

Req. 24th Jan. 1903.

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THE UNIVERSITY REPORT.

The University of Adelaide has just issued its regulations and syllabus for the ensuing year and the annual report of the Examinations Board for 1902. The pamphlet embraces 172 octavo pages, and contains information respecting the forthcoming examinations, reports of the examiners on last year's examinations, and the papers submitted to candidates in 1902. In the latter division great interest will attach to the elementary commercial examination papers, which are printed in full, and give an idea of the standard of efficiency expected.

Critical Examiners.

The notes by examiners are printed, and form an instructive commentary upon the work of the competitors in the various examinations.

Primary Examination.—Dealing first with the primary, the results in English are said to be, "as usual," far from satisfactory, the failures are too numerous, and "nearly half of those who pass raise doubts in the minds of the examiners." The remark is made that candidates enter for the examination before the time when they can take them comfortably, and weakness is noticed in grammar, analysis, definitions, and essays. Out of 960 entries only 549 passed. In arithmetic 717 satisfied the examiners, the majority getting at least five problems correct out of the seven propounded, and the history papers were nearly as successful, 801 candidates scoring 622 passes. The Greek and Latin papers are described as easy, and "those who failed, failed miserably." There were three candidates in Greek, and one pass; while in Latin the entries numbered 356, and the passes 238. The successes in French, 111 passes, 117 failures, reached a higher standard than last year, and gave evidence in many cases of careful teaching; but the failures were glaring, and 20 per cent. of the candidates, it is stated, should never have been allowed to sit for examination. Spelling in both French and English was decidedly weak. The eight failures out of 42 German papers were caused, apart from the ordinary rules of declension, by the difficult question of gender, and the examiner recommends the enforcement of the rule never to memorise any German noun unless coupled with its proper definite article. Algebra had 376 passes and 371 failures, and the result is noted as satisfactory. In this branch, too, many who failed were unfit to enter, and the importance of insisting on the relation between algebra and arithmetic is urged.

Junior Examination.—Here again bad spelling, looseness of style, and careless composition are spoken of as characteristics of the English literature and history sections. In the latter 40 per cent. of the candidates from the country centres in South Australia were quite unprepared for the test. The answers in the Greek papers disclosed that the pupils for the more part learned nothing thoroughly, though the Latin work was satisfactory. The candidates in French were uneven. In German there was vast divergence of attainment, and in two cases the work was almost faultless, while 11 out of 131 candidates failed to get one-third of the marks possible. Physiology proved a weak subject with many, and one-fourth of the competitors failed to secure 20 per cent. of marks, while there was too large a proportion of replies characterized by loose and vague expression. The botany section revealed some few excellent papers, but the majority were vague and confused, and there was a tendency to use botanical terms without knowing their meaning. For the junior examination 581 candidates entered, an increase of 156 on last year.

Senior Examination.—It is hardly creditable that the senior and higher English literature division should be found so much wanting as the first paragraph of the criticism seems to indicate. "Looseness of thought and writing" should not be common in this of all branches covered by the examination. The charge of too much literary immorality does not speak well for the students. "Vague and often meaningless jargon of appreciation" is a common fault in some social circles, which follow the literary fashions of the day, and the examiners are well advised in uttering a word of censure when they find it among candidates for the University certificates. The advice given in respect to history is to the point, that plenty of practice in writing down what the pupil knows is eminently desirable. In senior Greek great ignorance of syntax is complained of, and one notable mistake was due to "a want of humour and commonsense." Weaker candidates in Latin came out very unsatisfactorily in the translation of English into that language; nevertheless, taken all round, the average performance was better than that of a few years ago. There is evidently need for general improvement in this subject. The French papers disclosed the weakness of teaching in two most essential points. Only 10 per cent. of the candidates could translate "I can give you some." There was evidence of some careful and scholarly teaching in "some" German papers, but in most cases there was a sad deficiency as regards idiom, vocabulary, and accuracy in accordance. Arithmetic throughout the whole series seems to have been particularly well attended to. In trigonometry the common fault was a careless use of the symbols. It is gratifying to note that the results of the examination in chemistry were distinctly satisfactory, and that in physiology there was an improvement in the grasp and exposition of fundamental principles as compared with previous years. The botany papers were uniformly excellent, but there is every need for a closer attention to Australian geology and physical geography. In the higher examination languages seem to have been only moderately successful.

Commercial Examination.—A new branch, the commercial test, was added. This included bookkeeping, which was excellent; commercial correspondence, generally meritorious; commercial geography wanting; shorthand, which showed that students needed to devote attention to reading their notes as well as to writing them; and type writing, in which the examiners insisted on the importance of sufficient margin, and pointed out the prevalent mistake that the small "l" should be used for the numeral "1," and not the capital "I."

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATION RESULTS.

