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Editorial

Examination Standards

In the last issue of the Journal there was an article dealing with examinations. It was held in this article that a school cannot be judged by the result of written examinations. Since this issue a number of communications have been received in which the Journal's advocacy of this point of view is commended and it has been suggested that something further be written to show that even under the fairest conditions examinations are not a trustworthy test.

In a recent work edited by Mr. Starch of the University of Wisconsin, numerous diagrams are given to show how widely even expert examiners differ in their marking of students. In literature, arithmetic and geography there is the same story to tell. The marking ranges from 55 to 95 per cent. for the same paper. It is not likely that the examinations held here at midsummer are any fairer to students than those held elsewhere.

It is very easy to see how there should be a wide difference in marking. If one were examining a student to find out if he were able to take a position as an accountant in a bank he would naturally deduct marks for every error in calculation. If he were examining a student to test his ability to go on to the next grade he might ignore calculation, and mark for power of thought. It would be the same in marking every other subject.

In the marking of papers at midsummer, however, there should be no need of a very great difference in valuation

and it would seem necessary for all examiners in a subject to agree upon a standard. In writing they might take either the Thorndike scale, or the Ayers scale. In composition they might follow the scale of Prof. Hillegas. Better still, if all the examiners of a section were to meet together and fix standards for reference there would be a general feeling that none of the candidates would be marked unfairly.

We should like to commend to all teachers the reading of such a book as Mr. Starch's. It is provocative of thought even if it is not entirely convincing. The reason that it does not convince fully is very clear. It can be illustrated by reference to a discussion that took place in educational circles about twenty years ago. Some genius propounded the problem, "What color do children like best?" with the result that everyone in the country began making experiments. A certain percentage liked red, another percentage brown or green, etc. After a time somebody said, "It is absurd to ask a question like that, for children may like one color best in fruit, another color in dress and another when they come to look at the sky." In other words, aesthetic appreciation is linked with utility and conditions of environment. It is impossible to say what color is a favorite with children or grown people. So it is impossible to fix a standard in writing, composition or literature that can be used on all occasions. The standard in Grade I. will put emphasis on good form, the standard for Grade VIII. on freedom of movement. In