

*Special Papers.*

## THE RECENT UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL EXAMINATIONS.

BY T. ARNOLD HAULTAIN, M.A.

It has been my duty during the last few weeks to read and mark more than a thousand examination papers. Such a task—involving as it does the careful gauging of the mental capacity of each pupil, the accuracy of his information, his general intelligence, his command of language, and his power of thought—such a task gives one of the best possible opportunities of testing the general efficiency, first, of the school-masters and mistresses of our High and Public Schools, and, second, of the working of the educational machinery of Ontario. Such an opportunity should not be allowed to slip by without giving the public some information as to the manner in which their sons and daughters are being educated. I have not as yet seen in any periodical any allusion made to these examinations. I venture, therefore, to present a few hints and suggestions with the object chiefly of evoking an expression of opinion from those who by age and experience are far better fitted to express an opinion on these matters than am I myself.

Concerning the details of the internal mechanism of the conduct and results of examinations, an examiner's tongue is to a very large extent tied. And quite rightly and properly so. Such opinions and generalisations, however, as he may form or draw from the broad area of facts brought before his notice, may be made public without the slightest detriment either to examiners or examined. Indeed some such opinions and generalisations *ought* every year to be brought before the public. To this subject I shall presently revert. For the present let us examine the efficiency of our teachers and of our educational machinery as tested by the recent examinations.

First, then, as to the general efficiency of the masters and mistresses of our High and Public Schools. Two prominent defects were plainly visible throughout the papers: (1) a very noticeable lack of clearness of thought and expression, leading to extreme prolixity, great vagueness, merging sometimes into a total want of meaning, often into absolute nonsense; (2) lamentable ignorance of grammatical construction.

1. To the practical teacher this want of clearness is significant of much. It may indicate careless teaching, or it may be a sign of indolence on the part of an otherwise competent teacher; but probably it oftenest arises purely from *incompetence*: from an inability on the part of the teacher to convey from his own mind to that of his pupil a definite thought—generally because of the indefiniteness of his own. From whatsoever source it springs, however, this want of clearness is a sure sign of ignorance—it is the common cloak of ignorance. But with the details of this significance we need not here concern ourselves. All that need be said is that if a School Inspector found in any of the schools of his Inspectorate an evident and constant general want of definiteness and clearness in the answers given to his questions, he would be perfectly justified in concluding that such pupils were not being properly "*grounded*"—and "*grounding*," there is none but will admit, is the foundation-stone upon which the whole elaborate edifice of education is built.

2. To say that the papers show lamentable ignorance of grammatical construction is to use most euphemistic phrase. The English language is to the vast majority of candidates, an unknown tongue. Of the Queen's English the vast majority of candidates are guilty of murder, most foul, strange, and unnatural. Many exceptions, of course, there are; and if I am accused of destroying the righteous with the wicked, I shall answer that the former are not sufficiently numerous to redeem the character of the whole. It is not only that over and over again one comes across instances of the inability to distinguish between "lay" and "lie," between "fly" and "flee," between "sit" and "set," between "round" and "around;" it is that for hours one reads sentence after sentence in which phrases such as "I seen," "he don't," "they is," "he dost," etc., etc.,

abound; in which plural nouns are linked with singular verbs; in which direct and oblique narration are inextricably entangled; in which there is an utter oblivion of the fact that there exist such things as capitals or commas;—in which, in fact, every known rule that can be broken *is* broken. And this in the examinations for the Junior Matriculation of the University of Toronto, for the Second Class, and for the Third Class, Teachers' Certificates. What can one say or do? One thing one *can* say, and it is this: Such pupils were taught by men and women who could not themselves talk or write correctly. I may be severe, I may be hypercritical, I may be forgetting that we must not upon this continent and amongst the classes from which University and Departmental candidates are chiefly recruited expect that purity of diction which is supposed to be one of the marks of so-called "higher education;" all this I may be forgetting, but what I am not forgetting is that four-fifths of such candidates will one day be, or now actually are, *teachers*.

Second, then, as to the efficiency of the educational machinery of the Province, as tested by the recent examinations. It runs too smoothly. What do I mean by "too smoothly"? I mean that there are too many inducements held out to the youth of both sexes in Ontario to enter upon studies for which the majority of them (I by no means say all) are by nature and circumstances wholly unfitted. I mean that young men who ought to be following the plough and the harrow, and young women who ought to be in the kitchen and the dairy, are tempted into paths of life which they are utterly incompetent to tread. Knowledge—intelligence, even—is not the sole requisite for a teacher. Demeanour, breeding, manner, culture, refinement—one and all of these are as requisite; and can any one, even the most prejudiced, in his heart of hearts believe that the obtaining of thirty-three and a third per cent. will endow any candidate with these? And how are our youths tempted into what they style the "teaching profession"? By small fees, by bonuses, by emulous headmasters, by pushing teachers, by easy examinations, by lenient examiners, and, above and beyond all, *by the competition between schools*. Many are hurried on from one examination to another to feed the vanity and fill the pockets of an ambitious class of teachers. Nothing is thoroughly mastered, and the ground has in most cases to be all gone over again. The result is that the lowest forms of the High School do the work of the Public Schools, and the first years of the University do the work of the High Schools.

