UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

Some discussion has been excited by the results of the Preliminary Examination held at this University last week. This examination was provided by the inauguration of an entirely new system of organizing the relations between the University and the schools of the colony. It is intended as a stimulus to thoroughness in the purely elementary standard, which has engendered the attention of the lower classes in the Colleges and Grammar Schools, and it is to be used as an introduction to the Junior Public Examination. The scheme includes the provision that no candidate may satisfy the examiners before they will be classed as having passed the Preliminary or allowed to enter themselves for the Junior Public Examination. These subjects are, as stated in the University Calendar, reading (including writing from dictation), English grammar (including the analysis of sentences), English composition, and the elements of arithmetic (including vulgar and decimal fractions). Such a test, it will be noticed, comprises no other subjects, excepting those which are commonly designated as 'the Three R's.' The University expects to examine pupils in the ground work of educations to a certain extent performing for the private schools of the colony the task which is carried out for the State schools by the Inspector. But it is important to insist that no person shall be allowed to present himself for one of the examinations in learning of a more advanced class until he has at least mastered the elements of what is usually regarded as the lowest grade of education. To carry out this purpose the questions asked should be of a decidedly elementary character, and should, above all, be of such a nature that any average boy or girl, who has been properly instructed until the age of 10 or 11, would be able to pass.

Unfortunately there has been a hitch at the very inception of the new order of things. The examination paper in arithmetic was so characterized as not being at all in the true sense of the word elementary. The questions were presented by the Professor of Mathematics, but by the Lecturer on Logic, and it is only with some reluctance that the production of a number of problems which partook too much of the nature of puzzles and too little of that of straightforward intelligence. As to this paper was what would be called by teachers and students a "catchy" one, and all who have had experience of examinations will understand how fatal such a test to the ordinary mental capacity of the time are numbers of children who, without any particular education in arithmetical at all, would be able to solve the majority of the questions. But there are persons gifted with intellectual隽and beyond the majority of their fellows. Now, it is not the business of an elementary examination to test the innate brainpower of a pupil, but rather to test those who have been well taught and whether he has been industrious. As a matter of actual experience it is invariably found that such a paper as that to which we are referring favours the clever boy, who is naturally clever, even should they be both lazy and ill-instructed; while it sadly discourages the boy or girl of average intellect who is special aptitude for calculation who has honestly worked out the allotted tasks without attempting
to deviate from the the beaten track of what is generally understood as elementary arithmetic.

One example may be quoted to illustrate this tendency of "catchy" questions. This example concerns the finding of the length of a course of 3 miles on a course of a mile round. They run in opposite directions, and A wins by 40 yards. Where was B when A was the first to cross the line? A paper containing such questions as this may prove easy enough for some smart pupils; but there are large numbers of boys and girls who, while they may be able to answer the question if it would not be able to pass in it, even after a course of the very best tuition improved by the greatest industry. The problems set by Professor Bragg last year in the compulsory arithmetic papers for the Junior Public Examination were not at all so difficult; and yet it is supposed that the new examinations for this year are to be regarded as considerably more elementary than those which have preceded them. The consequence is that 101 candidates, or more than a third of those who presented themselves, have failed to pass. The number of candidates who, through ordinary circumstances, would perhaps be considered as easy is surprising. In this opinion. But, as a correspondent pointed out the other day, such a statement has no support of that of those who passed successfully were candidates over 16 years of age, who were proceeding to the public examinations. The preliminary examinations have not been held in any previous year, otherwise the great majority of these candidates would have been able to present themselves on the recent occasion. Furthermore, of the 101 who were unsuccessful no less than 91 failed in arithmetic, and 99 of these failed in no other subject. The highest number of failures in any other subject was 11, and there is reason to believe that in one or two of the papers the examiners must have been, if anything, too lenient. At any rate it would be difficult to imagine a more ill-balanced examination than this preliminary test. It is a matter of much to be regretted that the prospects of the new system should have been marred simply through a slight misunderstanding which might easily have been rectified.

The examinations in music presented a striking contrast to that which we have been referring. In this case also a new system has been inaugurated, and it is evident from the number of candidates who presented themselves that the examinations are likely to become popular. The system is the same as that to which we cordially congratulate the Professor and the University authorities. The plan adopted has been to classify in order of merit those who passed in the first class, and to place alphabetically the names of those who took only the second grade. This plan is designed to help out of twenty-seven junior candidates failed to pass, and this result seems to indicate that in some respects the Professor must have been lenient. It would be a great mistake to make musical certificates too cheap. Of course, it should be remembered that the examination of the kind has been held previously; a certain proportion of those