

CONTEMPORARY OPINION ON EDUCATIONAL TOPICS.

PROF. GOLDWIN SMITH AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO.

At the recent Convocation at University College, Toronto, Mr. Goldwin Smith expressed the following sensible opinion on the question of overstudy in preparing for university contests, and on the system of competitive examinations. "It was," he said, "of course, very interesting to one who was himself once engaged in similar university competitions to be present on an occasion of this kind. It recalled to his mind the days when he stood in trembling expectation at the doors of the examination rooms at Oxford, and saw the examiners come forth with the honour lists in their hands. A good deal had been said of late against this system of competitive examinations and prizes, and a good deal had been said with truth. It had been said that the system was defective as a test. No doubt it was. All tests were more or less defective. But he did not think examination or prize tests, if well used, were more defective than tests in general. In his own experience, at least, the results of examinations generally corresponded with the previous reputations of the students. It was also said that men were overstrained by these competitions. Sometimes, no doubt, they were. He did not think they were more often strained by competitions in examinations than by athletic competitions. Far more than health was endangered by vices which wait on idleness. He did not think any man who had a tolerable constitution need injure himself by competitive examinations, if he would only manage himself well, and abstain from habits which, under any circumstances, would be injurious to his health. If a professor found one of his pupils breaking down, he would do well to inquire whether he was reading too much; but he would also do well to inquire whether

he smoked too many cigars or read too late at night. Reading late at night, he was convinced, had been the occasion of many a physical collapse, while, on the contrary, a great deal more work might be done without injury to the health by reading early in the morning. He remembered once meeting the late Lord Westbury, who was then Sir Richard Bethel. He was at the time the Attorney-General of England, with a tremendous amount of professional work during the day, and obliged to attend in Parliament at night. Sir Richard, nevertheless, looked perfectly fresh and healthy, and he (Mr. Smith) complimented him on his appearance. 'Yes,' said Sir Richard, 'and I owe it to this, that I have always worked early in the morning and not late at night.' He added, with a sort of complacency, 'I set out in life with many dear friends who have worked late at night, and I have buried them all.' Far be it from him to say that reading for examination or prizes is the highest motive for reading. Love of study and a sense of duty were higher motives for competition, and the more they could dispense with the latter, and substitute the former, the better. But they could not do that always. He was glad to see the list of matriculated students increasing from year to year. He was one of those who believed Canada would see that in the end it was better to have one great university than a number of small ones—that we should learn that instead of scattering our resources, we should concentrate them, and concentrate them here. He hoped also that the time was not far distant when the University would become the real centre of our whole educational system. Among the questions agitated in England when he was last there, was the one to which he had alluded—the question between the strengthening of the old centres of learning and the multiplication of universities; and