



THE
JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

Devoted to Education, Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Volume XXII.

Quebec, Province of Quebec, April and May, 1878.

No. 4 & 5

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Examination Papers.

Read by the Revd. R. H. Quick before the College of Preceptors.

In one of Artemas Ward's wildest burlesques, there is an account of the "Pirate of the Canal," who struggles against modern improvements and increasing centralization, till, like another Götz von Berlichingen, he falls in the unequal combat, and dies exclaiming, "We are over-governed!" Similarly, in these days, the professional existence of a schoolmaster must often close with a similar cry, giving the main conviction which is the outcome of many years of suffering, "We are over-examined." In the future, perhaps, if not already, examinations may be regarded as the final cause of existence, and the human race may be conveniently divided into two classes, the examined and the examiners. This growing passion for examinations has often been discussed, and its dangers pointed out, by men who are

sure to command, attention, and I do not to-night propose adding my feeble voice to theirs. I shall accept the prevalence of examinations as I accept the prevalence of east winds during the "ethereal mildness" of our English spring. But as some prying persons have thought of getting behind the east wind, so I should like to get behind the examiners.

One of the most remarkable things about our system of examinations is our implicit trust in the examiners.

In Prussia, if much depends on the examination, there are all kinds of checks and counter-checks. The marks and papers are sent to a superior authority, and hostile criticism from this authority is, I believe, not uncommon; so carelessness, or even want of system, is impossible, for the examiners are themselves examined, and their decision may be set aside. But here it is not so. The examiner shuts himself up with a mass of papers, brings out his list, and sells the papers at so much a pound. At times we may be astonished at the amount of the labour knocked off, and we may be tempted to exclaim with Hamlet (though, of course, without the irreverent mind which could see any similarity between the mole and the examiner),—

"Can't work in the earth so fast?"

But the results, whatever they may be, are never questioned and any English examiner would think himself insulted if he were called upon to justify his decisions. In one way this implicit confidence in our examiners is a very healthy sign. It is proof positive that we can trust the English gentleman to do what is fair between man and man without the slightest bias of any kind of favouritism. But although our confidence in the perfect integrity of our examiners is most assuredly not misplaced, I think the art of examining—a very difficult and an increasingly important art—would make much greater progress if there were more consultation among examiners, and more discussion and comparison of the different ways by which they arrive at their conclusions.

A most valuable contribution has lately been made to our knowledge of the art of examining, by the publica-