

Special Papers.

OUR EXAMINATION SYSTEM.

CERTAIN DEFECTS; A FEW REMEDIES SUGGESTED.

(Concluded from last issue.)

The influence of such prescribed courses and their accompanying examinations cannot be overestimated. And this leads me to raise the question, "Which of our examinations has the most influence on the trend of common school education, and therefore on the education of the masses?" Doubtless the entrance examination, that examination which forms the connecting link, or rather that bridges the chasm between the common and the High School! When the pupil has passed the entrance examination he has practically finished his common school course. True, he may still attend the common school; but the danger is that he is now comparatively neglected unless indeed he have a higher examination in view, to wit, a teachers' examination. And the great danger is that, as Inspector Seath points out, *undue influence may be brought to bear to induce the successful entrant to study for a teacher's non-professional certificate*; and thus he may be wafted or drafted into a profession and into work for which he may have no natural inclination and for the performance of the duties of which he may be in no wise specially adapted or fitted.

To avoid this and other evils already referred to, we would suggest the following changes:—

I. PLACE ON YOUR COMMON SCHOOL CURRICULUM, to be taken at least as optional studies, CERTAIN ELEMENTARY TEXTS ON AGRICULTURAL SUBJECTS. If it be found expedient, follow these up with more advanced texts in the High Schools and Collegiate Institutes; and let this course connect by examination, directly or otherwise, with the Agricultural College.

This suggestion will probably be met with the loud and too common acclaim that we thus do away with a broad general education. We think not. The general course is still open to him who wishes to pursue it, and the superior training of the student who takes that course is not denied; but the specific course is made available for him who desires it. Have we not shown that our common and High Schools lead up to similar courses in Medicine, Law, Civil Engineering, etc. Why, we ask, should the study of that science upon which more than upon any other depends the progress of the nation, be so studiously avoided in our schools? Will those who differ from us give an intelligent answer to this question? True, we have a Model Farm, an Agricultural College, and a staff of professors who do practical, and we doubt not, very useful work; but what fraction of our prospective farmers attend on their teaching? Not one in a thousand; the reason is obvious. There is no *connecting link* between the boy's common or High School education and such a course. Connecting link! Indeed there is nothing at the one end to connect! Not one idea has been planted, not a single aspiration generated, not one inclination strengthened, that naturally directs the prospective farmer's steps to an Agricultural College; and, mark you, just as the twig is bent the tree inclines. It is almost amusing to read the Minister of Agriculture's lament that boys who take an advanced course of study do not return to the farm. The refrain of his song would seem to be that the higher education gained in our state schools is, in this way, dangerous to agricultural interests. This ought not to be so, and if it is a fact, I would fain ask our bucolic Minister whether the philosophy of the fact is not truly set forth in this paper. Again we say that elementary texts on agricultural subjects should be placed, at least as optional studies, on our common school curriculum. To a boy who spends sixteen or eighteen of every twenty-four hours on the farm—to whom the farm is, as it were, a great laboratory, there should be no difficulty in teaching this subject practically. It goes without saying that if taught theoretically, the result would be mischievous, rather than beneficial.

II. RAISE THE STANDARD OF THE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION. We do not go as far as Principal Grant, when he says that our common schools

should prepare candidates direct for the Universities; but we do think that our common school teachers are or ought to be competent to do a higher grade of work than that at present required of them. What would be the result were the examination of entrants made more searching? Beneficial to the student who intends taking a High School course by giving him a wider and a more thorough knowledge of the elementary work ere he grapples with the manifold difficulties to which the High School programme introduces him; beneficial also to the student who, from whatever cause or reason, will never take a High School course. The *terminus ad quem* of his course would be placed farther in the distance and upon a more elevated plane. Our education system should, if possible, accomplish the utilitarian ideal of conferring the greatest good on the greatest number. The great majority of the youth of our land live either in the country or in villages where there is no High School; and if we are to regard the entrance examination as marking the limit (and it certainly does mark the limit of work done in a great many schools) of that education which the country or village boy is to receive at his own door, when we say that the raising the standard would place at the door of the boy's home the possibilities of receiving a higher grade of education, accessible alike to the poor and the rich, and would stave off either entirely, or for a greater time, the period at which he is brought under what I have already characterized as the baneful influence of departmental examinations.

Another needed change is the wiping out of the December entrance examination. It is utterly absurd to argue that a pupil can gain a fair mastery of entrance work in four months. Added to this therein the difficulty that the successful candidate at Christmas is, particularly in our smaller High Schools, necessarily placed in the same classes with the successful entrant of the previous July. The absurdity of this is so apparent as to need no comment. Stiffen the examinations, hold them at the end of the academic year, so that the successful candidate may enter the High School at the beginning of the next academic year's work.

