

## Special Papers.

## OUR EXAMINATION SYSTEM.\*

CERTAIN DEFECTS; A FEW, REMEDIES SUGGESTED.

The prominence given to our school examinations by the Education Department, the teacher, the pupil, the trustee, and the public in general, is my justification or reason for asking you, as practical educators, to consider with me for one half-hour our examination system and its bearing on the education of the masses.

Examinations should among other things accomplish the following results:—

(1.) They should serve as accurate and practical tests of the student's knowledge in order that (a) he himself may know and (b) that the teacher may know how thoroughly each is doing his work.

(2.) They should train the pupil to think readily, to reason correctly and to express his thoughts in good English.

Our university and departmental examinations will be of little avail in effecting the latter object, inasmuch as the candidate never again sees the answers he has hastily written and has therefore no opportunity of noticing wherein they might be improved, whether as to grammatical construction, the use of more elegant expressions, or as to a more logical sequence of ideas. But what university and departmental examinations fail to do herein may be most effectively accomplished by means of the ordinary weekly or monthly examination. And here I may note that one of the most important factors of examinations as an educator is entirely overlooked if the teacher fails to point out clearly to each pupil at least his most glaring mistakes; not merely mistakes that concern the particular subject in hand, all of which ought to be dealt with, but mistakes of every kind, whether they be mistakes grammatical or mistakes logical; whether they consist in the use of inelegant phrases, badly constructed sentences, or badly formed paragraphs, or whether the mistakes consist in a bad arrangement of the ideas apart entirely from the language used. The most effective method of preventing the repetition of ungrammatical expressions and the recurrence of mistakes that have once actually occurred is by pointing out to each pupil his own mistakes—mistakes that may not be of common occurrence, that may be even peculiar to the particular pupil. This is a point that cannot be too much emphasized. One hour spent in correcting errors that a pupil actually has committed is worth a year spent in dealing with errors that he never makes.

If, then, as we have already hinted, departmental examinations serve merely as a means of grading candidates without exercising any beneficial educative influence, it follows that these examinations should be as few and far between as possible. But of this more anon when we come to deal with entrance examinations. I now wish to direct your attention to what I consider

THE GREATEST EVIL OF OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, an evil that may be traced partly to the competitive nature of our departmental examinations and partly to sources hereafter indicated. The evil I refer to is the tendency to turn our schools into factories for producing and furnishing the raw stuff for the different and already over-crowded professions. Is this statement doubted? I appeal to your own knowledge and experience for proof. How many boys, I ask, return from college—the keystone of our educational arch—to follow the plough? How many stand behind the merchant's counter or at his desk? How many are professional descendants of old Tubal Cain? Survey your college classmates and tell me how many are agitators of the clodded field. How many can you class as horny-handed sons of toil? How many in any manner earn their bread by the sweat of the brow? Let us go a step further—How many of your High School or Collegiate Institute fellows who have taken a full High School course, do you find in any of the aforementioned walks of life? We say that a very small minority will be found where there should be a majority. If so, the question naturally suggests itself, "How comes it that we have a minority, and that an infinitely small one, where we should have a majority?" Is there anything in our education system, considered theoretically, that

tends towards this undesirable result? If not, is there anything in our education system and methods, or rather in their practical working, that leads to this abnormal state of affairs? Or is it a case of the survival of the fittest? Is it that the fittest enter the professions, and that the unfittest, having been distanced or flagged in the education race, withdraw from the course and enter some sphere of manual toil? The last question we may safely answer emphatically and unambiguously in the negative. As keen intellect, as shrewd judgment, as much staying power will be found to-day on the farm and in the work-shop as will be met with in the dissecting room, in the forum, or beside the sacred or the pedagogic desk. Why then do not the former take as full a school course as the latter? Necessity, you say, determines the course of many. Quite true; but are there not a goodly number of intelligent parents who meet you with the question, "Of what use is algebra, geometry, and such like to my son, who intends (let us suppose) to farm?" This is a question that has often been hurled at me; and I ask you to consider whether it is the query of a philosopher or of a fool. To me there appears to be more philosophy in the interrogator than in the authors of numbers of our educational edicts and prescripts. Why do I think so? It may be reasoned out thusly: Life is short; granted. We cannot master everything; granted. Of two studies affording equally good mental gymnastics, we should first study that which has in it the element of practical utility. Grant this and it may easily be shown that there is more philosophy than folly in the above question.