The report of the Public Examinations Board of the Adelaide University always affords more or less interesting and instructive reading. Few questions are of more importance to the community generally than the standard of education attained by the average citizen. Any institution which tends to raise this standard is deserving of support. The University has contributed largely, both directly and indirectly, to the advance of knowledge in South Australia. The extended duties of the academy of the state are fraught with a double advantage. The idea that the University exists almost exclusively for the inculcation of learning has fortunately passed away, and scarcely less urgent than its direct operation as the highest teaching institution in the land are its comparatively newly acquired functions as an examining body. The value attaching to the certificates issued in the several divisions under which tests are conducted is considerable, and doubtless it acts as an incentive to competitors to strive to the utmost to attain the proficiency requisite for their acquisition. Even if this were all, there would be good reason for continuing and increasing the work in this connection; but perhaps of greater moment is the incentive given to professional teachers and principals of schools to adopt methods likely to lead their pupils to success at the University. With such a system of ascertaining the result of the year's work the inefficient or indolent teacher stands but little chance of gaining for his classes a reputation which will commend them to public opinion. In this matter examinations by the school inspectors and tests by University examiners are widely different.

It would be impossible to gauge with precision the real value of any educational system by mere examination tests; but the new spirit of scholasticism is perhaps as marked in the proceedings at these trials as in the modus operandi of the classroom. To lead out the faculties, to sharpen and equip them, is the goal of all true education, and mere memorizing has little permanent value. The examiners of the Adelaide University deserve credit for the pains they have taken in setting such questions as will in some degree measure the power of students to apply the knowledge they have gained. Knowledge without thought is useless, and the jibe frequently indulged in to the effect that successful University men

are not heard of in their future career may have been mainly due to the vicious system of "cram" which so long prevailed. Books of reference have multiplied so rapidly that their name is legion, and it is no longer essential to the effective discharge of life's duties, even in one of its learned walks, that a man should be an embodied encyclopaedia of technical detail. Power to think, promptitude to act with judgment, alertness to see and seize an opportunity, are among the results for which education should strive. A University training is desirable in so far as it will assist in arriving at this end, and, although the report does not deal with the actual University curriculum, it is a step towards it.

It is gratifying to note in the statistics published by the board that in each division there has been a larger number of entries than was shown in the previous year. The total percentage of passes is not so high as might be desired; but the conditions under which students are entered may to some extent account for this. Candidates are drawn from all parts of the state in a somewhat miscellaneous manner, and the remark of several examiners—that in many instances they are entered before they are ready for the test—are very pertinent, and should be carefully weighed by teachers. Nothing can be gained, and much may be lost, by yielding to a too fervent desire to send immature pupils to essay a task which is obviously beyond their present attainment. We are presuming, of course, that the test questions are fair. This forcing process not alone acts deleteriously on the institution whence the candidates came, but has a reflex and baneful influence upon the students themselves, and is likely to oppress them in their future study with a sense of failure and incompetence. One advantage of these annual examinations is that teachers themselves have an

opportunity of realizing defects previously unnoticed. A hint given by the examiner concerning careless and ineffective teaching in any department will cause serious thought in a conscientious instructor. In Adelaide, as elsewhere in British and American communities, University examinations disclose a lack of adequate application in the pursuit of literary English; and yet there is hardly a more desirable accomplishment than that of speaking and writing English well. A pleasing feature of the revised curriculum of the University is the introduction of commercial subjects into the lists of examination tests. Possibly experience may disclose a need for modification of the standards for an elementary examination of this kind, but the work promises to be of great utility. The report of the examiners will not escape criticism in some parts, but this will not detract from the important fact that South Australia possesses in its University an institution which is becoming more and more worthy of the high traditions of its great exemplars in other parts of the King's dominions.

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HUMOUR AT THE UNIVERSITY.

Of all humour the unconscious type is usually most happy, and specimens of glistering comedy invariably crop out of "tragedy of the University." Here are a few taken from the report of the last public examinations in connection with the Adelaide University:—"Domesday Book was written so as to keep an account of all that came to pass of importance, whether good or bad, and it was supposed to be read at the end of the world," said one student; another remarked that "it was so called because the people believed they would have to repent of their sins before they died;" and a third, who has yet to learn something of the complex nature of men and the limitations of human knowledge, stated that "Domesday gave an exact description of every man, woman, and child!" In such "shots" one can understand the workings of the candidate's mind; it is not so easy to account for the following:—"John Wycliffe was the inventor of the spinning jenny;" "Danstan was the man who, when trying to convert a tribe of savages, was pitted to death with trombones." Candidates constantly use terms whose significance they do not understand, as for instance—"The Court of Star Chamber was a law in Henry II. time, consisting of one Judge," &c.; "Thomas Cromwell will always be known as the Protectorate of Ireland;" "Alfred also was an invention!" which statement might be a sceptical reference to the uncertainty of documentary evidence, but was probably due to a somewhat undignified identification of "England's darling" with his graduated tallow candle. There is also a curious inconsequence about the statement "Henry II. and Becket were great friends till Becket was made Archbishop of Canterbury. He then threw away his bad clothes and drank bad wine, which offended the King very much." Evidence of defective teaching is to be found in such questions as involve geographical knowledge. The following are particular gems:—"Drake sailed up the west coast to California, and took a bee line to England"; they went to South America, then attacked Cadix, then to south of Australia, and discovered Cape Horn;" "passed Valparaiso, went round Cape St. Vincent, passed New California, &c." One candidate wrote down "the South Sea Bubble was 'established' in 1820!" another, that "Oliver Cromwell was succeeded by his brother Dick!"