

Special Papers.

*PROMOTION EXAMINATIONS.

BY H. M. HICKS.

Most of the teachers present will either have attended, or heard described, an old-time examination in a rural school, at which the assembled parents and friends of the pupils were made to stare by the superior knowledge and fluency of the children; and also to congratulate themselves on having so wonderful a teacher, and one so well able "to get the young uns on good." Some of us know that in many cases this knowledge and fluency had been developed by a special course of daily exercise for a month or so on these self-same questions. Many of us know, too, the nature of question and answer.—"What is a river?" "A large and long stream of running water." "What is a noun?" "Name, person, place, thing." "Parse 'knife.'" "Com'n noun, noot' gender, third person, sing'l'r number, nom've case to the verb 'cuts.'" Such slipshod, *go-as-you-please* answers are still very common where only oral tests of knowledge are applied.

In connection with such an examination a large number of promotions would take place, especially if the teacher were leaving the school; and then his successor would find a motley group in each class, and would, at will, either struggle with the pupils as they were, turn the poorer ones back, or promote the better ones to the next class.

"Some twenty years ago," in a small school-house in Norfolk there was a fifth class of about twenty-five pupils—nearly half the school. Some of these were very fair readers, while others would scan the verses, emphasize the prepositions, and make a grand pause for breath before, and for rest after, each long word. Part of them were in the senior geography class, the rest in the junior, or in no class at all. Some *ciphered* in division, others in reduction, many in fractions, and the select few worked as far even as "cubic root," as one man called it. The work of many of them amounted to scarcely more than a '*cipher*,' as little attempt was made to teach or learn principles. In one thing all were about equal—each could spell off the great words of the spelling-book, such as hippopotamus, extraordinary, incomparable, and the like, though each was in blissful ignorance of the distinction in such forms as 'pale' and 'pail,' 'ere' and 'e'er'; as well as unable to write an ordinary letter without many misspelt words and ungrammatical expressions. Why all this confused mass of pupils in the class? Partly because there was no sixth class to promote into, and partly because the promoting was done by a complete system of guess-work on the part of the teacher, or of self-promotion on the part of the pupils. Many a school in the county contained such a class then, and yet a third-class of to-day would be found superior to it, if measured in these cardinal directions on the educational compass—extent of knowledge, depth of thought, ease and clearness of expression, and accuracy and neatness of composition. How has this advance been made? By a long series of short steps together with one great stride. That stride is the introduction of the uniform, written, promotion examinations.

It was long felt that something of this kind was needed. Parents found, on moving from section to section that the children were put forward or backward to suit the circumstances of the school, or the apparent whim of the teacher; and that in consequence new books were required and more or less friction experienced. The faithful teacher, on entering a new school, found before him in too many cases the herculean task of bringing order out of chaos. To promote was impossible, to submit was suicidal, and to turn back would require weeks, perhaps months of judicious and persistent effort, in order to avoid doing harm, and to win the pupils' consent; and even then his success was more likely to be partial than complete. Teachers saw too, that parents, having no better criterion, regarded promotion as the true test of advancement; and so teachers were constantly tempted to promote pupils unfit for it, a temptation to which too many of them yielded.

For all these ills people sought a remedy. It was seen that written work is the truer and surer test of

knowledge, and so in some places competitive examinations for prizes were established. These were found unsatisfactory, as they removed teachers and pupils from home, and induced petty jealousies and a spirit of rivalry; so they were abandoned. What next? Well, invention is the daughter of necessity, you know, and so after many temporary failures, some fertile brain evolved the idea at present carried out—that of promoting only after a systematic, uniform, written test in each subject required in the form from which a pupil is promoted. Blessings on the head of the inventor, and of those who have introduced, and so far perfected, these examinations, which have done so much to unify and to elevate our schools.

From the first, the promotion examinations have been doing good. At once the pupils felt that a definite standard must be reached, and felt too, that that standard was likely to be higher than that before set up. The constant raising of the standard, and tightening of the reins, has had a good effect in keeping up this idea. The teacher, too, found the pupils more ambitious for work, and less inclined to ask for promotion. The teacher had an additional incentive to interest both himself and the pupils in the work of the session. As time has advanced, we have, directly and indirectly, reaped many advantages from these examinations. The classification has become far better and more in harmony with the work as laid down in the limit for the various forms. With the same effort the teacher can accomplish more in each class, because of the more uniform mental capacity of the pupils of the class. Competition in a class is a very important element of success, and it can do its proper work only in a school thoroughly classified. In fact no school is prepared for genuine work without thorough classification, no proper classification can well be made without a searching written examination, and no written examination can be better than that which has for its examiners the best among the teacher's equals. These principles have long been recognized in our higher institutions of learning, and their recognition in our public school promotion is bearing good fruit. And there is no reason why they should not be recognized in the public school, unless the teacher be possessed of a spirit of divination which is denied to the high school master and the professor. The examinations have promoted education with us in each of the cardinal directions indicated above.

