

any other advantages be claimed? Perhaps these artificial incentives to work may relieve professors of the task of supplying other motives. This, however, is the surest and quickest way to reduce teaching to a mere form and to fossilize our teachers. The system certainly cannot increase the financial resources of our colleges. The reverse is true; for they are thereby deprived of a large sum that might be devoted to needed improvements.

I have noticed that some who speak unfavorably of prize-giving and who would not spend a dollar of public money for this purpose would not hesitate to use private funds if they could be obtained. I cannot see any difference, so far as the general principle is concerned; and it is not easy to see that the effect upon students is changed in the least degree. True, it encourages private liberality, and possibly, to some donors, affords considerable satisfaction.

But is this the best use that can be made of this money? If not, these donors can, and no doubt will, transfer their benefactions, and thereby increase the satisfaction they now experience.

Not to dwell on this point, I pass on to another objection, sufficiently serious, I think, to condemn the present prize system. I refer to the basis on which they are generally awarded—that is, competitive examinations.

I believe that those who have had most experience in conducting these examinations are strongest in their condemnation, and would consider it a great relief if they were utterly abolished. Huxley says: "Under the best of circumstances examination will remain but an imperfect test of capacity, while it tells next to nothing about a man's power as an investigator." If inexperienced persons were to condemn them, we should hesitate to accept their verdict; but when our most prominent and competent examiners are almost a unit in condemning this mode of testing the real merits of students, where prizes are involved, we must believe that it is radically and essentially defective. It has been said that even Socrates would be plucked in our modern competitive examinations.

In the first place, there appears to be no agreement among our examiners on clearly defined principles by which the ability of competitors may be fairly tested. This may seem to be a sweeping assertion, but I shall give my reasons for the statement.

1. The ordinary written examinations may serve as a means of deciding whether candidates are ignorant of a subject or fairly acquainted with it, and hence are practically reliable in such cases as entrance examinations of all kinds, and for various promotions, which are entrance examinations in reality; but they cannot so determine the comparative attainments of competitors as to fix upon the one who absolutely stands first. In most cases prizes, scholarships and medals are awarded on the result of several examinations in the hands of as many different examiners. But no two examiners mark alike even on the same paper; and a still greater disparity is seen when they work on different papers.

One examiner attaches special importance to logical statement, and marks accordingly; another, to accuracy; a third to neatness and clearness; a fourth, to show diction; another to a conformity to his own favorite methods of solving problems or elucidating propositions.

Now, supposing a set of papers on the different subjects of a competitive examination to have passed through the hands of these five examiners, and results to be recorded. Let these same papers be passed on to five other competent examiners in the same subjects, for their independent verdict. Who does not know the probable result? The man selected as *facile princeps* by the first examiners may hardly rank a good second in the hands of the others! In support of my position, I ask you to look at the number of appeals that are sustained in connection with our departmental examinations. If no appeals are sustained in university examinations, it is only because no appeals are allowed.

Take, for instance, the departmental and university examinations of last month. Who would have the assurance to say that a prize or a medal could be given on such papers as we had on several very important subjects?

In fact, there are no fundamental controlling principles on which examiners are compelled to act. Upon the idiosyncracies of any particular examiner there appears to be no check. Individuality characterizes all our examinations. To this one would not necessarily object; but in too many cases there is a disregard for established limits, and no common standard of difficulty as between papers of the same grade. And yet on the results of such examinations many of our prizes must be awarded.

2. Even supposing that the numerical results of our examinations were reliable, a written examination alone cannot determine what a

student knows of a subject. There are disturbing elements that often prevent candidates from doing themselves justice; and it appears to me that the time has come when the opinion of teachers, who have spent years, it may be, in daily testing the abilities of candidates, ought to count for something in these examinations. On this point I shall not enlarge, but it is a question that will be heard from again.

3. Then again, I object to the system of prizes and scholarships on the ground that our mode of competition rewards but one when all may be equally meritorious. Is that paradoxical? I believe it is true. I have already touched on this point. I should like to see a system by which prizes would not be awarded to a few on the ground of relative scholarship, but to all who reach a fixed standard.

What more painful duty can fall to the lot of a conscientious teacher or professor than to be compelled to award a gold medal on four years' work, when between the two or three worthy competitors a difference of less than one per cent is known to exist? I have known such a case. What does the awarding of two gold medals in the same subject mean? Who believes that they represent absolutely equal merit? Ask for the figures in such a case. Analyse the process by which this painful equation was reached; and, if you are not convinced that our prize system is utterly bad, I shall be disappointed. Even though a slight numerical difference may be shown to exist, it is quite possible that the man who stands second may be the more meritorious. I appeal to experienced teachers. Is not this statement borne out by facts? Do not prizes often mark success and reward genius rather than merit?

These remarks are intended to apply also to Public and High School prizes. Take the following from this year's report of the examiners of the Toronto Public Schools: "The competition was in many instances remarkably close. In the contest for the medals presented by Mr. J. Macdonald for the two best pupils in the city schools, Herbert Sampson, who stood first, was only nine marks ahead of Lizzie Blight and Douglas Airth, who stood second and equal." Query: Who really knows that Lizzie Blight and Douglas Airth are equal, and who can guarantee that Herbert Sampson is superior by nine marks?

Before suggesting a remedy, allow me to notice one other objection.

3. What becomes of our head boys—our medallists? Dr. Arnold says: "University distinctions are a great starting-point in life; they introduce a man well; they even add to his influence afterwards." No doubt this is true, if there is sufficient ballast to carry the honor, enough of practical good sense and other qualities to supplement it. Too often, however, hopes are excited within the university walls that are never realized beyond it. Unless prize-men have acquired something more than power to make high scores at examinations, they will be doomed to wander—out of humor with themselves and useless to society. I would refer especially, however, to the danger of *overwork* in competing for prizes. Well-regulated study is not injurious; but in the excitement of running for prizes study is not well regulated. By many this is regarded as the chief objection to the system, and certainly it ought not to be lightly passed over.

Allow me in closing to offer a few suggestions:—

1. Let all our universities agree to abolish all prizes, scholarships and medals. They can establish confederation on this measure at least, and it would be a popular form of union. If Germany with her ten grand universities and 13,000 students, can take this position, and lead the world in university work, why need we fear to follow? Our leading colleges have virtually admitted the desirability of such a move; but they appear to be waiting for one another, and much like your merchants on the question of early closing. If by one sweep the change were effected, a sigh of relief would rise from every hard-working, conscientious professor in the country. 2. Let all public money now used for this purpose be spent on increasing the efficiency of the provincial university. 3. With existing private benefactions let a fund be established for bestowing beneficiary aid on needy students, on a plan similar to that in operation at Yale College. 4. Let such further contributions as can be obtained, be devoted to the encouragement of original research, travelling fellowships, and special post-graduate work. 5. Then, if necessary, and not till then, would we say to the authorities of our provincial university, "Ask the Legislature for additional assistance, and you will get it. What is of equal importance, you will deserve it." 6. If you ask, "What is to supply the place of scholarships, prizes, and medals?" I would say, first of all, consign to the