

## PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS.

We wish it to be distinctly understood that we are not the foes of inspection and properly conducted examinations. Where the people are called upon to support a system of public instruction, it is their duty, as it is their interest, to see that the money they contribute is expended so as most to promote the public advantage. They are bound to keep a vigilant outlook upon the proceedings of the public officers who discharge the duties pertaining to this department. Through their superintendents and instructors they reach every school and are kept informed of educational success or failure throughout their province. They can determine whether the education of the province is in a state of efficiency, as far as can be learned from statistics, and decide respecting the value of the suggestions which are offered to secure more gratifying results. The means taken by the officials of the educational departments to obtain this information may not always be above criticism, and may not be the best adapted to provide them with the most accurate data upon which to base their estimate of a school, but we are willing to accept their results and do not desire to quarrel with the method by which they are reached. These officers have a definite object in view, and they avail themselves of whatever instruments they think best for their purpose; they are men who ought to have been selected for the discharge of this duty because of their special fitness, from their experience, accomplishments, high character, judgment and prudence, and, therefore, men who enjoy the confidence of the community and the teachers.

But what shall we say of these public examinations which are still held in almost every public school and generally at this season of the year? It cannot be doubted that previous to the age of government inspection there was some reason for the custom, for it was the only occasion upon which the teacher and the public came into official contact, the only day during the year when the school-room was thrown open to the parents and friends of the pupils, and the educational methods of the school were exposed to the inspection and criticism of the visitors. Under these circumstances, an examination, partial and unsatisfactory though it was, was of some benefit. It served as a stimulus both to teachers and pupils, and, in some degree at any rate, evoked a certain interest in the work of the teacher and supplied a means by which the character of the school might be tested. But now when the machinery by which this is accomplished is elaborated to such a degree, what good end can be served by the continuance of the custom?

When, as is the practice in the larger towns, the pupils have not only to submit to the ordeal of an examination by the government inspector but to that of a grading officer besides, why should the old and now entirely useless habit of a public examination be so tenaciously clung to? Is it not the fact that, sometimes, on these occasions, when gentlemen are called upon to express their opinion of the school, from what they have seen, they rashly do so, and unwittingly put themselves in antagonism to those who have better means of judging, and are better fitted to form an opinion of the work of the school? The speaking on such occasions is for the most part meaningless laudation, and where it becomes critical and suggestive it does so from imperfect knowledge and a partial view of the circumstances, and is but little calculated to encourage, stimulate or instruct either teachers or pupils.

Such an examination partakes more of the nature of an exhibition, than an occasion for testing the acquirements of the pupils. Teachers are sometimes engaged in preparation for weeks, and we have known cases in which the special lessons of the examination day were repeated at intervals for months, that the display might be a success. Now, to good teachers such work is very distasteful, and is performed by them, not from choice, but necessity. They know, that to the superficial observer, readiness in answering is the first and indispensable requisite in a pupil, and they have to govern themselves accordingly. By this standard, then, scholars are compared with those of other teachers, and not by their ability to grapple with and overcome difficulties, their tenacity of purpose, and their power of understanding. They are, therefore, compelled to resort to methods in which the memory plays the most important part, that their examination may be successful.

Now, this is an injustice both to the teacher and the scholar. Examinations, as conducted by the inspectors, are, or ought to be, quite sufficient to determine the qualifications of the pupils. And if it still be necessary to have a public occasion on which the parents and friends of the children may meet them in school and signalize the end of the school year, and the commencement of the holidays, let it be a real exhibition, and not a mixing up of things which ought to be kept separate. Let us have, by all means, as fine a display as can possibly be prepared. Reading is one of the first of accomplishments, and if the prospect of readings and recitations at the end of the year will stimulate to greater effort, and enable scholars to attain greater excellence in elocution, the observance of such a closing day will not be without utility. And, we doubt not, that a like favorable re-