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24 November 1960

Meteorology in Retrospect

by F.Loewe

A large audience gathered on the evening of 24th November to bid farewell to Dr.Loewe who retires from the position of Head of the Department of Meteorology, University of Melbourne, at the end of the year. The chairman of the meeting Mr. L.J.Dwyer in introducing the speaker, traced Dr.Loewe's career in meteorology from his early days in the German Weather Service to his work in Australia, emphasizing his co-operation with the Bureau, in particular the part he played in the training of its meteorologists, and his work in Antarctica. All present joined the chairman in wishing Dr.Loewe happiness in his retirement.

Dr.Loewe then presented his talk which covered impressions gained during his career from his early days in Europe to his recent years in the University of Melbourne. Remembering the "prefrontal" times of his first studies, he described the life of Margules as an example of a man ahead of his time. He deplored the increasing separation of meteorology from the neighbouring earth sciences, particularly geography and physical oceanography, and that of even the meteorologist from direct study and observation of the atmosphere. Viewing the problem in a wider frame he stressed the failure of the educational institutions in Australia, among them his own university, to produce a group of persons of wide culture and many-sided intellectual curiosity. The system tended to produce mainly efficient blinkered technicians. He blamed the excess of formal examinations for hampering the liberal education of the Australian student at school and at the university.

The speaker then recounted his share in the earliest stages of aviation meteorology and on his research flights from 1925 onwards, which gave him a deeper insight into the interactions between the different atmospheric phenomena and the unforgettable pleasure of dangers overcome and beauty revealed.

He described briefly one of the expeditions in which he had taken part, the "Alfred Wegener German Greenland Expedition" of 1929-31. He mentioned some of the results gained notwithstanding hardship and misfortune, and stated that he felt enriched by the struggles to get these results. He felt that it might be worthwhile to consider whether a less elaborate technical set-up than is today customary, might not attract even more independent and adventurous thinkers to polar work than those volunteering today. He quoted as an example the later scientific careers of the scientists of Scott's Terra-Nova-Expedition. He praised his leader Alfred Wegener, who perished on the ice cap of Greenland, as a shining example of this Viking spirit in an outstanding creative scientist.

The speaker concluded his speech at the end of his official professional career with verses expressing joy and gratitude for a life in which meteorology formed the centre of many and diverse gratifying experiences.