

THE UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

The holding of the examinations at the University this year has brought out more than the usual crop of complaints. Parents have complained that the strength and energies of their children have been overtaxed, and teachers that neglect has been shown in the want of due care in understanding and providing for the difficulties of teachers and pupils alike. In some respects it must in all fairness be admitted that several of the counts of the indictment against the University authorities have been conceived in the spirit of carping criticism. This fact is accentuated when it is noted that each person has his own particular pet aversion in the matter and manner of the examinations set for the candidates, and scarcely any two agree in bringing before the public exactly the same cause of dissatisfaction. The German paper at the junior public examination appears very easy to one and difficult to another, while the amount of preparation involved in getting through the work set for it is declared to be beyond all reason. It is the same story in regard to the mathematical papers at the various examinations, one teacher finding them very difficult for his pupils, while another has no cause of complaint. From all this it would be easy to argue that the fault lies more with the unevenness of the methods adopted by some of the teachers than with the want of unity in the examinations. Few teachers are equally good in their ability to impart instruction in a number of subjects simultaneously, and there are not many schools in the colony in which any great subdivision of the labour of teaching has yet become possible.

Making due allowance for this feature of the case, it is well not to dwell much upon complaints about individual examination papers set during the progress of an examination. Without doubt there is something seriously wrong, but it is rather in the system than in the men who are engaged in carrying it out. We have already pointed out the harm which is being done by the University in focussing the attention of pupils merely upon grammar and arithmetic by means of the preliminary examination to the detriment of all other subjects which are afterwards supposed to be studied in preparation for the junior examination, but which too often are left out of count altogether. But there is an even worse evil than this connected with the senior examination, and it is well that various correspondents should have called the attention of the public to this examination in particular. In the design of the senior examination the University authorities have aimed at accomplishing two perfectly irreconcilable objects, and the natural result has been that of accomplishing neither in a satisfactory manner. The senior examination is made to do duty as a test for the admission of students into the University classes. In order to matriculate it is necessary for a pupil to give a good account of himself in certain of the subjects. In the case of intending medical students the scope of the senior examination is so very much higher than that of the examination required by the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom that it has been found advisable to allow candidates who are over sixteen, and who have passed the junior examina-

tion in easy English, Latin, mathematics, mechanics, and one other subject, to proceed with their course, provided they have taken certain honours. Why this last proviso should be insisted upon, seeing that it is not required by the British Medical Council, it is difficult to understand except on the supposition that the University Senate and Council are anxious to make students perform what are ecclesiastically known as "works of supererogation." But the very fact that a modification has to be made in the senior or matriculation examination in order to bring it nearly down to the same degree of easiness as that prescribed by the British Council should show clearly how far removed the present senior examination is from the comparative simplicity which should characterize an entrance examination.

The other object which is aimed at by the senior examination is to provide a final test by which the brightest and cleverest of the pupils from the Colleges and High Schools may measure their powers one against the other. In this aspect it is a final examination to all those who are not intended for a University career, and these form the majority. It is also an honour examination, designed to enable the examiner to classify and define the limits of the knowledge of any candidate, no matter how phenomenally clever that candidate may happen to be. Now it is a maxim among those accustomed to academic work that the examination which is suitable for an honour test cannot possibly be made equally suitable as a mere pass examination. Oxford and Cambridge have their separate public examinations, which are not intended as entrance tests. London University certainly has a high standard for matriculation, but it should be remembered that this is an examining body, and that its course for a degree in most cases extends over a year less than that at Adelaide University. In fact the matriculation examination is not an entrance examination in the same sense in which it is so in any other of the great Universities. At Adelaide the effort to kill two birds with one stone has been productive of very curious effects. Some of the examiners being impressed with the dual nature of the examination have endeavoured to simplify matters by setting three or four times as many questions as are intended to be answered in the expectation that pass students will pick out the easy ones and honour students the harder ones. The general result, however, is that the paper becomes almost as intricate as a Chinese puzzle, and by the time that a candidate has gone through the whole and endeavoured to estimate his chance of answering each individual question as compared with its neighbours a state of utter mental confusion has been induced, and failure becomes almost inevitable. The University Senate meets to-day for the purpose of considering the course for the degree of LL.B., and deciding upon a proposal that Greek should be left out of the proposed new curriculum. If this course is agreed to with the object of lightening the strain to be placed upon students within the University there is ample reason why some steps in the same direction should be taken in reference to the tasks imposed upon younger candidates.
