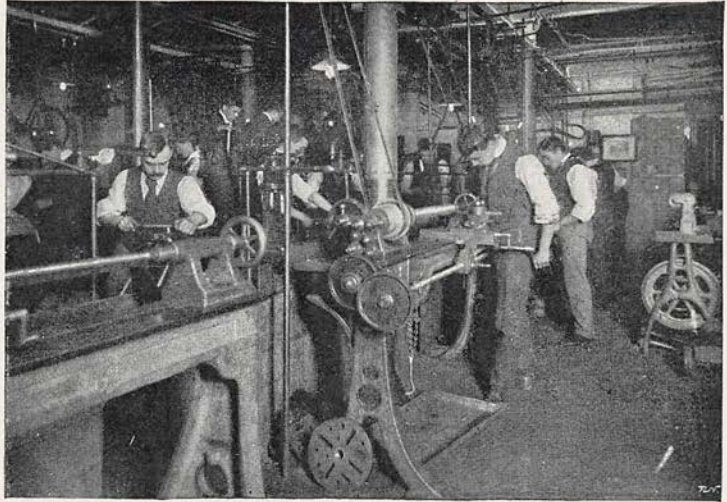
are attended by thousands, and have been conducted by leaders of all the churches, from the Archbishop of Canterbury down-



substantial pecuniary rewards in view. The average young tailor, for instance, thinks himself fortunate if he earns 35s. a week, and is by no means sure of work. After studying cutting for some winters at the Polytechnic, and becoming a really first-class hand, he can readily obtain from £3 10s. to £6, or even more, a week, and will find abundant vacancies. In trade to-day knowledge pays, and the old "rule-o'-thumb" man finds himself relegated to the back-ground.

One might quote, if necessary, many opinions from competent authorities on the excellence of the Polytechnic technical teaching; but one fact speaks more than all such. After a careful examination of the different methods adopted for encouraging technical education in London, the Charity Commissioners determined to adopt the plan in force at Regent Street in the formation of newer technical schools. At the same time they gave the Polytechnic a grant of £3,500

governing body was appointed for the Institute, and to it Mr. Hogg handed over the building and fittings. This governing body,



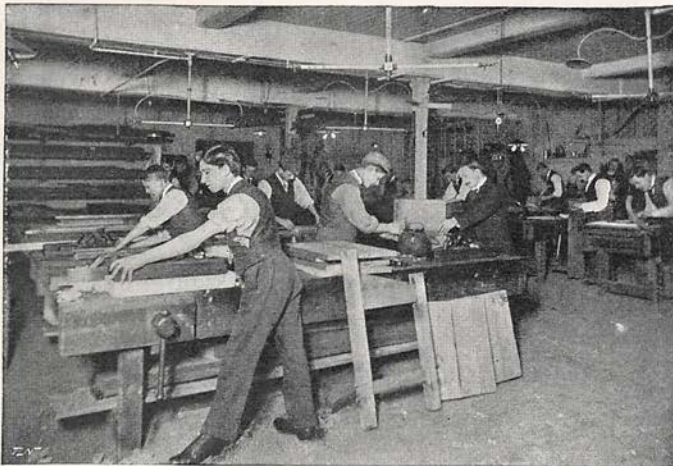
From a photo by

THE ENGINEERS' SHOP.

[W. H. Bunnnett.]

consisting of such men as Sir Owen Roberts and Lord Reay, is the supreme authority. The members elect a council, which is a consultative body only, but whose wishes are as far as possible met in the actual administration. When it is mentioned that Mr. Hogg himself has given over £150,000 to the Institution, it will be seen that the financial burden is no light one.

The Poly "boys" have always been great athletes, and Mr. Hogg is a firm believer in the beneficent influence of training. His views are borne out by the fact that since the Regent Street building has been open, it has never once been necessary to turn out a man for ill-behaviour. The athletic clubs attached to the Institute have Merton Hall Farm, a piece of land twenty-seven acres in extent, and the Paddington Recreation Grounds for their practice. The boating club has a large boat-house of its own at Chiswick. The cycling club is one of the most noted



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THE CARPENTERS' SHOP.

[W. H. Bunnnett.]

a year, which helped to relieve Mr. Quintin Hogg of part of the great financial burden he had for several years gladly borne. A

in this country; several of the leading racers of to-day belong to it or learned their business there, and year after year it has



won the cycling championship of London. This club publishes its own journal, and its race meetings are quite great events in the Metropolitan sporting world. The most popular of all sections, so far as membership is concerned, is probably the gymnastic, and the accompanying view speaks so well of its capacity that description is unnecessary. In summer time the great reading-room is turned into a swimming-bath, and it makes one of the largest in the kingdom.

I am indebted to Mr. W. S. Haukins, Hon. Secretary of the Polytechnic Athletic Club, for the following account of its work.

