

Advertiser January 26 1886

THE UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—Your correspondent who suggested that the professors themselves should produce by some multiplying process the requisite number of copies of the examination papers, and those who have approved of the suggestion, can have no conception of the time and labor involved. The professors find it almost impossible, even when the papers are printed, to get the results of the examination out on the day fixed by the University statutes for the publication of the list, and if they had to produce from thirty to a hundred copies of every paper by some multiplying process a week or ten days more would elapse before the results could be published. Besides, this the multiplication of examination papers is scarcely professors' work, and it involves certain dangers from which printing is free. In one of the large schools of this colony papers were at one time multiplied by the typograph, but the work occupied about seventy hours of one master's time, though he was to some extent assisted by others. The suggestion that Prince Alfred College owes its success to the fact that Mr. Chapple is warden of the senate is a senseless one. His position as warden, even if he were willing to avail himself unfairly of any chances, offers him no opportunities of knowing anything of the papers beforehand. The suggestion is worthless except to prove the meanness of the person who makes it. Prince Alfred College has passed so many pupils in the recent examinations because the entire organisation of the place is devoted to that one end, and because each subject is taught by a man well acquainted with the peculiarities of the examinations, and driven along by the consciousness that his billet depends upon the success of his pupils. It is impossible to pass forty out of forty-six candidates for any examination whatever without a good deal of cramming, and as parents estimate the value and success of a school by the number of passes its pupils secure they directly encourage cramming. When a man's success in his profession, nay, his very bread, frequently not only for himself, but for his wife and children, depend upon the number of passes secured by his pupils, be sure that under such pressure he will soon cease to be very scrupulous about cramming boys. Parents and headmasters complain if boys do not pass; they do not complain if a boy passes that he was "crammed." Very large percentages of passes in any examination can only be secured by two methods—1. Remorseless cramming, at least in some distasteful but necessary subjects. 2. Remorseless weeding out of dull and idle pupils. The most successful coach for any examination in the world is perhaps Mr. Wren, the great coach for the Indian Civil Service, and no one who knows anything of his establishment would deny that a good deal of cramming is done there. Further, Mr. Wren keeps up his high percentages of passes by promptly sending about their business any pupils who refuse to work properly, or who do not show themselves possessed of wits enough to make success almost certain. The unfortunate schoolmaster has no such ready means of getting rid of dull and idle pupils.

getting rid of dull and idle boys, but must plod on to the end of the chapter weighted and hindered by a number of boys who have no intention of trying to pass any examination whatever, and who do not possess the ability, even if they wished to do so. To say that there is no cramming at P.A.C. is ludicrous; such results could not be secured without it. An inspection of the subjects in which P.A.C. boys pass will show that they are all driven in a groove, whether the groove suits their special aptitudes or not. A large establishment must do this; it cannot stop to enquire into the peculiarities of each boy; it must choose the grooves along which boys can be best driven, and remorselessly drive them along those grooves. And until the older college consents unscrupulously to do the same, it will be beaten from the start by its rival. I quite agree with your correspondent who says that the sympathies of the University professors are in a direction quite opposite to P.A.C. It is only natural that they should be so, but no one who knows anything of the professors can for a moment think that their sympathies would influence results in the least degree. Indeed I can say from experience that an examiner who has the prospect of ploughing through some hundreds of examination papers before him is in a frame of mind in which little room for pity or favoritism is found. Moreover, when a certain number of marks secures a pass in a subject, an examiner cannot tell, until he has added up the marks allotted to each question or part of a question, whether the total will reach the number required for a pass or not; and once he has looked carefully through a set of papers, he is very indisposed to go back and alter his allotment in any way. I would not have troubled you, Mr. Editor, with so many remarks were it not that I feel strongly on these matters, and have a greater acquaintance with them than most of your correspondents can possess.—I am, &c.,

THEORETIKOS.

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She's all my fancy painted her,
She's lovely, she's divine.

—Old Love Song.

O, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel' as ithers see us.

—Burns.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—I have waited a day or two to see whether your issue of the 13th inst. conveyed the full contents of the vials of wrath to be poured out upon my devoted head, or whether there were others in store for me. Apparently the vortex of the cyclone has passed over, the storm has spent its fury, and despite the fierce denunciations of your correspondents in that day's issue, and the tropical heat we have been experiencing, I have been mercifully spared and afforded another opportunity of repenting of my evil ways and atoning for past transgressions. If, unlike the young lady referred to in the lines quoted above, I am all my "opponents" paint me, I fear I should be far from "lovely," anything but "divine," and the possession of the power craved for by Burns would reveal a personage with a prominent pair of horns, the material for making good soup, and an "orthopaedical foot," animated, like the half-pay captain in Dickens's "Election for Beadle," by "envy and hatred and malice and all uncharitableness." It really is very amusing to find those who profess to be animated by Christian charity, and who claim the right of dissent, so devoid of the first element of Christianity, so intolerant of dissent. Before embarking upon a career of repentance and atonement I crave the privilege of making a few remarks in mitigation of judgment.

First, a number of letters had appeared in your columns with reference to the University examinations, some suggesting that the papers of the candidates should be distinguished by numbers instead of names; others suggesting that the examiners should be appointed from the professorial staff of other colonial universities. With these letters and suggestions, however, I had nothing whatever to do; yet notwithstanding I really cannot see the force of the outcry against the writers of these letters; these matters, like Cæsar's wife, should not only be above reproach but beyond suspicion. That there is fair ground for their suggestions is no doubt unconsciously yet unmistakably proved by the statement of your correspondent "Verus," when, speaking of the examiners he says, "they all have no leaning to the school that has been so successful. If there is any such sympathy it is in quite another direction." If I have read these letters aright I conceive the object of the writers is to avoid all suspicion of "leaning" to one side or the other; and to "howl," as some of your correspondents have done, against suggestions that have for their object the removal of any cause of suspicion is calculated to engender the thought that the suggested remedy is very distasteful to the objectors for very sufficient reasons. Seeing these suggestions for alterations in the method of examinations I innocently mentioned what years ago appeared to me to afford an opportunity for the misuse of the papers formulated by the examiners as a test of the candidates' proficiency in the various branches of their education, and forthwith "An Old Scholar," whilst

admitting that my suggestion was not specially applicable to any educational institution, yet feels it incumbent upon "An Old (Prince Alfred) Scholar" to resent the suggestion of the possibility of such a misuse of papers as being "the virtue of a coward!" Does not this alacrity to rush to the defence "of all candidates" suggest the idea of fitting on a cap, or, as the French proverb has it, *Il s'accuse qu'excuse*. Why should not an "Old Scholar" of any other educational institution feel called upon to resent the suggestion of the possibility of the misuse of papers as well as "An Old (Prince Alfred) Scholar?" To come to the communications of your correspondents, "Verus," "Quidem," and "Sub Silentio," in reply to the letter in which I gave my reasons for anticipating the success that has attended the efforts of the management of the Prince Alfred College, and my admiration of the business tact and knowledge of human nature that have moulded their action in the past. Preliminarily I would remark that as far as possible I shall sink all reference to their expressions that my communications have been the result of "malice and jealousy," and having "exhausted my stock of venom in mean and spiteful insinuations," &c., for the reason that any unprejudiced person can see how wanting they are in any foundation in fact, as you, Mr. Editor, must also know. After indulging in a cataract of vituperation and reference to other correspondents, "Verus" condescends to notice "Argus" as follows:—"Some wiseacre signing himself "Argus" has discovered some mysterious connection between speech day in the Town Hall, numerous prizes in gaudy bindings, and success in the University examinations." Any one who will take the trouble to compare this statement with my letter, and with the statement at the conclusion of his letter, which states that I imply "that the P.A.C. gives special attention to boys of more than average ability and aptitude," cannot fail: