

TEACHING OF ENGLISH

EXAMINERS CRITICISED

Plea for Students

(By a Contributor)

Mr. C. M. Ward, of Adelaide High School, is to be commended for his fearless and thoughtful attack on the "Notes by Examiners" in the department of English.

He has admitted that there could be some improvement in the teaching of English, but he has justly pointed out that "English receives its fair share of time on school programmes." He has also pointed a moral and adorned a tale by his indictment of the English used in the reports of those who sit in high places.

The wonder is that such an outburst has not occurred before in "The South Australian Teachers Journal." For several years the teaching profession has been handicapped in the teaching of literature by a syllabus that is inelastic, and distraught at the slovenly reports of those who slate the candidate after failing him.

It is good for us all to think that "the purveyors of literary criticism, with its hackneyed terms and threadbare conventions" should periodically take stock of their wares. It is admitted by the powers who slaughter the work of candidates that they expect a pupil "to read his books intelligently and write naturally and sincerely."

What an absurdity, when the child is obliged these days to soak in secondhand ideas, to read up notes, and to retail more or less what he has received from his instructor. Where is the student at any secondary school today who will sit down to his Shakespeare and roam at will over any drama?

The truth of the matter is that the child is so utterly bored with introductions, notes, and glossaries that he hates the play he is obliged to study for the year. He leaves school and forsakes his playwright forever. He has never been given a chance to read a play as a play. He cannot understand that there is a well of English undefiled in a text that he must examine through a mental microscope and a mental telescope.

"Naturally and Sincerely"

Mr. Ward asks pertinently what examiners would have to say if a pupil who hated a play, a poem, or a book were to write "naturally and sincerely" about it? He is on very firm earth when he suggests that a child with little experience of life is unable to give "naturally" an analysis of a "character" from Shakespeare.

One could come to grips with Mr. Ward in his criticism of the sonnet; but it is apparent that he is thinking in terms of his pupils—and the average boy or girl is unable to understand why a poem of 14 lines in iambic pentameter and divided into octave and sestet should "make for conciseness of expression and effective imagery." (Mr. Ward wisely notes the "make for" of the examiners!)

It is a reasonable statement that there is as much "imagery" (what, by the way, does the child understand by that word?) in any lyric that is not a sonnet. It seems that a pupil must dilate on Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms and have up his sleeve the valuable information that Matthew Arnold's "Others abide our question" is in bad sonnet form, as also is that of Keats "on first looking into Chapman's Homer."

Does it matter a tittle whether a child knows why an ode is called "Pindaric," or why there are 12 syllables in the last verse of a Spenserian stanza? Or why most scenes in plays end on a couplet? Not a bit.

The play's the thing; the poem's the thing; the novel and the essays are the meat and gravy. Apparently, however, this is not so in the eyes of examiners. It is a pity that in this age of jazz, when most modern novels are drivel, and free verse is rampant, something is not being done to entice the youth of the State to pious learning and good literature.

Here questions of grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation need not be discussed. They are necessary evils that have to be mastered sooner or later, according to experience; but Mr. Ward uses commonsense when he avers, "It is an affront and a menace to an intelligent pupil to put before him for correction a lot of errors which never may have crossed his mind."

"Tragic and Horrible"

It is worth the while of every parent to purchase a copy of the journal I am quoting so that they may see for themselves what "murky effusions" have been written by examiners who ought to have better sense and a better critical faculty. Better still, they might buy the report of the examiners and add it to their list of tragic horrors. It is both tragic and horrible.

Mr. Ward is eloquent of truth when he says, "I would suggest that the board of examiners should no longer make English

a compulsory subject; that examiners in this subject should set their own house in order, and, with a proper realisation of the inadequacy of present methods, refrain from attempts to probe the souls of young people with a few hackneyed questions."

There is no reason why a rigid syllabus should be adhered to. It should be possible to have no set texts to act as nightmares. It is better that intermediate students should read four or five comedies of Shakespeare and a tragedy in one year than that they should read "As You Like It" to death, conscious all the time that their reading is not as they like it.

But let us never forget that boys will be boys. It is immoral to ask them to be colossal humbugs in an examination theatre.

REG. 7-6-28

ST. ANDREW'S COLLEGE.

A Munificent Gift.

Auspicious Opening Ceremony.

The beautiful terrace and extensive lawns of Strathspey, Fullarton road, Mitcham, now St. Andrew's College (University of Adelaide) were the scene of a distinguished assemblage on Wednesday afternoon on the occasion of the opening ceremony by His Excellency the Governor (Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven).

Those on the terrace also included the Chief Justice and Chancellor of the University (Sir George Murray), the chairman of the College Council (Mr. W. J. Isbister, K.C.), the Master of the College (Mr. R. R. P. Barbour), the Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly of South Australia (Rt. Rev. A. C. Weber), the Rev. Dr. G. Davidson, Rev. Dr. J. A. Seymour, Hon. W. G. Duncan, M.L.C., Mr. J. T. Gordon, Professor McKellar Stewart, the Master of St. Mark's College (Mr. A. Grenfell Price), and Capt. G. H. Verney, A.D.C. to His Excellency the Governor.

