

# THE ' VARSITY:

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## EXAMINERS AND EXAMINATIONS.

To the mind of the average undergraduate the question of examiner and examine assumes very different proportions according to the season of the year. But as the ominous month of May draws nigh, professors and lectures sink into insignificance, and the examiner becomes the all-important source and centre of academic thought; the very fountain of university honors. To this department of the work of the year, special attention was drawn in the recent address of the President of University College, and to that we now revert. In earlier years it was the practice of the Senate to appoint the college professors as its examiners, naming along with each a co-examiner whose independent position was accepted as a sufficient guarantee against any possible bias of his colleague. The practical result was, as Dr. Wilson said, 'the examiners were, with few exceptions, professors and experienced teachers,' and the University examinations consisted largely of *bona fide* test work of the teaching of the year. But the aim at a division of the University endowment among the denominational colleges intensified the jealousy with which the Provincial College was regarded; and in the indiscriminate censure of its assailants the examination by professors was denounced in unmeasured terms. One of the results accordingly was the disqualification of any member of the Senate to act as an examiner, and the consequent exclusion of all professors who had a seat on the Senate, as well as of others well qualified for the work, from presiding in the examination hall. The principals and masters of all collegiate institutes and high schools are also excluded. In truth, in a country where men qualified for the peculiarly delicate duties of an examiner are necessarily rare, and for which the practical experience of a teacher is of vital importance, it almost seems as though the very aim of the present system was to render ineligible nearly all the men best fitted for the work.

It is the custom among certain well-meaning educational reformers to belaud the London University, and its system of degree-conferring by a Board wholly apart from any college or teaching body. Oxford and Cambridge have the advantage of a numerous class of fellows, tutors, and honor-men experienced in teaching, and familiar with the details of college work as carried on there. London can avail itself of the same aid, though lacking the harmonious relations that should adapt the examinations to the teaching, the results of which are assumed to be tested. Nevertheless, in the wholly exceptional condition of a community of five millions of people within a radius of ten miles, a method may be found to answer the purpose which is totally unadapted to a like number of people scattered across a continent.

Anyone who has studied the history of university reform in England in recent years, must know that many of the highest authorities on this subject have protested against the mischievous results of a system which places instruction on an altogether secondary footing, and magnifies examinations as though they constituted the very tree of knowledge, the fount where all the muses drank. Its tendency is seen more and more to foster mere cram in place of honest study. Anyone who desires to master this subject in all its bearings should study the elaborate evidence which finally induced the British Parliament to emancipate Owen's College from the evils traced entirely to the working of the London University system, and to create the new Victoria University, which practically restores to the teachers their legitimate influence in the conduct of university examinations.

So far are English educationists from aiming at anything equivalent to the idea at present in vogue in Canada, of one so-called National University, with its monopoly of a solitary ex-

amination board for Ontario, or rather for the whole Dominion; that they more and more advocate the indispensable necessity of examinations being largely carried out on the actual teaching in the lecture room, and not on mere subjects and text books. Professor Tait of Edinburgh University, himself a Cambridge Senior Wrangler, says, 'no one but the teacher can examine in the true interests of the student.' Dr. Schurman, a distinguished graduate of London, denounces the system of his own University as mischievous. Principal Grant, of Queen's University, has expressed his conviction that the advantages which they enjoy at Kingston, by having their examinations in their own hands, are invaluable. Leading men of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Dublin, Manchester, Glasgow, etc., can all be quoted in maintenance of the same opinion, which the experience of every teacher, and of many students, must confirm. Does not every honor student of University College know what it is to devote a year of diligent study, and systematic attendance on the lectures, in some selected and favorite department, and then get a paper in the University Hall in which it is difficult to find a single question bearing on the year's work?

One result of one London University Board of Examiners for all colleges is shown to be the growth of a class of professional 'coaches,' 'crammers,' 'dry-nurses,' etc., as they are called; men who analyse the papers of the University examinations; put their 'patients' through a course of answers on the average of questions of past years, and openly advertise their success in helping dunces to Civil Service appointments and University degrees. Such a process is not wholly unknown in Canada, and will soon be rampant among us if we ever rejoice in the grand central examination board of a 'National University.' The multiplication of poorly equipped colleges with degree-conferring powers is an undoubted evil; but the suppressing of the healthful rivalry in the system of teaching, and the standards of proficiency, which happily still prevails in Canada, and is more than ever encouraged in England, would be a far greater one. Let any one who doubts this compare the courses of study in the various colleges of Canada at a time when University College was entering on its work, and see what they are now; noting at the same time to what extent the advance has been on the very lines laid down by the Provincial College for its own teaching. This, be it remembered, has taken place among independent universities, and not in colleges looking forward to the examinations of one central board.

There is one other grievance traceable to the same source, which every undergraduate will feelingly recognize. Under the former system the University examinations could to a large extent be accepted by the college. But now in some if not in all of the departments, no honor man would be satisfied with an award of college standing, honors, or prizes, based on the work in the University Hall. Hence the endless college terminal examinations; until the hapless undergraduate, in his progress from Matriculation to B. A., may well exclaim, with Macbeth, at each appalling return of the vexatious ordeal:

'Thou art too like the first :  
A third is like the former . . . A fourth? Start, eyes!  
What! will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?  
Another yet? A seventh? I'll see no more!  
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass  
Which shows me many more!'

## IS A NATIONAL UNIVERSITY A DREAM?

We suppose that few persons will deny that, as an abstract idea, it is desirable to have one strong, well-endowed central university, with a sufficient staff of able professors, with a large, well-