

EXAMINATIONS.

In the November number of the *Nineteenth Century*, there appears a protest, signed by many leading educationists and public men, against the mischief to which in Britain the practice of competitive examinations is leading. The systems of examinations which has been elaborated during the last thirty years, according to the terms of this protest, is productive of great physical injury to the constitutions of the young people who prepare for them; it tends to lead to uniformity in all educational processes, it destroys the best teaching by depriving the teacher of the power of intelligent self-direction, and by converting the pupil into a machine, it renders impossible a fair estimate of the values of different kinds of education in consequence of the monetary considerations which now cast their shadow over all educational work; it encourages an excessive cultivation of the "rote-faculties" and the power of cleverly skimming a subject, and it substitutes for the desire to obtain knowledge for the sake of understanding the world in which the student has to live, the marvellous forces among which he has to act, and the humanity of which he forms part, the ambition to secure a high place in an examination-list or some money reward. But a protest against a system productive of so much evil is of little practical value if it is not accompanied by a remedial scheme, which, while it avoids the mistakes of the system which is condemned, promises to retain all the advantages which it offers. Here, however, the protesters show that it is easier to find fault than to discover a substitute. The only suggestions which they can give are the appointment of a royal commission, the nomination of various committees, and a recurrence to the mode of preferment in use in the various departments of the public service, before the adoption of the system of open competition. Surely we can scarcely conceive of proposals more unsatisfactory, or less likely to lead to the removal of the evils complained of, and the inauguration of an era when education will not be sacrificed to examination.

In Canada—in the Atlantic provinces at any rate—examinations have not been organized to an extraordinary degree, yet we sometimes hear mutterings of discontent. It becomes, therefore, an interesting question to inquire in how far the mischief that is being done to the youth of Britain may possibly affect the youth of these provinces, and what means can be adopted to check it if it is already active.

As far as we can learn, examinations are not too frequent either at our universities or for teachers' licenses, and therefore it cannot be urged that in either case there is undue pressure. But it seems to

be the tendency of examination to extend its influence and to embrace within the range of its operation every department of school work, from the highest to the lowest. In England there is scarcely a school but is reached by some process of examination. The government schools are examined by the inspectors to determine the amount of the grant to which they are entitled; all schools may send up pupils for examination at the Oxford and Cambridge "locals;" the College of Preceptors holds periodical examinations in all parts of the country, while the work in the grammar and high schools is tested by the universities in competitions for exhibitions and other prizes, and there is little doubt that, upon the whole, the stimulating effect upon school work, both on teachers and pupils, has been satisfactory. More activity has been evoked by these examinations than could have been produced by any other means; and yet the success that has attended this system, as not unfrequently happens, has led to results alike disappointing and disastrous. So long as examinations were reasonable in number and scope they were of admirable service to education, but since they increased to their present dimensions, and there has developed simultaneously with that growth a tendency in teachers to cram rather than to educate, they have been the master and not the servant of education. The sooner this tyranny ceases the better it will be for education.

But great care should be taken lest, in attempting to bring about a better state of things, what is useful is removed as well as what is mischievous. The objections to examinations which are raised in the protest are rather applicable to their abuse than to their legitimate employment. Some test of educational work there must be, and we cannot imagine any means so convenient, upon the whole so fair and satisfactory, and at the same time so stimulative, as examinations, under reasonable regulations, and conducted by men qualified by scholarship and experience for the performance of their duty. There is no method so easy and reliable by which a teacher can discover, in the case of his senior pupils, in how far they have benefited by his instruction. If there be any subjects which have been misunderstood in the course of their treatment in class, an examination is certain to make this abundantly evident. Carelessness, inaccuracy and indolence are detected by the teacher, and readiness and conciseness of expression, together with definiteness of conception and the power of concentration of thought and energy, are acquired by the pupil.

Nor, if we look beyond the school-room, need we fear the results of rational examination. There is no plan which would yield such general satisfaction in the distribution of exhibitions, scholarships and