The guests seated on the lawns included the staff of the University of Adelaide, and representative of various aspects of the life of the community. The college was opened for inspection at the close of the ceremony, and afternoon tea was served in a marquee on the tennis court.

The chairman of the College Council (Mr. W. J. Isbister, K.C.), welcomed His Excellency on behalf of the council. As a Scotsman, he said, the Governor would have had an interesting education with which Scotsmen were usually credited, and which had been evinced in South Australia by numerous examples. He also welcomed Sir George Murray as Lieutenant-Governor and Chancellor of the University. No one had taken a keener interest than he in everything appertaining to the University, and the college had to thank him for spontaneous and generous help in its foundation. He also welcomed the Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly (the Right Rev. A. C. Weber), the staff of the University, and last, but not least, the Master of St. Mark's College (Mr. A. Grenfell Price). (Applause).

A Happy Coincidence.

The University of Adelaide, continued the chairman, owed its origin to an act of self-denial on the part of a small theological college in Adelaide, which existed no longer. A donation of £20,000 offered to the college by Sir Walter Hughes, with a further £20,000 from Sir Thomas Elder, enabled the University to be brought into existence. It was a happy coincidence that St. Andrew's College owed its existence to relatives of Sir Walter Hughes, namely, the family of Sir John Duncan, who was his nephew. The college was intended by the sons and daughters of Sir John Duncan, to perpetuate the memory of their father and their mother, and the latter would have also taken part in the gift had it not been for her unexpected death. For this purpose they had transferred the house, and 19 acres of land, to trustees for a residential college in connection with the Presbyterian Church in South Australia, and to be called by a name, to be decided on by the college council. It had been made an unalterable condition of the gift that no religious test should be applied to anybody to enable them to enter as a student of the college or partake of any of its privileges. The council had decided on the name of St. Andrew's, and under that name it had been affiliated with the University. Although the University of Adelaide compared favourably with most other universities, it had certainly lagged behind with regard to residential colleges. Even the comparatively new University of Queensland, of which the master (Mr. R. R. P. Barbour) had been a graduate,

had four residential colleges. St. Mark's had been the first of the Adelaide residential colleges, and now St. Andrew's was the second, but there was no doubt, room for them both.

Generous Donors.

The surroundings were ideal, proceeded Mr. Isbister. He considered the distance from the city was a blessing, rather than a disadvantage. In these days, he said, when there were so many complaints about noise, the sequestered calm was surely something to be desired, particularly for a student. Some of the men in residence were, and would be engaged in work at the Waite Institute for agricultural research nearby. The donor of Urrbrae (Mr. Peter Waite) was a friend and neighbour for many years of Sir John Duncan. The college had to thank Sir George Murray, Mr. Barr Smith, and the family of Mr. John Gordon for generous assistance. That assistance had been material, but they also had personal assistance in their master (Mr. Barbour). He was a Rhodes scholar, had studied at Balliol College, Oxford, and had been a master for three years at the Church of England Grammar School, Geelong. There was reason to think that he would do well in his present post, and being a young man, he would be sympathetic to the undergraduates. The college would be of use to the University and the State by building up character of the right sort, giving men that experience of things which were more important in ordinary life than the knowledge to be gained from books. St. Andrew's had started under good auspices, and he hoped its future would be as happy as its foundation. (Applause).

Value of College Life.

In declaring the college open, His Excellency the Governor, said he was glad to have been offered the opportunity of adding his thanks to those of every one else to the family of the late Sir John Duncan for their magnificent gift. He thoroughly agreed with the words of Mr. Isbister that the value of a residential college to a young man during his University career could not be over estimated. The interchange of ideas, the constant companionship of other students, and the friendly discussion on events of the day accounted for no small part in the education of the young man. A knowledge of books was all very well, but, unless accompanied by a knowledge of men and a knowledge of the world, it was of little value in the battle of life. Constant companionship with his fellow students would be a great factor in the student's mental development, and the formation of his character. Those young men who would have one advantage of residing at the college would for ever afterwards be grateful, and in years to come would look back with equal affection and gratitude to the College of St. Andrew's and the University of Adelaide itself. (Applause).

Growth of the College System.

