

✓ Register December 5 1888.

## UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

The Adelaide University may at least claim that it gives the competitive examination system plenty of tether. Yielding to a protracted application of public pressure, it some time ago decided that the Matriculation Examination, which had to a large extent become the be-all and end-all of scholastic endeavour, should go the way which all such imperfect compressions of learning into definiteness should take. Notwithstanding this, and no doubt with the best of motives, it has been pursuing a policy tending in the direction of giving extraordinary prominence to examinations as distinguished from teaching. It has indeed wisely modified its rules so far as to provide that candidates for matriculation, instead of being required in all cases to prove to their examiners that they know a little of everything and a great deal of specified things, may be enrolled as matriculated students on satisfying the Professors in Arts that they have sufficient knowledge to enable them to enter upon the first year's course. But this only affects a very small number and a very small part of the University's operations. The chief part of its business consists in examinations. There now exist as a kind of introduction to the business of the institution—or rather as outer gates before one can come to the door and knock—four processes. There is, first, a Preliminary Examination; then there are Junior and Senior Public Examinations; then there is a Higher Public Examination. In each of these four the University gratifies its ambition to be recognised as the head of higher education and the test of instruction in schools.

This is a laudable aim to cherish, but there are other objects belonging to the higher mission of a University that should receive adequate attention. It is noteworthy that even in what may be regarded as its strongest point, namely, in the matter of examinations, the procedure of the authorities of the institution has been questioned. The latest instance of this is the complaints made about the last Preliminary Examination. One of the subjects of this examination was "the elements of arithmetic, including vulgar and decimal fractions." Last year some of the questions asked by the Examiner were difficult enough, while others were exceedingly simple. Difficult or simple, however, no serious objection was taken to them, and there was not a noticeably large number of failures. This year the Examiners presumably went on similar lines, but the result was a lamentable collapse of candidates. There were 207 failures, 176 of which were in arithmetic. Hereupon followed complaints and moanings innumerable. It was broadly suggested that the failures were the fault of the Examiners. The University Council deemed it proper to make enquiry into the matter, and it has come to an opposite conclusion. It sought information from the teachers who sent up pupils, and it claims that the result of their researches is not unfavourable to the Examiners. If this is so the conclusion is irresistible that the plucked ones more or less deserved plucking; and, further, that the teachers are not free from blame. The outcome of the investigations of the Council as reported by itself, in fact, entitles parents and the public at large to look to the teachers for an explanation.

In the absence of this explanation it is a reasonable deduction that arithmetic is not satisfactorily taught in the colony. Upon this point there can be no uncertainty so far as our State schools are concerned, for Inspector after Inspector has lifted up his voice in condemnation. So strongly has this view of the case impressed itself upon the Inspector-General of Schools that he has elaborated a system of teaching arithmetic which has been noticed at length in our columns. And yet it is in our State schools—which are popularly supposed to impart the three R's at least to scholars—that we would most of all expect proficiency. If in the region of primary education primary education is neglected, what may we expect from places which hardly profess to teach the rudiments, but the main aim of which is represented to be the imparting of a classical or a commercial education? If these secondary schools of ours were examined by the same Inspectors, and under the same conditions as the State schools have been examined, what would be the result? Can it be that it would not redound to the honour and glory of the secondary schools? The points in which the Council admits that improvements in the present system of conducting examinations are possible are not of much real consequence. It may possibly tend to the advantage of pupils that a clock shall be placed in the examination-room, and that the time for answering papers shall be prolonged. But, apart from giving candidates an idea of the passing of time, the new arrangements will do them no good. If they know their work they will pass the examination, clock or no clock; if they do not, they will inevitably be plucked. The list of successful candidates in different grades of University work which we published yesterday shows advances in the number. Thus, for the Higher Public Examination there were 26 successful candidates last year, there are 32 now; for the various terms of the B.Sc. degree, three passed last year and 10 this year. The students who passed the first three examinations for the M.B. degree are reinforced by eight new arrivals—so that there are now 21 persons, instead of 13, who are on the way to become graduates in medicine. It is on the professional schools that the greatest demand is made at present, and the University is fortunate in possessing capable lecturers in them. At the same time the University should also pay attention to the Arts School, and it will be well if it can subdue its dominant tendency to rule everything by examination<sup>as</sup>

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# THE UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—After reading your able article upon "University Examinations," it occurred to me that you had omitted to mention one, if not the most prolific, cause of the numerous failures in arithmetic during the examinations just completed. Would it not be more advisable that arithmetic, requiring as it does a clear active brain, should be taken during the morning hours, and not in the afternoon, when naturally more sleepiness is experienced? And again, surely a candidate should not be interrupted during the time allowed for arithmetic by being called away for reading, or for any other cause. One other alteration I would recommend, viz, that the examinations should be held in May or June, and not in November, during which month the weather is generally oppressive and enervating.

I am, Sir, &c.,

FIAT JUSTITIA.

Registered  
17/11/88