

The Advertiser 1st April 98 The Advertiser 1st April 1898

UNIVERSITY EXAMS.

AN INTERESTING REPORT.

M. R. W. Chapman, the chairman of the board of examiners for the University preliminary, junior, and senior public examinations, has issued a special report upon them from which the following extracts are taken:—

Dealing first with arithmetic Mr. Chapman states:—

It has always been noticed that when questions are set which involve a very slight departure from fixed rules a large number of candidates fail almost down to the particular questions. This examination has proved no exception to the rule. . . . The methods of working were as a rule good, but in some cases roundabout methods were often used. Very few candidates seemed to be familiar with the relationship of "chains" to acres, a relationship which is important, as it is by chains and acres that the land is usually measured.

The candidates seemed in some cases abominably ignorant of the English language, and the report deals with some amusing instances of this state of affairs, and states:—

In grammar the candidates are expected to know the classification of words and clauses. This is chiefly tested by parsing in analysis, the main thing is to give the exact relations of the clauses to one another, and it is here that the weakness has been most apparent. Sometimes, too, clauses have not been correctly separated. . . . It is not expected that these young people should know the original use of words, but only their actual use now. . . . Finally, besides this knowledge of grammar the candidates are expected to give the meaning of the English words which are in fairly common use. In all the six exams which the present examiner has made the answers to the questions have been by far the weakest. This is not surprising, because it is this part of the work over which a teacher can have the least control in any special preparation. But we do not think that an adequate explanation is given when it is said that the Australian children read very little, for it is not so much that the words are unfamiliar to them as that they have not been interrogated about their meaning. We find that the candidates nearly always gave good enough examples, but they attached a wrong meaning to the words through an unchallenged association of sound or ideas. This may be seen in such answers as the following to the last three words of the list given in the March paper, viz.:—"Primitive means not very good; for example, the picnic was a very primitive affair." Another candidate said "Primitive means very holy, for example the Primitive Methodist Church," while a third wrote "Primitive means neither one thing nor the other, for example, the Primitive Methodist Church." The word reverie was said by one candidate to mean umpire, and criterion by another to mean "lying towards the north, for example, the Criterion Hotel." A second said the word meant "made of wool, for example, the Criterion shirt," and yet a third wrote "Criterion means fine linen, for example, the Criterion shirts lead, other follows."

On the subject of English the report states:—

The essays in English composition have much improved since the time allowed has been doubled. Nearly all the failures were due to incorrectness in grammar and punctuation. But one looks for a certain orderliness of ideas and for the absence of vulgarisms and doubtful expressions, such as "a lot of us" and "like we do." At the last examination an introduction to an essay on horses read:—"In the beginning God created man, and gave him all he wanted. A little later he made beasts to run over the earth, and sent a very important animal, which was the horse. It generally stands about 5 ft. in height and its whole construction consists of four legs, two eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth, body and tail." Another essay opened:—"There have been different kinds of inventions since the year 1800, when the people had no means of travelling except in a donkey-cart." It is true, says the examiner, that young people usually feel that they have little to write beyond the first sentence, but they would have plenty to say if questioned, and in considering their essays an examiner must always presume that they have been taught to ask their own questions, and that these have some coherence, and not quite so infantile as the "construction" above.

In the junior public examinations all the papers in English literature showed familiarity with the poems prescribed. The general average of the English history answers was good, in some cases remarkably good, considering the quantity of the ground that had to be covered. The answers to question No. 3 were the weakest, because most of the candidates took the present century to be the eighteenth. In geography a large number of candidates merely made a guess at the countries asked for in the question, and many of the answers were extremely vague, continents being given instead of countries. The papers in German were on the whole accurately done, the weakest part was, as always, the translation of sentences into German, owing mainly to the poorness of vocabulary. Lengthy reference is made in the report to the question of Latin, the translation of which into English at the examination being very bad, only one candidate gaining half marks. In some cases the dictionaries were used in an absurdly unintelligent manner, one candidate translating *suavis precationis*, "a snub-nosed precession." Most of the candidates seemed content with finding very little point or meaning in the Latin. The papers on Greek were feeble, only one candidate doing moderately well in the composition. In mathematics the propositions in geometry were very well done. Some of the work was very untidy, and many of the drawings did not contribute at all to clearness. Very few answers were given to the questions in physics, and the papers in chemistry were on the whole well done.

The questions set in physiology were not answered as well as usual. In the case of one or two of them it was evident that the great majority of the candidates entirely failed to apprehend their scope, which should have been clear enough. In this particular respect the examiner thinks it was owing to the fault of the teachers, and suggests that it would be a good thing if they would interview him with a view to ascertaining what he regards as the legitimate scope of the questions.

