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## UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

Some discussion has been excited by the results of the Preliminary Examination held at the University last week. This examination was practically 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 test of thoroughness in the purely elementary studies which occupy 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 four subjects, in all of which the candidates must 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 intimated 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 in undertaking to examine pupils in the ground work of education is to a certain extent performing for the private schools of the colony the task which is carried out for the State schools by the Inspectors. The intention is 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 an ordinary school 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 efficiently instructed until the age of 13 or 14 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 has been very justly criticised as not being at all in the true sense of the word elementary. The questions were not presented by the Professor of Mathematics, but by the Lecturer on Law, and the result has been the production of a number of problems which partook too much of the nature of puzzles and too little of that of straightforward arithmetic. The 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 is such a test to the ordinary average pupil. No doubt there are numbers of children who, without any particular education in arithmetic at all, would be able to solve the majority of the questions. But there are persons gifted with intellectual smartness 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 discover whether he has 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 all those candidates who are naturally clever, even should they be both lazy and ill-instructed; while it sadly discourages the boy or girl of average intellect or of no 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. The examiner asked—A and B run a race of  $\frac{2}{3}$  mile on a course  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a mile round. They run in opposite directions, and A wins by 40 yards. Where was B when A passed the post the first time? 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, although by no means stupid, 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. This proportion would not under ordinary circumstances be an excessive one. It usually happens that of the candidates who consider themselves ready to pass an examination, at least one out of every three is mistaken in this opinion. But, as a correspondent pointed out the other day, a considerable proportion 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 not have had to present themselves on the recent occasion. Furthermore, of the 101 who were unsuccessful no less than 91 failed in arithmetic, and 69 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, taken as a whole, and it is very 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 to 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. This is a prospect upon 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. In the theory of music only two 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 as no examination of the kind has been held previously, a certain proportion of those