

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS.

SOME "HOWLERS."

In their notes on the recent University examinations the examiners give a number of illustrations of school boy "howlers," which are amusing. For example, they say, referring to the primary examination—"Invaluable" proved a stumbling block to many, but some, thought to be on the safe side by giving two meanings, 'precious' and 'worthless.'"

In the primary geography examination two of the answers were, "Dogger Bank is the place for fishing in the North Sea, doggeral and cod is (are) the chief fish that are caught;" and "Greenwich" is a home for arsenals." A considerable number, too, stated that "Diamantina is a river running out of Lake Eyre into Queensland."

In perhaps a majority of the junior geography papers the reason why Australia is hotter in January than in July was given as the nearness of the earth to the sun in the former month. Even where the obliquity of the earth's axis and the consequent variation of the seasons were recognised it was still generally stated that "Australia was nearer to the sun in summer, and therefore the rays of the sun had not so far to travel, while in winter (July) they had further to go, as Australia was turned away from the sun."

In senior botany few candidates made good work of question 2. Most frequently irritability was confused with adaptation to environment in the broad sense, and many candidates gave only the characteristics of a desert flora. There was, also, too much vague or meaningless writing, such as "so no leaves respond to the night air;" and "irritability is the power, or rather the weakness, a plant possesses."

With respect to the relative age of river systems, there was frequently a want of appreciation of the extent of geological time, as, for example, "In young rivers the stones in the streams are angular and not worn, and in old rivers they are all rounded;" and "in an old river there are waterfalls, but a young river has not had time to make waterfalls."

By far the worst answers in the junior commercial geography were in reply to question 4, and the examiner says—"I fear that here the fault lies largely with the teacher. Such utter ignorance was shown of the uses of fairly common materials that one wonders whether this part of the work was entirely neglected. Teak certainly is not very common, and in time one might learn to use it for tanning leather, and become accustomed to find it substituted for peat; but what is one to say when indigo is used for making cloth, rubber, and food, and as a covering for cable wires? Surely, too, so common a material as that used for wheat bags, flour bags, bran bags, and wool packs would not meet electrical requirements and be used as rubbers. One would expect the school museum to have specimens of graphite in stock if only in the form of lead pencils, but the examiner was informed that 'it is a mineral used as a manure and for putting in medicine,' that it is 'a kind of coal and is used for burning,' is used 'for making the best machinery and iron goods,' and 'for paving streets.' Shellac, too, is not the 'red powdered body of an insect which is converted into coloring matter called cochineal, and is used largely by confectioners for the coloring of icing for cakes.' These are not given as examples of amusing blunders, but to show how necessary it is to form and use a school museum; to take advantage of the well-known kindness of local manufacturers and commercial firms; and to encourage visits to the various public museums of Adelaide. For his part the examiner will assist by marking in future this section of the work somewhat less leniently."

HOWLERS!

THE EXAMINATION HARVEST.

AS REAPED BY THE EXAMINERS.

In the manual of the Public Examinations Board for 1909, published under the auspices of the University of Adelaide, there has been compiled much matter touching the interests of students and the educational public. Baldly, the booklet comprises regulations and the syllabus for all the public examinations during the present year, together with dates and hours on which every subject shall come up for examination, the report of the examiners on last year's work, complete lists of the successful candidates in 1908, and copies of all the examination papers presented during that period. Not to mention other and minor matter, the publication is one which should commend itself absorbingly to students, past, present, and future.

—Inside Information.—

The notes by the examiners should be studied as though they were a textbook. Students will find a deal of useful "inside information." There is also humour, but the examiners have chronicled the "howlers," not so much from the funny side as to throw a little light on examination ideals, and to stir into activity dull brains. Dealing first with the primary examination, and with its English paper, criticism is introduced encouragingly thus:—"It is satisfactory to be able to report a general improvement, both in the matter and the form of the papers. There were very few really bad papers, and the standard of work was decidedly higher than last year." They deplore the frequent confusion of "resent" with "recent," and "incident" with "accident." "Invaluable" proved a stumbling block to many of the "primaries." Some cute but misguided students left too much to the discretion and good humour of the examiners, by giving the meaning as both "precious" and "worthless." Very few saw anything amiss in the expression "more preferable."

—Old Tricks.—

In the spelling paper "deverstate," "similar," and "encumbrence" were the most usual mis-spellings. There are still candidates, point out the canny examiners, who think that an "e" with a dot over it will serve for two letters of the alphabet, or that the examiners are eager to give the benefit of the doubt to a smudge. In geography one student wrote:—"Dogger Bank is the place for fishing in the North Sea, doggeral and cod is (are) the chief fish that are caught;" and "Greenwich is a home for arsenals." A considerable number, too, stated that "Diamantina is a river running out of Lake Eyre into Queensland." Most of the candidates appeared to have had very hazy notions about the origin of artesian water. There were those who apparently thought that Albany is still a mail steamer port, that Pirie chiefly exports coffee, and that Portland still is mainly a whaling station. In geometry the prevailing weakness in candidates was lack of accuracy. Concerning the English paper in the junior examination more than the average number of students passed, but not a single paper could be marked "excellent," and very few "very good." The analysis of sentences was fairly well done, but some candidates were too lazy to write the clauses in full, deeming it sufficient to put the first word and the last with dots between them. Thus the use of a wriggle for "and" do not create a favourable impression in the mind of examiners. In passing it was sad to find so many thinking that "the harvest what I reap" would be correct English. Some candidates wrote far too fully, while others gave disjointed sentences after the style of advertisements for missing friends.

—Parochially Loyal.—

In perhaps a majority of the junior geography papers the reason why Australia is hotter in January than in July was attributed to the nearness of the earth to the sun in the former month. Even where the obliquity of the earth's axis and the consequent variation of the seasons were recognised, it was still generally stated that "Australia was nearer to the sun in summer, and therefore the rays of the sun had not so far to travel, while in winter they had further to go, as Australia was turned away from the sun!" A surprising number in accounting for the world's prevalent winds stated that "as the hot air

at the equator rose the cold air from the poles rushed in to take its place." There were certain parochially loyal juniors who considered that the most important trade routes in the world started from Port Adelaide! A surprisingly large number of candidates did not know of the independence of Switzerland, and mentioned as its ruler the French President, the Kaiser, or the Czar. Greece was often stated to be a dependency of Turkey. Spelling was a very weak point. The errors were of interest as showing a slovenly pronunciation of geographical names which should have been corrected by the teacher during recitation of lessons. "Balkin," "Niagra," &c., were far too frequent. Concerning the junior French, the examiners pointed out a few general faults that candidates might easily avoid—bad and sometimes almost illegible writing, together with dirty and blotted papers; sentences begun with small letters; the occasional use of such slang as "sang out." Some candidates gave alternative translations, one of which in most cases was wrong. This meant a certain forfeiture of marks. Accents, too, were often either left out or marked incorrectly. Work on the junior chemistry paper was the weakest for several years. The knowledge of many of the candidates was quite below standard. Such words as "pyrites" and "beakers" were spelt in all fantastical combinations.

—Milton—Immoral or Immortal?—

"A fault that will be severely dealt with in future"—so the warning comes in dealing with junior botany—"is carelessness in writing and spelling. Much of the work was neat and correct, but much also was atrocious. In several cases marks had to be deducted for what was almost illegibility; and when a candidate consistently speaks of a 'caylix' (in one case nine times) one wonders what

the teacher was doing during the year. For the first time the examiner noted the peculiar compounds 'onto' and 'alright;' and a momentary difficulty was experienced in identifying 'ollioc' and 'canedia.' Here is a fine literary criticism! A candidate for the senior examination summed up Hawthorne's qualities as being most suitable for children of six! "Such want of perception is to be deplored" (the examiner might have commented more bluntly). Here are some crumbs from the senior history papers:—"Ecclesiastical polity contained the demands of the Chartists;" "Ecclesiastical Polity" was written by Henry VIII. or Knox or Calvin;" "Milton wrote such immoral books that the press would not publish them, so he wrote 'Areopagitica' to ask them to." Indeed! With the exception of a few really excellent papers senior Latin work was decidedly poor. Senior French, too, was by no means generally brilliant. In the translation from French into English a senior candidate is hardly expected to translate such a phrase as un quart de siecle by "a quart of ale!" And how does this sound for a senior—on geology?—"In young rivers the stones in the streams are angular and not worn, and in old rivers they are all rounded;" and "in an old river there are waterfalls, but a young river has not had time to make waterfalls."

—Curious Blunders.—

Level-headed business youths proved not all irreproachable. In the geographical paper of the junior commercial there were curious blunders over fairly common materials. Teak certainly is not very common, and in time one might learn to use it for tanning leather, and become accustomed to find it substituted for peat; but what is one to say when indigo is used for making cloth, rubber, and food, and as a covering for cable wires? Surely, too, so common a material as that used for wheatbags, flour bags, branbags, and woolpacks would not meet electrical requirements and be used as rubbers. One would expect the school museum to have specimens of graphite in stock if only in the form of lead pencils, but the examiner was informed that "it is a mineral used as a manure and for putting in medicine," that it is "a kind of coal, and is used for burning;" is used "for making the best machinery and iron goods," and "for paving streets." Shellac, too, is not the "red powdered body of an insect which is converted into coloring matter called cochineal, and is used largely by confectioners for the coloring of icing for cakes." These are not given as examples of amusing blunders, but to show how necessary it is to form and use a school museum; to take advantage of the well-known kindness of our local manufacturers and commercial firms; and to encourage visits to the various public museums of Adelaide. "For my part," says the examiner, "I shall assist by marking this section of the work somewhat less leniently."