But before we make any suggestions as to what we consider necessary reforms, let us notice the

## INFLUENCE OF DEPARTMENTAL EXAMINATIONS

on the student in his choice of studies, a choice that naturally tends to determine his vocation for life. Parents, trustees and the general public judge a teacher and a school mainly by examination results. The common school teacher who passes the most entrance pupils is, *ceteris paribus*, a deificus in the neighborhood. The High School or Collegiate Institute that shows the longest list of successful candidates at the university and the departmental examinations, is unhesitatingly declared the best school; is held forth in the press and in all annual statements and through all advertising mediums as the best school. Each and every teacher is therefore naturally desirous that his school should stand the ordinary tests and show to good advantage when thus tested. And here, let me say, that I do not wish to be understood as belittling examinations *per se*. Examinations have their place and generally serve as fair tests of a student's knowledge. I have no sympathy with the oft-repeated statement that a student may stand examination tests well and still be a blockhead. Occasionally it is true you will find a man who has headed the class lists at every examination enter a profession for which he is wholly unfitted, and while in that profession be justly pronounced a decided failure. But such a case is a very uncommon exception. The man who excels as a student will generally excel in life. "If I had not been Premier of Great Britain I should have been Archbishop of Canterbury," is Lord Beaconsfield's announcement of his belief in the general principle that the man or the boy who does well for the time being, the work allotted to him will, at another time, or under other circumstances, do equally well entirely different work. But to return, I repeat that I do not wish to be understood as adversely criticizing our present departmental examinations. I do not wish to be classed with the many-headed monster through who raise the annual wail as regularly and as surely as the annual examination is held. Having spent four years as a High-School teacher, and having during that time prepared candidates for the different examinations, and having also been one of the entrants' examiners, I have had a fair chance of judging whether our university and departmental examiners so prepared their papers as to select the fittest and to reject the unfittest; and, year after year, I have been surprised at the accuracy of the examination as a test. I cannot recall one marked exception to the rule that the fittest invariably survived and that the unfittest as invariably perished.

(To be continued in next issue.)

## English.

All communications intended for this column should be sent to W. E. Huston, M.A., care of THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL, Toronto, not later than the 5th of each month.

## ENTRANCE LITERATURE.

SHE WAS A PHANTOM OF DELIGHT.

BY W. M. M'CLEMENT, S. S. 6, SENECA, HALDIMAND CO.

1. Explain the meaning of the title of the lesson and give your opinion as to the appropriateness of the title to the subject matter of the poem.

2. Who was the subject of the poem?

3. (a) State a few facts about the author's life.

(b) Give a list of his poems with which you are familiar, stating which pleases you most, and why.

(c) Name the chief characteristics of his poems.

4. "She was a phantom of delight." How?

"When first she gleamed upon my sight." At what period of her life?

"Sent to be a moment's ornament." Give the true meaning of this in your own words.

"Her eyes as stars of twilight fair,  
Like twilight's too her dusky hair."

What familiar figure of speech is here made use of? Bring out clearly the appropriateness of the comparison.

"But all things else about her drawn  
From May-time and the cheerful dawn."

Why does he say, "drawn from May-time and dawn"?

"Dancing shape." Meaning of *dancing* here.

"Image gay to haunt, to startle and waylay." Show why these words are possibly the fittest that could be used in this stanza.

"Her household manners light and free." Explain.

"Steps of virgin liberty." Why "steps of liberty"?

"Sweet records, promises as sweet." What were the records and what the promises?

"And now I see with eye serene  
The very pulse of the machine."

Why does he see with "eye serene"? Why "pulse of the machine"?

"A traveller between life and death." Give the comparison.

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,  
To warn, to comfort and command."

Explain in words of your own selection.

5. Give the subject-title of each stanza of the poem.

6. In what relation in life does the writer stand to the subject of the poem in each successive stanza? Give reasons for your opinion.

7. What written direction would you give as to the reading of the first and third stanzas?

## SHE WAS A PHANTOM OF DELIGHT.

BY E. RICHMOND, MARNOCH.

BEFORE entering upon the study of the poem, have a short talk about the author, the reaction he caused in poetry—his admirable depth of pathos, his purity of sentiment and his refinement. The poem should be criticized especially as to the two last qualities.

The three stanzas in the poem express Wordsworth's feelings respecting his "Phantom of Delight"—(Mary Hutchinson, whom he married in 1802)—in a three-fold aspect:

First, her peculiarly attractive powers, which so much influenced him on his first seeing her.

Second, her moral, mental and physical beauties, observed upon further acquaintance.

Third, her character—discovered upon close intimacy with her—as a being thoughtful and having all the faculties "nobly planned," a being having an object in life, living in a pure and serene atmosphere, a being worthy of our imitation.

\*Paper read by A. G. McKay, M.A., at the West Grey Teachers' Association, Owen Sound, October 5, 1888.