

Prominent Personalities

M. P. HANSEN

Written by C. R. Bradish

THE NEW DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Drawing by L. F. REYNOLDS

FROM Log Cabin to White Australian parallels. The feats of "House" has had many humble of aspiring young Lincolns stud our island story, and they are feats of fine achievement, exhibiting all manner of heroism and resource. Perseverance, they say, is a Nordic trait; but that restless ambition to "get on" flourishes among all races, flowering magnificently, as we know in the lowliest soil. It would be worth while compiling a history of the men who have stewed in the faint light of tallow dips to rise to affluence or power in after days. Such a history would include many notable names. The record would be damp with tears, and blood, and perspiration; but it would serve as a guide for the coming Caesars and provide refreshment for the "also-rans."

I think that Martin P. Hansen, Victoria's new Director of Education, ought to have a chapter in such a tale. He is one of those who have groped and striven against great odds. His father, who has just turned the corner of his second youth at the sprightly age of 95, will tell you in a lovely beaming tone of all that Martin has accomplished. The old gentleman still lives on his farm at Toolleen, the ghost of a hamlet that clutches at the edge of civilisation by way of a small school, a P.O. and a store. Toolleen is fifteen miles from Heathcote, and its list of insomniacs is obviously not large; yet it is a lively memory to Martin Hansen, who did his first reading among the two or three books obtainable in his parents' home.

Hansen, Senior, is a Dane. So was the late Mrs

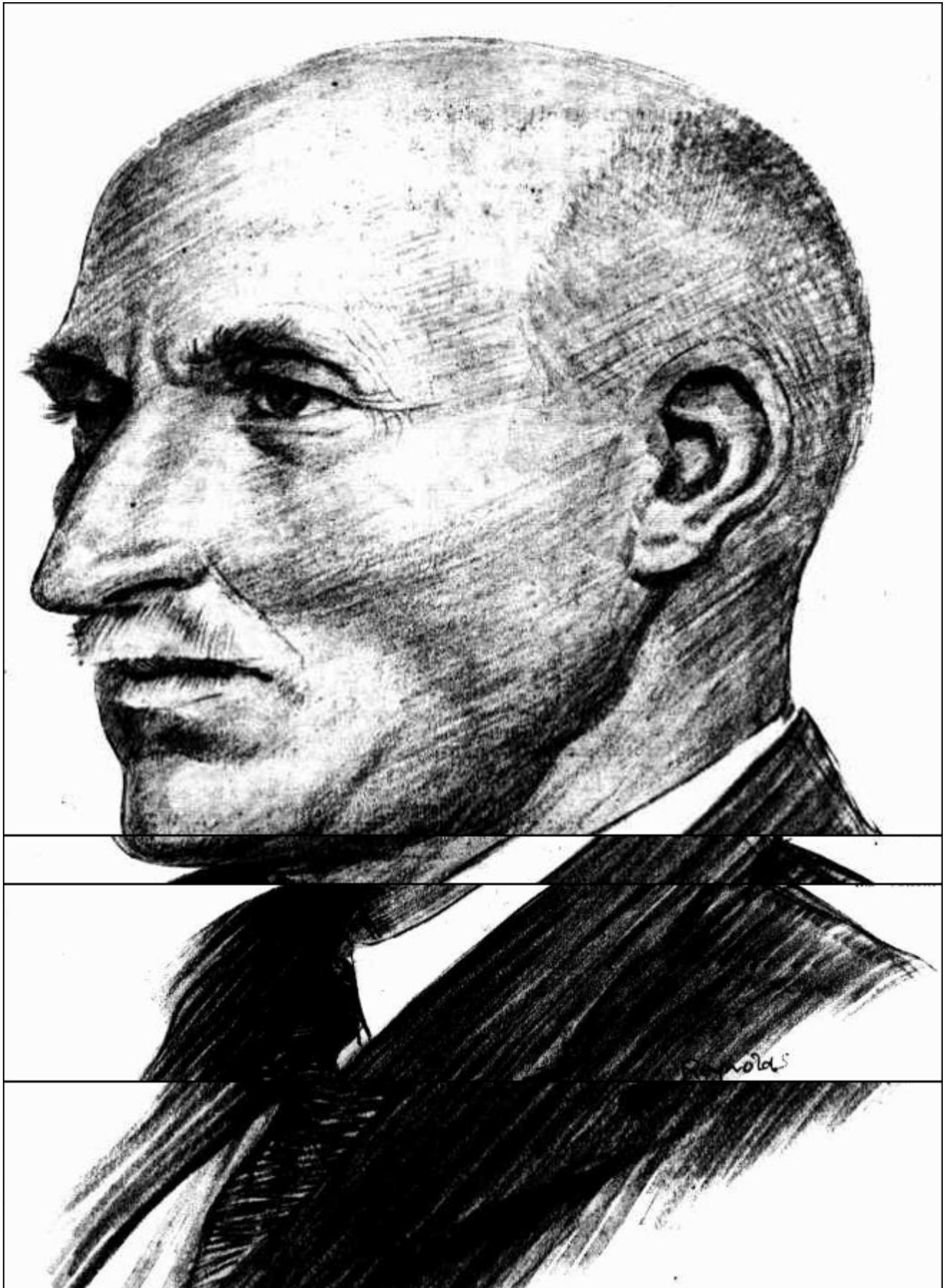
is a Dane. So was the late Mrs Hansen, Martin's