On each of these topics much might be said, but this is not the place for it. On one minor one only will I venture to remark—on the small fees, namely. The public perhaps are not aware that by the payment of *two dollars*—that is about two-sevenths of a bricklayer's daily earnings—by the payment of two dollars a candidate may present himself at the nearest town for a Second Class Teacher's Examination. Twenty-eight distinct and separate papers are set.\* He is supplied with pens, ink, and paper. A presiding examiner is in attendance for forty-two hours and a half. His answer papers are transmitted, with no cost to himself, to Toronto, there to be examined by men chosen for the purpose. Thus to strew with roses the really thorny path which leads to success in teaching seems to me worse than folly. These things the public ought to know, or, if already they know them, they ought to be reminded of them again and again.

Lastly, to refer to a point already mentioned. It is superfluous to say that examinations are, or should be made, in themselves an *educating* process. They are not merely tests of excellence; they are one of the most powerful instruments the teacher possesses for calling forth or exercising the powers of the mind. Unless examinations are made use of with this end in view, one of their most important functions is wasted. And it has been the habit hitherto so to waste the University and Departmental Examinations. A candidate presents himself for examination; the papers are placed before him; so much time is allowed him in which to answer the questions set; he is passed or "plucked," as the case may be, and—there is

\* Each candidate does not, of course, write on the whole twenty-eight papers; but twenty eight distinct and separate papers are prepared.

an end of the matter. Wherein he failed, in what he was deficient, where he excelled, to what subjects he should devote more attention—of these and similar points he learns nothing. The argument that University and Departmental Examinations are tests, and tests only, is hardly admissible. If they *can* be utilized as educating factors, they *ought* to be. There is surely a science of Educational Economy as there is a science of Political Economy, although no Adam Smith has yet arisen to formulate its principles; and surely one of these principles is that no educating instrument should be needlessly wasted. How University and Departmental Examinations may be made of value from this point of view is the question. I would suggest that the examiners for the Junior Matriculation of the University of Toronto, and that each of the various committees of the sub-examiners be required to issue yearly a minute embodying their views and opinions on such subjects as they think should be brought before the notice of those preparing candidates for the following year's examinations: such, for example, as the general tenor of the answers, how they compare with those of preceding years, the more salient sins of omission and commission, the more glaring faults, the general trend of educational methods, etc. Such minute, I conceive, would be welcomed by the High School masters throughout the Province. The cost of printing and distribution would be trifling, and could be easily defrayed by adding a few cents to that now truly infinitesimal fee—the two dollars.

I sincerely trust that I have not in any way betrayed the trust reposed in me as examiner, that I have not divulged or made public anything which should have been kept back. Nothing could have been farther from my intentions. I have purposely avoided references to particular instances, and have dealt as much as possible in generalisations only. An examiner has a fourfold duty to perform: one to those who engage him; one to his candidates; one to the teachers of his candidates; and one (perhaps after all the most important) to the public, who are the fathers and mothers of those candidates. This last I have here, however feebly, attempted to discharge. I believe that there are many old and experienced teachers in this Province who will bear me out when I say I believe the youth of Ontario are yearly sacrificed to that Moloch—education *falsely so called*. They pass through the fire of examinations, and think they are being "educated," and they think being "educated" means being made fit for a sphere for which they are not suited and for which they were never born. They think "education" means a smattering of two or three languages, sciences, and literatures. They think "education" means a contempt for the "humble" occupations of fathers and mothers, a striving after a "higher" walk of life, a more "exalted" "position" in the world. What is the result? I would that the public could read the answers given by the candidates at the recent University and Departmental Examinations. They would then know for themselves what is the result. —*The Week*.

WHEN a man is 82 years old, has been married 58 years, and has taught school 65 years, having spent 11,192 days in the school-room, he cannot be considered headstrong if he concludes that he has done his duty in that line. So thought James G. May, of Salem, Ind., who has just retired from the service.—*School Bulletin*.

THERE should be a law to expel a teacher from a school who examines and corrects the writing of all her pupils. Her time can be better employed. Just take a jumbled sentence and put it on the board and there correct it and make it English. Let the pupils understand that they are helping you to make English of it, and by following this up daily, in a short time you will find things looking better. Do not forget supplementary reading, something outside the regular reading lesson. If your school authorities do not supply you with it, bring in something and read to the children. The geography lesson will entirely change and the pupils will become familiar with stories. There is too much in our schools of what is known as teaching, a continual talking to children. Pupils should learn how to learn something.—*R. C. Metcalf*.