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J. A. Thomson's Proposals for Reform of the New Zealand
Institute in 1917—A Chapter in the History of the
Royal Society of New Zealand

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Abstract

THOMSON'S 1917 proposals for reform of the New Zealand Institute, here published for the first time, arose from wartime attempts to stimulate science in the British dominions. It involved establishment of a Fellowship restricted to "the most competent scientific men of the Dominion" who should elect the executive, the continued affiliation of local scientific institutions with reduced responsibilities, and the holding of public meetings of the Institute to draw public attention to the progress of science. Several of Thomson's far-sighted proposals were implemented during the next fifty years.

INTRODUCTION

At the Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the New Zealand Institute on January 30, 1917, Dr James Allan Thomson gave a notice of motion for the reform of the New Zealand Institute (*Trans. N.Z. Inst.* 49: 542). Thomson's father, George Malcolm Thomson, M.L.C. (1848-1933), was a staunch supporter of the Otago Institute from its early years, an early advocate of reform during the Hector period of the New Zealand Institute's history, a member of the Board of Governors from 1903 to 1933, and the third elected President (1907-08) of the Institute (see Benham, 1935). J. A. Thomson, New Zealand's first Rhodes Scholar, returned to New Zealand after post-graduate work at Oxford and on the West Australian gold-fields to become the first paleontologist at the New Zealand Geological Survey in 1911. In 1914 he succeeded A. Hamilton as Director of the Dominion Museum, Wellington, and thus became the leading scientific adviser to the New Zealand Government (see Speight, 1929).

The imminence of a world war had drawn the attention of the Imperial and Dominion governments to the deficiencies in the organisation of science in the British Empire, in contrast to its efficiency in Germany. By an Order in Council dated July 28, 1915, Great Britain had established a Committee and an Advisory Council for the organisation and development of state-aided scientific and industrial

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