The general standard of excellence attained in the answers to the papers on English literature and history in the senior public examinations, says the report, was very high, partly owing no doubt to a failure in one of them involving failure with the whole examination. Nearly all the candidates who failed in Latin were rejected for their weakness in composition. It must be obvious that unless a candidate is able to render an easy piece of English into Latin without making the most atrocious blunders in accent and syntax, such knowledge of the language as may be possessed must be of the flimsiest kind. The weaker candidates generally showed a tendency to go floundering along in a heavy, unthinking, literal fashion, instead of first clearly grasping the meaning of them and re-stating them in the correct Latin. In the unseen translations both the pieces set seemed to have presented great difficulty. Only two candidates reached half marks, whilst the productions of most were hopeless rubbish. The majority of the candidates seemed to have had little experience or thorough instruction in reading Latin at sight, and engaged at haphazard with the pieces set and on no definite principles.

THE ELDER STATUE.

The executive committee appointed in connection with the movement for the erection of a statue to perpetuate the memory of the late Sir Thomas Elder has already held two meetings. Subscription cards are being sent to all the members of the general committee, to the presidents of all institutes, and to many others believed to be willing to assist in raising the necessary funds. Several of the subscriptions already to hand are for £25 each. The Blind, Deaf, and Dumb Institution and Home for Incurables have voted to the fund £20 and £10 respectively, amounts equal to 1 per cent. on their bequests. All the subscriptions will be acknowledged in the daily papers later on.

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THE UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS.

The Board of Examiners in connection with the Adelaide University have issued a special report on the result of the Preliminary, Junior, and Senior, Public Examinations of last year. It is signed by the Chairman, Mr. R. W. Chapman.

Beginning with the preliminary examination, the report has the following reference to arithmetic—It has always been noticed in this examination that when questions are set which involve even a very slight departure from the fixed rules a very large number of candidates break down in those particular questions. This examination has proved no exception to the rule. . . . The methods of working were as a rule good, but in some cases roundabout methods were often used. Very few candidates seemed to be familiar with relationship of chains to acres—a relationship which is important, as it is by chains and acres that land is usually measured. . . . In grammar the candidates are expected to know the classification of words and clauses and to be clear as to the ground of the classification, viz., the function of words and clauses in the sentence. This is chiefly tested by analysis and parsing. In analysis the main thing is to give the exact relations of the clauses to one another, and it is here that weakness has been most apparent. Sometimes, too, the clauses have been not correctly separated. Teachers would probably find it useful to omit the historical point of view altogether at so elementary a stage, and keep entirely to the function of the word in the sentence. It is not expected that these young people should know the original use of words, but only their actual use now. As regards memory work, the scope of this will in future be better defined by the recommendation of a textbook. Finally, besides this knowledge of grammar the candidates are expected to give the meaning of English words which are in fairly common use. In all the six examinations which the present examiner has now made the answers to this question have been by far the weakest. This is not surprising because it is this part of the work over which a teacher can have least control in any special preparation. But we do not think that an adequate explanation is given when it is said that Australian children read little, for it is not so much that the words are unfamiliar to them as that they have not been interrogated about the meaning of them. We find that the candidates nearly always give good enough examples, but that they attach a wrong meaning to the words through an unchallenged association of sound or ideas. This may be seen in such answers as the following to the last three words of the list given in the March paper, viz., primitive, reverie, criterion:—"Primitive—not very good; for example, the picnic was a very primitive affair;" "primitive means very holy; for example, the Primitive Methodist Church." "primitive means neither one thing nor the other; for example, the Primitive Methodist Church." "Reverie—umpire, for example." "Criterion—lying towards the north; for example, the Criterion Hotel;" "criterion means made of wool; for example, the criterion shirt;" "criterion—fine linen; for example, criterion shirts lead, others follows." The essays in English composition have much improved since the time allowed has been doubled. Correctness in grammar and punctuation is the first thing, and nearly all failures have been due to faults in one or other; but one looks also for a certain orderliness of ideas, for the absence of vulgarisms and doubtful expressions, such as "a lot of us," "like we do," and finally for a reasonable length. Within the time it may fairly be expected that the candidates write from 350 to 400 words, though the terror of having to write so much will, without practice, induce introductions like this one from an essay on horses written at the last examination:—"In the beginning God created man, and gave him all he wanted. A little later afterwards he made beasts to run over the earth, and sent a very important animal to man, which was the horse. It generally stands about five feet in height, its whole construction consists of four legs, two eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth, body, and tail." And another opens similarly:—"There have been many different kinds of inventions since the year 1800, when the people had no means of travelling except in a donkey-cart." It is true that young people usually feel they have little to write beyond the first sentence, but they would have plenty to say if they were questioned, and in considering their essays an examiner must always presume that they have been taught to ask their own questions and that these have some coherence and are not quite so infantile as the "construction" above.