"One of the greatest, if not the greatest, features of the social side of the Regent Street Polytechnic is the athletic club, with its splendid cricket, tennis, and football ground at Merton Hall, Wimbledon, twenty-seven acres in extent, with separate dressing accommodation for each team, and fitted up with every convenience, including a refreshment pavilion on the grounds. Every Saturday in the summer the club members play ten cricket and two tennis matches,

that of any Saturday afternoon club, and it is a great feature to see the president of the Polytechnic, Mr. Quintin Hogg, and his son,



From a photo by]

[W. H. Bennett.

A POLYTECHNIC TROPHY.



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MR. J. E. K. STUDD.

[Russell.

and in the winter nine Association matches and one Rugby. The play of the cricket, football, and tennis sections is equal to

playing in one of the teams each Saturday. The boat-house at Chiswick was specially built for us, and we have the largest stock of any private club on the river. The quality of the rowing is first class, and our boating section has for several years won the principal events at the Oxford Royal Regatta. The home of the swimming and water-polo section is in the handsome bath in the Polytechnic. The swimmers can boast of having had the winners of the half-mile, one mile, and long distance championships of England, and in the water-polo they have had for several years one of the finest teams in England. Last season they won the championship of London, and their junior team won the junior championship of Middlesex. When you consider that a young man can get all the advantages of playing cricket, tennis, football, rowing, swimming, and water-polo, for the modest sum of five shillings per annum, it will give some idea of the great organising powers of the governing body of the Regent Street Polytechnic."

The Polytechnic claims, and rightly, to be the pioneer of the co-operative holiday movement, and over six thousand people travel under its auspices each year. This movement started by an excursion organised for the boys of the day school on the Continent one summer. The boys returned with such glowing accounts of their enjoyments that the adults began to inquire if



something of the kind could not be done for them. The next year a fourteen days trip to Switzerland was planned, and then the tours grew and were thrown open to the general public. These tours are neither subsidised nor profit-making enterprises. The rates are fixed as nearly as possible to cover the cost, and if the year's work gives a margin of profit, it is handed over to the general funds of the Institute. A number of young peoples' institutes throughout the country have affiliated themselves

the lake at Lucerne, where the excursionists are housed during their stay.

When first initiated, the Polytechnic work was exclusively for men, but this is no longer so. For long the members were constantly asking when something was to be done for their sisters, or for "other fellows' sisters." In 1887 houses were taken in Langham Place, a few doors from the original building, and a "Sisters' Institute" was opened. A thousand applications for membership were received almost at once, and now young men



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[S. J. Beckett.

A POLYTECHNIC PARTY ON TOUR IN NORWAY.

to the tourist section of the Polytechnic, and the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association of North America arranges all its European tours through the Regent Street body.

The chief of these tours are the nine guinea thirteen days cruise among the fiords of Norway, and the five guinea eight days excursion to Switzerland. The Polytechnic has its own steamer for the Norwegian cruise, and takes only one class of passengers. In Switzerland, the Polytechnic authorities have their own *châlets*, beautifully situated on

and maidens share almost like and like advantages. It is often laughingly said that since the young women's branch was opened the Polytechnic has become quite a matrimonial bureau; certainly many marriages are arranged between members of the two sections. Few who know anything of life in Central London will regard this as anything but a blessing. One of the greatest curses of the life of the struggling young man or woman living in the Inner Circle is the loneliness of his or her life and the fearful difficulty of obtaining any social intercourse.



No single description of the Polytechnic could deal with all its work or workers. Mr. Douglas Hogg, Mr. V. R. Hoare, Dr. H. S. Lunn, and many others, devote the whole or part of their time to the Institute's work. One thing among these workers cannot but strike the most casual visitor. All seem to delight in their labour, and to strive to see how much, rather than how little, they can get through.

During the winter months the Saturday evening concerts in Queen's Hall, the finest concert hall in London, are a great attraction, and are crowded to excess. First-class professional singers are obtained and reasonable prices of admission charged, and these concerts prove, if proof were necessary, that it is not necessary to pander in the least to the lower tastes to attract a crowd.

Among other prominent branches of Polytechnic activity must be mentioned the Advice and Labour and Reception Bureaux. A young barrister freely attends once a week to give gratuitous legal advice to the

members. The Labour and Reception Bureau, besides acting as an employment agency, meets and introduces to London life young people coming up from the country.

Mr. Quintin Hogg is not yet satisfied. He is now anxious to add to the Polytechnic a great home for young men, where young fellows might live in comfort and with home-like surroundings at prices they could afford to pay. He feels deeply the discomfort of the average young man in lodgings, discomfort wholly unnecessary, seeing the price he is charged. That such a home could be successfully conducted and made to pay Mr. Hogg is convinced. But one thing bars the way. It would have to be within easy reach of the Regent Street building, and in that district rents are enormously high. To start a home on an adequate scale involves much financial responsibility, and, as Mr. Hogg says, "To a West Indian sugar-planter such risk is out of the question." Where will the necessary millionaire come from?



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A COSY CORNER IN THE CYCLISTS' ROOM.