

UNIVERSITY "EXAMS."

SOME LOCAL "HOWLERS."

LESSONS BY EXAMINERS.

Once a year the members of the Public Examinations Board of the Adelaide University have the opportunity of giving some practical advice to the students who have submitted themselves to their criticism in connection with the University examinations; and, incidentally, to the teachers who have had the training of the candidates. Both have now the opportunity of considering the lines of their success or failure during the past year, if they will study the Manual of the Public Examinations Board for 1914, which has just been issued in the form of a 264-page book.

—A Few Good "Howlers."—

Included in the specimen extracts from papers of the candidates are a few typical "howlers." The best is, perhaps, a definition of a circle given in the Primary examination as follows:—"A circle is a rectilinear figure bounded by a continuously curved straight line." In the Junior commercial book-keeping a candidate gave the surprising information that "all assets are losses." Another, analysing a balance sheet, stated that "in spite of increases in the expenses, the net profit is smaller." A strange proposition was submitted by a student, who put it that "if we engage a few men instead of the double number of boys, we could then make the wages account lower, as the wages of two boys is about three times as that of one man. The Higher modern history examination elicited the information that "the north and south poles were added to the Empire by Queen Victoria." Some Primary history candidates confused Mary Queen of Scots with Queen Mary of England, and she was said to have married Lord Dudley; while some, who knew who she was, said she had married the "Dolphin" and the "Daphne" of France; and one made a bad guess in saying she was a daughter of Robert Bruce. An entrant for the Senior modern history said of the dispensing power claimed by the Stuarts:—"Dispensing power was the power given to a chemist to poison people. 'Petitioners,' he added, "were suffragettes who threw bombs and petitions, and 'abhorers' (sic) were hunger-strikers." The report states that the mis-spelling "pastural" was adopted by at least 20 Junior Commercial candidates, and "boarder" for "border" was frequent. Much confusion was shown in the use of "affect" and "effect," and the spelling of geographical names was weak: Columbo, Mediterranean, Cicily, Scicily, Artic, and Pujet occurred again and again. The examiner was nonplussed by the word "sawya," but as it was used in connection with Manchuria, he guessed that soya beans were meant.

—Handwriting and Spelling.—

The examiners have much to say in reference to the accomplishments of students in the English examinations. In the primary "there was a distinct improvement in handwriting, and in method of arrangement. . . . Few gained anything like full marks for parsing, and some got practically none. In the phrase, 'if he had laid down,' 50 per cent. of the candidates saw nothing wrong with the word 'laid,' apparently something in the climate makes it hard to use 'to lie' and 'to lay' correctly. A good many still believe that 'I don't think' is equivalent to 'I think not' or 'I don't think so.' The omission of such a short word as 'so' is surely poor economy when it does not make sense." The senior and junior English papers are both described as "marred by bad spelling and worse handwriting." Candidates for the senior are, if anything, the worse offenders, and in spite of frequent warnings the writers of half-formed and mongrel characters seem to be increasing in numbers."

—Arithmetic.—

The primary arithmetic paper was fairly done, but a good many candidates were uncertain about units of measurement; e.g., that there are 100 links in a chain, and that water is not usually measured in loads or necks. There was the usual number of silly answers; that 2 cwt. of potatoes could be bought for a penny, and that a cubic foot of wood weighs anything from 1-2,000 part of an ounce to 50,000,000 tons. "Many candidates submitted work that was quite unintelligible," the report continues. "In many of these cases the answer was naturally wrong, but it was occasionally right. It must be distinctly understood that a candidate cannot expect marks for an answer unless it is clear how the answer has been obtained." The junior arithmetic on the whole was good, but a surprisingly large number of candidates were uncertain whether to give priority to

papers presented three marked characteristics:—They were disgracefully untidy, the arithmetic was very inaccurate (no doubt largely a result of untidiness), and the bookwork was not known. Most candidates understood how to do the questions, but comparatively few could get reasonably correct answers. Question 9 contained two pieces of algebra bookwork. It was so badly done that the examiner had the curiosity to tabulate the results of 50 candidates, taken in numerical order. Of these 19 did not attempt one piece, and eight did not attempt the other. Six candidates attempted neither. Four candidates obtained as many as half-marks for the one, and eight candidates for the other, but only one candidate obtained as many as half-marks for each piece. In such circumstances it would have been surprising if the rest of the paper had been well done. As usual in this examination the graph was done wretchedly."