Hansen, Martin's mother. Both came from a

mother. Both  
came from a  
part of Denmark

part of Denmark which was so close to the Prussian border that the sound of sauerkraut being eaten could be heard on still evenings. Either driven by a fear of Prussia or a desire for a new existence, Hansen pere one day shook the last clod of Denmark off his feet. He made for New Zealand where a new music was in the air. It was the beautiful rataplan of p i c k s coming down on gold-bearing quartz. Hansen joined the chorus, and if his work was vigorous, the result was falsetto. He then packed up and made for Victoria. He tried Bendigo first, and it was at Crosbie nearby where his son, Martin, was born.

oolleen, just a few miles away from Crosbie, was the first setting for Martin's life story. Here the boy must have felt early that the stony slumbrous routine of a rustic was a menace to his future. Perhaps the influence of his first master, James Bernard Boyle, turned his thoughts elsewhere; but anyhow he determined on getting all





the education that he could. As his father could not finance him through a course in a college he did the next best thing—he won a scholarship. Scholarships then were awarded on a territorial basis, a certain number were allotted to each district throughout the State, and he, running second in the examination for his part of the world, was granted the option of £40 for one year, or £10 p.a. for four years at the Scotch College. Wisely he chose the former, for he was able to obtain fur-

ther terms by sprightly demonstrations of knowledge at subsequent exams.

With Scotch behind him and numerous suitable professions offering he decided on being a teacher. He thereupon sat for the competitive examination for admission to the Teachers' Training College. He headed the swarm of candidates by a considerable margin of marks, and at the end of his course he won the Gladman prize and another reward for his competent views on

the theory and practice of teaching. The Gladman prize amounted to 12 guineas, and need I say that the young pedagogue had the cash translated into books.

A midget school at Cochrane's Creek was the place of his initiation as a teacher, and I am told that such was his enthusiasm in a district which scholastically had been given up for dead that the pupils increased from a dour dozen to 30 bright infants in a few months. He was now apparently well set; but retrenchment was in the air, and the effect of a new system of regrading, brought in some time later, caused him to shoot in his resignation and take a job in the University High School. This he held two years, and then yielding to various persuasive voices, enlisted under the banner of the Education Department again. For another short space he was trudging up the bare slopes of the then State School cur-

space he was trudging up the bare slopes of the then State School curriculum, when once more he tired, or maybe discovered fine possibilities in a public school career. Anyhow the end of the 19th century found him installed at Wesley College and assisting its educative processes in divers brilliant ways.

Wesley at that period mustered no more than 60 lads. In addition to being the senior master, Hansen was a maestro of sports. In this he showed unusual judgment and activity. He had the great advantage of being personally keen, of possessing above all a mind that had its days off from Greek roots, parsing and Todhunter. One day he heard of the prowess of Charles Donald as a rowing coach, and conceived the revolutionary idea of recommending him as a tutor to the ambitious young boatmen in the College. His suggestion was adopted. Donald was engaged, and the result was that at the first inter-collegiate

eight-oared battle on the Lower Yarra Wesley's advantage over the next competitor amounted to yards of dirty water.

I should like to linger over his ten years at Wesley College, but I have not the room. All that can be said is that the decade was immensely profitable to one who was to become the chief inspector of registered secondary schools and was bound through his own associations to keep a warm fatherly eye on their development. Much has been written about this feature of his educational work, and other public prints have been eloquent of late on the matter of his pioneering the "Class A" system in the Government schools. Likewise there have been many just and commendable allusions to his tact and skill as an assistant director who has been called upon to take the helm when Frank Tate, the late head, was absent from Australia.

Still, I am not so much touched by these now historical commonplaces as I am attracted by the man himself.

these now historical circumstances.  
I am attracted by the man himself.  
Hansen is a tonic, a restorative to a  
jaded soul. To see his dancing eye,  
to hear his voice is like a jaunt in the  
country with the wattle out.