Coming to the Junior Public Examination the report says:—All the papers on English literature showed familiarity with the poems prescribed. In English history the general average of the answers was good—in some cases remarkably good, considering the quantity of ground that had to be covered. Accuracy, rather than fullness of knowledge, is expected for this paper. The worst average mark fell to the last question, because half of the candidates who selected it took the present century to be the eighteenth. In geography the method of answering questions leaves much to be desired. The German grammar paper was, on the whole, accurately done. The weakest part was, as always, the translation of sentences into German, owing mainly to poorness of vocabulary. It would probably be better if the use of dictionaries for translation were abolished and the passages for translation made simpler, so as to test the candidates' vocabulary rather than their knowledge of construction. The vocabulary is far the most important thing, and it is always far the weakest. As to Latin the result of the examination was disappointing. Only 43 per cent. of the candidates gained half marks in the grammar section of the paper. To descend to particular points, only 52 per cent. could give the meaning, gender, and ablative of *caro*, only 42 per cent. the meaning of *quidem*, and only 56 per cent. the meaning and chief parts of *strao*. Composition.—The object of this part of the paper was to test a candidate's readiness in taking simple ideas expressed in English and re-stating them in Latin, showing correct knowledge of accent, syntax, vocabulary, and idiom. The English sentences set were intentionally of an easy kind, but the work sent up by the majority of candidates was very weak. Only 39 per cent. gained half marks. Some notion of the feeble condition of those examined may be gained by the following statistics. Only 53 per cent. succeeded in translating correctly into Latin "All the soldiers who were in the city are dead," and only 33 per cent. could translate "They will see everything that I saw myself." The translation from Latin into English, for which the use of dictionaries was allowed, was very bad, only one candidate gaining half marks. In some cases the dictionaries were used in an absurdly unintelligent manner, e.g., one candidate translated *simili precationis* "a snub-nosed precession," and most seemed content with finding very little point or meaning in the Latin. The work in Greek was feeble. Only one candidate did moderately well in the composition. Rigid accuracy must be secured in the foundation in this subject. The examination is intended to encourage scholarly and careful teaching at however elementary a stage the pupils may be. In mathematics the propositions in geometry were very well done. It is, however, disappointing that so few attempt the very easy deductions that are set. Some of the work was very untidy, and some of the drawing did not contribute at all to clearness. The algebra paper was, on the whole, very well done indeed. In physics very fair answers were given, and the chemistry papers were, on the whole, well done. The questions set in physiology were not answered as well as usual. In the case of one or two of them it was evident that the great majority of the candidates had entirely failed to apprehend their scope, which should have been clear enough. In this particular respect the examiner thinks it has been the fault of the teacher, and would suggest that it would be a good thing if, in such cases the teachers would interview him with a view to ascertaining what he regards as the legitimate scope of the questions.

With reference to the Senior Public Examination the report says:—The general standard attained in the answers to the English literature and history papers is very high, partly owing, no doubt, to a failure in them involving failure in the whole examination. Besides an intimate knowledge of the books prescribed one must specially praise the essays in composition founded on them. In point of correctness there is seldom fault to find even with the worst, and many of the candidates have much facility in arranging their material and expressing it methodically. This is the most important result to be had from working upon the syllabus in English for these examinations, and I have nearly always noticed that the weakest papers show most immaturity in this respect. Nearly all those who failed in Latin were rejected for their weakness in composition. It must be obvious that unless a candidate is able to render an easy piece of English into Latin without making a series of atrocious blunders in accent and syntax, such knowledge of

the language as he may have is of the flimsiest kind. The weaker candidates generally showed a tendency to go floundering along in a heavy, unthinking, literal fashion, instead of first clearly grasping the meaning of the English, and then re-stating that meaning in correct Latin. More practice and careful and intelligent instruction in writing Latin prose are desirable. In the unseen translations both the pieces set seem to have presented great difficulty. Only two candidates reached half marks. The productions of most were hopeless rubbish. The rendering of "Tondet firmas opes" by "He throws away his eggs" represents very fairly well the average efforts of those examined. The majority of candidates seem to have had little experience or thorough instruction in reading Latin at sight, and engaged at haphazard with the pieces set, and on no definite principles. The general criticism passed on the results of the Latin paper will apply to the Greek as well. In the preparation of candidates careful attention should be paid to Greek composition from the very first. More practice, too, is necessary in unseen translation. Even the better candidates showed lamentable weakness in this section. In mathematics the geometry paper on the whole was very well answered, as far as the Euclid propositions were concerned. In the pass portion of the paper the easy deductions were well done, but very few attempted the more difficult ones. In arithmetic and algebra the answers were not quite satisfactory. Elementary portions of trigonometry were well done, but no very great knowledge is shown of this subject. The work in physics has greatly improved of recent years, and the answers were generally very satisfactory. The chemistry and physiology papers on the whole were very well done. The geology papers were the best set of worked papers the present examiner has had for many years, only one candidate failing to obtain a pass.