—Geography.—

In primary, junior, and senior alike geography seems to have been a weak point, for the average of passes was not 50 per cent. Attempts of primary candidates to draw the map of the southern English counties are described as grotesque, and half the papers included Wessex, which has no existence. The junior papers showed "very imperfect knowledge of such simple subjects as the cause of ocean currents, the nature of the tides, conditions that influence climate, and the origin of plains." In the junior commercial one candidate convinced his examiner that his physiographic knowledge was sadly lacking by his declaration that "the warm current condenses the colder current into ordinary sea water, and makes it more suitable for fish." The candidates were asked to write notes on Buffalo, Seattle, Stettin, Stassfurt, and Messina. Out of 116, only 16 knew anything about Stassfurt, whose products are the basis of Germany's world-famed chemical industries. Most confused this town with Strassburg, and one-quarter of them wrote about a place which they called "Strassfurt." Of those who attempted the question, almost all told the examiner that the place was important for goose-liver potting works! Buffalo was almost unknown; the timber trade between Seattle and Australia was seldom mentioned. The best average answer was for Messina, owing no doubt to the attention drawn to that place by the recent earthquake.

—History.—

In discussing ignorance exhibited in relation to history, the examiners state that the words as well as the chapters of the textbook have been too closely adhered to, the significance of facts has not been grasped, and a statement like that applied to Walpole, that "he had the best head for figures of any man in the country," occurred again and again in the candidates' answers, in relations to many characters, and was apparently in use as a convenient stopgap. Candidates are warned that such parrotlike replies are dangerous, and are not acceptable even when correct.

—Other Departments.—

Severe comment is passed on the junior physics results, which it is held indicate a defect in teaching. One candidate alone was really excellent, the others who gained credits being creditable in contradiction to the rest of the students rather than absolutely; while any other than the most lenient marking of the papers would have reduced the present attenuated pass list (104 passes, 145 failures) by 50 per cent." In discussing the junior commercial shorthand and type-writing results a large percentage of failures in the former is noted, and in reference to the latter the examiner is not surprised that there are complaints among business men that it is almost impossible to get good typists. "Not only do the candidates seem quite unable to make out handwriting, but the very fact of having to try seems to make them recklessly untidy. Teachers ought to give more practice in copying manuscripts, and ought to teach the meaning of the ordinary correction signs, which will be required in the next examination. Dealing with the Higher Greek and Latin, the following should be laid to heart by those whom it concerns:—"The superiority of the Western Australian candidates in Higher Greek and Latin over the South Australian is more marked than before. It was hard to pass the latter, hard to fail the former. Some statistics:—Latin—Western Australia, 15 candidates, average marks 63 per cent., failed 2; South Australia, 30 candidates, average marks 42 per cent., failed 20. Greek—Western Australia, 10 candidates, average marks 60 per cent., failed 1; South Australia, 4 candidates, average marks 44 per cent., failed 2. The candid summation of which is that the Western Australian candidates are good and the South Aus

tralian bad. Of course the report is not all of the adverse nature that might be imagined from the above. The examiners have been careful to give credit wherever it was deserved; and in numerous departments improvement is noticed. The strictures passed on many points both in the teaching and the work of the student should put both on their mettle; and one cannot do better than to recommend that both should procure the report and carefully digest it with the view of discovering where improvements can be effected for the coming year's work.

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ROMAN CATHOLICS AND THE UNIVERSITY.

A question of interest to Roman Catholics has arisen respecting the selection of one of the text books for the University examinations. One of the books selected was Elizabeth Lee's "Selections from Carlyle," to which representatives of the Roman Catholic body objected. The matter was brought under the notice of Mr. W. J. Denny, M.P., a member of the University Council, who at once communicated with the Chancellor of the University (Sir Samuel Way), and the matter has been settled in a manner which is expected to prove satisfactory to Catholics. The Chancellor has arranged that J. H. Fowler's "English Essays" is to be selected as an alternative text book, and the necessary arrangements will be made accordingly without delay.