The Chancellor, as representative of the University of Adelaide, offered heartiest felicitations and good wishes to St. Andrew's College on the completion of the opening ceremony. The University, he said, had had many great benefactors from the foothills between Glen Osmond and Mitcham. The gift of Sir Walter Hughes had been followed by that of Sir Thomas Elder, at Birksgate, then by that of Mr. R. Barr Smith, and his family, at Torrens Park, and Mr. Peter Waite at Urrbrae. Then Mr. T. E. Barr Smith, at Birksgate, and now came the gift of Strathspey, by the family of the late Sir John and Lady Duncan, who were carrying on the tradition of Sir Walter Hughes, Sir John's uncle. With ancient universities like those of Oxford and Cambridge, it was true that they grew from colleges, but with many modern universities, the order appeared to be reversed. In Adelaide they now had two colleges, and nothing was more certain than that they would have others. St. Mark's College had already laid the foundations of a useful career, and it would only be a short time before St. Andrew's would be a worthy rival. St. Mark's was opened just three years ago, and his breath had been nearly taken away on the previous day, when he had read in the newspapers that the past members of the college had celebrated their first annual dinner.

A Fortunate Choice.

Sir George added that some people thought the situation of St. Andrew's was too remote from the University. Personally he did not regard that as a serious drawback. He, himself, lived five miles from the city, and he found it an advantage for he had to think sometimes and there was no place like the foothills for that purpose. He offered his congratulations to Mr. Barbour on his appointment to the mastership of the college, and he congratulated the college on having secured his services. With his

How Science Helps.

Impressions of Sir John Russell.

During the past week Professor Sir John Russell, director of the Rothamsted Experimental Station, England (the oldest agricultural experimental station in the world, having been established in 1843), has been studying the development of agriculture in South Australia. He has been the guest of Professor and Mrs. Prescott during his stay in Adelaide, and on Saturday left for Wood's Point and Murray Bridge joining the express for Melbourne on Sunday. His visit to Australia is at the invitation of the Australian universities to lecture on agricultural science and to meet those interested in the development of agriculture.

Be Prepared.

Interviewed by a representative of The Register on Saturday Sir John said South Australia was fortunate in possessing a good Department of Agriculture and three such fine institutions as the University of Adelaide, the Waite Institute, and Roseworthy College. For a young country South Australia was well advanced in the matter of agricultural experiment, and the farmers of the State were in the happy position of being able to obtain the best information available. He was greatly impressed with the rapid but sound development of the Waite Institute. He had only been able to see the agricultural section of South Australia. Although large areas were being devoted to wheat-growing, he did not think too great attention was being paid to the cereal in view of present market conditions. The chief thing was to be prepared to "change over" if the necessity arose. The wheat market was very sensitive, but the fact that lucerne was already being grown at Booborowie for example showed that the change could easily be effected. South Australian farmers, so far as he was able to judge, were an alert body of men and were not likely to be caught napping if a change had to be made at any time. In Great Britain, for example, prior to the establishment of any system of agricultural research, transport in the 'eighties and 'nineties developed to such an extent that wheat from North and South America was able to be placed upon the market very cheaply. The British farmer, who hitherto had found wheat-growing thoroughly profitable, found himself quite unable to withstand the competition. It took him from 10 to 15 years to adjust himself to the changed conditions by growing something else. Consequently there was great financial loss. Since the war, too, there had been an equally big revolution in British farming, but with agricultural research systems well developed farmers were able to adjust themselves readily to the different conditions prevailing. The chief need was the testing out of crops and systems of husbandry, so that if at any time a change were desirable the necessary information would be to hand. This need was being catered for in Australia fairly well. Agriculture, like any other industry, was developing all the time. It was essential that all agricultural experiments should be accurate in their results. Inaccuracy might prove disastrous. Experimental work was based largely on laboratorial work, and it followed that the experiments were often somewhat remote from any practical field problem of the moment. The layman sometimes found it difficult to appreciate that point.

Drought and Salt.

Two great problems confronted the Australian farmer—drought and salt. The drought problem was being studied on sound lines. There must be determined the production of drought-resisting varieties, improved machinery for tillage, improved systems of cultivation, conservation of water, and the most economical use of the water available. Necessarily the process of obtaining this knowledge was slow, for it took at least a year to carry out most experiments. In connection with drought-resistance, Dr. A. E. V. Richardson had rendered valuable service in connection with his work regarding utilization of water by the plant. This provided a basis for planting, plant-breeding, and plant selection. In wet regions selection by the eye was practicable, but in dry areas this was likely to be misleading. In his opinion, the salt problem was much the more difficult. It confronted not only Australia, but wide tracts of the British Empire. It manifested itself in Africa, India, Palestine, and parts of Western Canada. The most satisfactory way of attacking it was to be found in co-operative work by the experts of the Empire. It was hoped that the new Soil Bureau would prove helpful in this connection by keeping experts in touch with each other and by collating information gained in different parts of the world. There was a basis for the commencement of operations, but much careful laboratory work had yet to be done before there could be worked out any useful or practical schemes. In South Australia farmers were fortunate in having in their midst Professor Prescott, who had had eight years' experience in Egypt. He (Professor Prescott) was instituting a survey of the irrigation areas which should prove a basis for experimental work.