

Give a brief account of the origin, progress and result of the war between Athens and Syracuse.

The period covered by the requirements of the curriculum being from the Persian to the Peloponnesian War, both inclusive, it is at once apparent that the subject of the question is one of very great importance, and that the pupil who knows nothing or very little about it has either been badly instructed or is constitutionally incapable of learning history. We subjoin a few of the answers given to the question, with the admission, which we are glad to be able to make, that others handed in were almost entirely unexceptionable both in matter and form :—

(1.) The origin of the war with Syracuse was an outbreak between a Roman and Greek colony. It was carried on with great tardiness, and resulted in the final defeat of the Greeks and the loss of their fleet.

(2.) The war with Syracuse began because the Athenians were warring against some Sicilian town which requested aid from Syracuse. The Syracusians threw themselves and defeated the Athenian army and fleet afterwards; they also defeated the reinforcements. This war was full of defeats and losses. The result was that it weakened the Athenian State very much.

(3.) The war between Athens and Syracuse was begun by a personal quarrel, and it was continued at first with success to both sides, and in the end Athens was victorious and obtained some territory which formerly belonged to Syracuse.

(4.) Syracuse having interfered in the contest of supremacy between Athens and Sparta; supporting the latter; a Greek army under Demosthenes was sent against the Syracusians. It progressed most unfavourable to the Greeks resulting in the total destruction to the army.

(5.) Origin—the people of Syracuse had done a great many injuries to the Athenians, hence the war unsuccessful at first, but when Pericles took the lead, the aspect of affairs changed for the Athenians—result defeat at Syracuse and triumph at Athens.

(6.) In the war between Athens and Syracuse the chief event was the siege of that city against which the Sicilian expedition was directed. The Athenians were completely defeated for by a stratagem the army was divided and defeated in turn.

Comment is almost unnecessary. The utter ignorance of facts betrayed by some of the answers and the still more general absence of historical perspective, shrink into insignificance compared with the want of skill in the construction of a connected discourse and even of ordinary sentences. We may add that the answers are given word for word, and though a candidate at an examination can hardly be expected to punctuate with precision it is not unreasonable to find fault with one who uses a sufficient number of marks, but persistently misplaces them. The second question was :—

Describe the part played in Greek History by Miltiades, Themistocles, and Pericles, comparing them as orators, statesmen and generals.

In answer to this one candidate writes as follows :—

Miltiades was the hero of Marathon in which battle he defeated the Persians. After this battle he was an idol of the people but died by their hands, he was as great a statesman and an orator as he was a general.

Themistocles is better known as an author and an orator than a general.

Pericles was a great naval commander and also a statesman. He was accused of several great crimes and being abroad at the time was sent and allowed to come home in his own trireme. Taking advantage of this he fled and after having been very kindly received by several of the neighbouring kings he returned to Athens and was there tried for the crime which he had committed and was made to drink the cup of poison. He was the greatest general and statesman of his day and also a very eloquent orator.

It is quite evident that the framer of this answer had in his mind's eye, while writing the last paragraph, at least three

different persons, not one of them being the real Pericles, of whom he clearly knew nothing at all. In answer to a request to notice briefly the Scipio gens one candidate writes as follows :

There were several Scipios. There were two by this name fought against Hannibal, altogether they were not successful, and they were slain. A son of the Scipio slain succeeded in conquering Hannibal.

Another in reply to a similar request respecting the Gracchus gens makes a still more ludicrous answer :—

Gracchus was another noted Roman family name; the principal person of this family was he of the triumvirate fame just described.

The reference in the last few words is to the answer to a previous question about the members of the First Triumvirate. The following is part of the answer referred to :—

The popularity and power of three persons in the Roman Empire—Pompey, Caesar, and Gracchus—required that they should divide the ruling of the empire amongst themselves for to prevent other parties from overcoming them as well as to save a war among themselves.

Pompey received Syria—Caesar, Gaul—Gracchus, Syria. Gracchus became embroiled in Asiatic wars, &c., &c.

Modern History fares little better in the way of accurate answering. The following two specimens must, however, suffice; they are in answer to a request to write a note on the "South Sea Bubble," a term about which it is quite inconceivable that any boy or girl well taught in English History should know absolutely nothing :—

(1.) The South Sea Bubble was started by a company who said that it would pay well and then it always failed.

(2.) The South Sea Bubble was a company formed for exporting things to the countries in the South Sea. Useless things were sent out which were never sold, and in this way they lost a great deal of money laid out. The commencement of one company set a lot of minor companies in motion which was another thing that helped break the great company, and when the crash did come so many failing at the same time there was no money to be had in the country.

The above specimens—and we are sorry that they are not less numerous than they are—suffice to prove the existence of several defects in the method of teaching history at present in vogue in most of the High Schools. In the first place, the text-books are not all that could be desired. If they were all well written, and constructed with a due regard to historical perspective, any boy of ordinary ability might safely be trusted to acquire a more intelligent knowledge of the subject by his own unaided exertions than most pupils now do with the aid of the teacher. In the second place, the teachers either do not perceive for themselves the relative importance of different classes of facts or they fail to impress their more accurate and philosophical views upon the minds of their pupils. And in the third place, the pupils do not get a sufficient amount of practice at writing answers to questions. No matter how well he may be up in his subject, the candidate cannot but be at a loss, as compared with others, if he has not been in the habit of putting what he knows about it in a concise form on paper.

Contributions and Correspondence.

WHAT IS CRAM?

BY C. CLARKSON, B.A.

II.

Having defined, explained, and illustrated Bad Cram, it is now time to consider Good Cram. This is really the same thing as