3. I have already pointed out that there is a danger that the competitive character of our departmental examinations exercises an evil influence. The possibility of such evil influence would be to a great extent removed if the result of the examinations held throughout the province were published alphabetically *en masse*. At present the names of the successful candidates at the different non-professional examinations throughout the province are so published that comparisons can yet very easily be made between competing schools. Such comparisons may be absolutely misleading, for we are given merely the quantity of work done, not the quality. We notice that one school has passed a certain number of candidates; but the total number that wrote and the number that were rejected we know nothing of. Consequently we say that comparisons may be actually misleading. The possibility of such mistakes and of the evil influence above indicated, should, if possible be wiped out.

4. Make the professional training of teachers a reality. At present the law-student spends five year's in practical training for his profession, during which time he pays some \$200 in fees; the medical student takes a four year's course in professional training, and pays his fees with a liberal hand; the teacher spends about as many months as the former do years in professional training, during which time the fees are merely nominal. Is it any wonder then that so many aspirants for honors in the other professions use that of the teacher as a mere stepping stone? Is it any wonder that the majority of those engaged in teaching are travellers and not sojourners.

TEACHERS' SALARIES.

BY A COUNTY TEACHER.

NOT long since I heard a trustee remark to an applicant for a situation, "You will have to come down; we have always been very fortunate here. We never hire until late, and then we get some one who has been disappointed in getting a situation,

cheap." Now, while it is undeniably true that many trustees do all they can to keep the salaries as low as possible, still I do not consider the fault is entirely on their side. We have close-fisted trustees and we have teachers who pander to this close-fistedness.

About a month ago I resigned my position, and my trustees advertised for a male teacher. In reply about forty applications were received. I was present at the meeting when my successor was chosen, and had the privilege of reading the applications, and I must say that for the first time I was ashamed of my profession. There was, indeed, a small percentage of neatly written, well composed applications, but in many cases the spelling was bad. One applicant held a Third Class Certificate, but had "*studded*" some Second Class subjects; another "*inclosed recommendations*." The writing was even worse than the spelling, and the composition stiff and awkward. The punctuation certainly could not be criticized, for there was none to criticize. I watched with great interest and curiosity to see if the trustees would detect the errors. They noticed the writing, but errors and deficiencies in other respects appeared to pass unnoticed. And these trustees are as intelligent on the whole as most of those on the country school boards.

These applicants, armed with lengthy and learned testimonials from interested High School teachers, asked for their services—perhaps a great deal more than they were worth—but so little that the remuneration required by a competent teacher seemed very large in comparison. One man, "twenty-one years of age, strong and healthy," demanded for his services the sum of \$298 per annum. He evidently expected to meet trustees like the one above referred to, and thought that being \$2 lower than the round sum his competitors might name, he would surely be appointed. Another applicant, for a very small sum, would pledge himself to give satisfaction to the *entire* section, which he knew by *personal* experience could be done.

In a neighboring section, where they have been paying \$500, a young man who has attended a High School for at least five years, and who, in addition to his Professional Third, holds a Second Class Non-Professional Certificate, applied for and accepted \$300, though the trustees had expected to pay more. In another neighboring section where they pay \$400 this year, and to my knowledge offered the same salary to another teacher for the coming year, an experienced teacher made a *personal* application and accepted \$265. Now don't you think in these cases the teacher is most to be blamed?

Worse again than accepting such low salaries where there are vacancies, is the undermining system practised by some who profess to be teachers. During the time I have held my present position persons who hold the necessary certificates of qualification—I will not call them teachers—have come in repeatedly and offered their services for less than I am receiving. Others, I have no doubt, have had the same experience. I know of a recent instance in which one of these persons offered to teach for \$50 less than the trustees were paying, and the result was that their teacher was obliged either to resign or accept a lower salary.

I have the most unbounded sympathy with the boy who has, perhaps, spent every available cent in gaining his professional papers, in his anxiety to obtain a situation; but my sympathy ceases when that anxiety leads him to undervalue his services, or seek to undermine another. The teacher who accepts \$300 will find it harder to have his salary raised to \$500, than if he had started with \$350 or \$400; and besides injuring himself, he does the profession an irreparable wrong. We occasionally find a board of trustees who are willing to pay a good teacher for his services; but there are always a sufficient number in the section to make it unpleasant for them to do so, especially when the neighboring sections are paying such low salaries.

Teachers not infrequently are annoyed because they do not belong to the same church as a few of the leading cranks in the neighborhood, and cases are known in which they have lost their situations on account of political views. But I believe as serious difficulties as any that are met with, come from the petty jealousies and undermining schemes of those in the profession.