In extent of knowledge.—Till lately nearly all pupils in the third form omitted one or more of the four subjects, Grammar, History, Geography, and Drawing, and pupils in the second and fourth forms did the same to a greater or less extent; now it is the rule rather than the exception that all take all the subjects of the form. Of course as time passes on, the exceptions become less and less; and thus we gain a decided advantage both in possession and in prospect.

In the depth of thought.—It is a well-known fact that every examiner runs sooner or later into a perceptible groove, so that a person, by knowing the examiner, can forecast, to a greater or less extent, the nature of the questions to be given in an examination. Now, when a pupil knows that promotion depends upon answering properly the questions of a stranger, he will be better prepared on all points than if he has to answer only the questions set by his teacher whose peculiar style he already knows. He must think for himself more, and so he more fully absorbs the essence of the work in hand.

In ease and clearness of expression.—The true examiner takes nothing for granted. He gives credit for nothing but what is clearly stated. This clearness can be developed only by the pupil's constant oversight and criticism. These will induce that ease which is born only of work and thought.

"True ease in writing comes by art, not chance. As those move easiest who have learned to dance."

In accuracy and neatness of composition.—The teacher is impelled to be more careful and definite in planning the work of each session, more concise in teaching what he undertakes, more exacting as to the answers given by a pupil; and all because other eyes may deliberately scan the blunders he condones, and other minds may easily judge as to the neatness or the work he turns out.

In thinking over this question we concluded to give a faithful word-picture of each advantage, and each disadvantage connected with it; and so we

captured a large number of specimens of each, and locked them up in an inner chamber to await our pleasure. We first disposed of the advantages, some of which were photographed, and others allowed to escape; then turning our attention to the disadvantages we had just brought our camera to bear full upon them, when they vanished through the solid wall, and so we concluded they were only ghosts after all. Indeed, we are quite sure of this, for some persons have been frightened by them.

And now, since we have this examination with us, not, we trust, as a sojourner, but as a permanent friend, we take the liberty of a true friend to discuss, in a friendly, prosy way, some improvements in his character.

We gladly note the good effect of changes made within the past year. It is much better to have the work in history limited, as at present, to certain subjects; and to have each subject of the form written on as far as possible. But it is too hard for young pupils to write continuously for three days as at present, and we suggest that the work for them be limited to four hours' writing a day; and this could be done either by shortening the work on each paper, or by extending the examination over four or even five days. We are thankful to the high school masters for past favors, but think that for the future all the examiners should be public school men. These are of course inferior in education to the high school teachers, but they are more in touch with the wants of the pupils, and better able to appreciate the small difference in the capacity of pupils in the various forms. They have already shown themselves fully equal to the tasks imposed upon the examiners. Two examiners should be appointed for each subject, and the whole body of examiners should be expected to see that all the questions are within the prescribed limits, and none of them unduly severe. Not more than two marks should be deducted for each misspelt word on the spelling paper. Ten marks should be allowed for neatness on each paper, and one mark deducted for each mistake in spelling and syntax. Each pupil should have a full set of papers, as in the higher examinations. This would make the work of writing much easier and more satisfactory to the pupils, and would give the school the benefit of the teacher's attention at a time when it is greatly needed. The best paper for the pupil to use is foolscap, and the teacher should cut each half-sheet across the middle, since the quarter-sheet answers every purpose, and will be kept much neater than a large half-sheet well could be. After writing a page the pupil should fold the paper once across—that is, so that the crease shall run from top to bottom—and then carefully write on the *front*, the name, subject, etc., and also fasten together, all the answers to one paper so that none may go astray. These examinations have become so popular with us that nearly every teacher in the county uses them, and nearly every school-board furnishes pupils with paper for them. But since they are so useful, and since a few teachers and school-boards still shirk them, it would be well to have them made legal and necessary for promotion in those counties in which the Teachers' Association arranges for their adoption; so that funds may be forthcoming for their management.

In order to introduce and perfect any such improvement as these examinations furnish, and also to ensure their highest success and usefulness, we need a good supply of two prime qualities—enthusiasm and criticism. Of these the former is said to be greater, and this we grant since it initiates and carries forward, since it furnishes the motive power by which reform or improvement is carried on. But criticism is scarcely less important, as it is the balance wheel by which this motive power is steadied and preserved. Enthusiasm is the force centrifugal which would at any time make us go off at a tangent.

[NOTE.—We are sorry to find that the last sheet of MS. of the foregoing article has been lost or mislaid, and we are obliged to terminate it thus abruptly.—ED.]

THE ten largest cities in the world, with the number of inhabitants of each, are:—London, 4,149,533; Paris, 2,344,550; New York, 1,520,066; Berlin, 1,206,577; Vienna, 1,103,857; Philadelphia, 1,043,698; St. Petersburg, 929,100; Tokio, 902,837; Constantinople, 873,565; Calcutta, 871,504.