

to marvel at their absurdity. One of the greatest difficulties experienced by all our Universities is to find judicious, capable examiners. The first papers set by an inexperienced examiner often give no satisfaction to any one but himself; and this is pre-eminently the case in what might seem the simplest of all subjects, viz., English. He is bent on distinguishing himself, and quite above the consideration of anything so puerile as the mental condition of a youthful candidate under the first trying ordeal of the University examination hall.

Such marvellously fine papers, in which their authors have had far more thought for their own distinction than for the reasonable aptitudes of the candidates, under the special circumstances involved, are a grief to all who realize the true aim of such examinations. An experienced examiner learns to know how little justice a nervous young neophyte does to himself in the haste and anxiety of the examination hall; and is rather led by such answers to reconsider his own questions, and be sure that they were sufficiently clear and definite to give the candidate a fair opportunity of showing what amount of knowledge he really possessed.

My own opinion, founded on the experience of many years as an examiner, is that the fairest, as well as the surest test, is prose composition. But this must be relieved of all extraneous and misleading conditions. The practice of recent examiners has been not only to name the theme; but to specify a variety of details, involving a knowledge of many points which, however proper they might be as questions in a literary examination; only hamper the candidate, and divert his attention from his legitimate aim, viz., good English prose composition.

At the junior matriculation I should attach more importance to composition than to questions on the history

of the literature; for the former, if judiciously conducted, precludes all mere cram, and furnishes a test of true knowledge on some of the most essential branches of a sound English education. The subject named should be of so simple a character that it may be fairly assumed to place all candidates on an equality. The mere title should be given, leaving each candidate to treat it as he please. The theme may be "Our Canadian Winter," "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers," "The Discovery of America by Columbus," "The Canadian Pacific Railway," or other, and if possible, more simple themes. To the subject thus specified a note should be added, informing the candidate that he will be allowed at least a full hour for composition; that he is to write carefully, in a clear and legible hand, not exceeding, say four, or at most five, pages of quarto post, or ordinary examination paper; that his theme will be read by the examiner as a test in (1) orthography, (2) grammar, (3) rhetoric, (4) style, (5) punctuation.

Such a test has the advantage of removing nearly all the inequalities dependent on special modes of teaching; or on favourite subjects, or "hobbies," of certain teachers. It will enforce a habitual attention to prose composition in all the High Schools and Collegiate Institutes; while it will furnish to the ablest teachers the very best opportunities of dealing with all the important practical questions of English grammar. If this is accompanied with a greater latitude given to the teacher in the choice of authors and subjects, selected with a view to cultivate a taste for English reading, and a critical appreciation of our best English classics, I feel assured that the change will meet the wishes of our best High School masters, and prove advantageous to their pupils. I cannot too