

From the Advertiser  
April 18<sup>th</sup> 1883

### COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—To find one's pet mountain a mole-hill is doubtless annoying, but in descending to offensive personalities Mr. Northmore amply justifies that anonymity to which he takes exception. In dropping the subject, allow me to add I do not for a moment dispute that competitive examinations are often too severe; and I wrote to you merely to show that Mr. Northmore was cutting the throat of his own argument by quoting in proof so easy a sum.—I am, &c.,

'POSSUM.

April 17, 1883.

[We may state that we know "Possum" is not, and we believe he never has been, connected with the Adelaide or any other University.—ED.]

The Advertiser  
April 20<sup>th</sup>  
1883

### COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—Having a liking for arithmetic, though no great arithmetician, I would like to say I think neither Mr. Northmore nor "Possum" has made the examination problem complained of very clear. It appears to me there is no great difficulty nor unfairness about it. It does not state that the examiner had examined sets of papers in the relation of 7 to 12, amounting to 49, but that 49 have been examined. It is evident there must have been some parts of a well-arranged set and some parts of an ill-arranged set examined to make up the 49, for the 49 is divided into 100 parts, and 80 of them belong to the well-arranged sets, while 20 fall to the ill-arranged. The question seems simple:— $\frac{80}{100}$  of 49 =  $9\frac{1}{2}$ . Every 7 and fraction thereof contained in  $9\frac{1}{2}$  must equal so many 12's and parts of 12 of the well-arranged. Thus:— $9\frac{1}{2} \div 7 = 1\frac{3}{14}$ .  $1\frac{3}{14} = 12 + \frac{3}{14}$  of 12, which is  $16\frac{3}{14}$ . Remove the ill-arranged ( $9\frac{1}{2}$ ) from the 49, supply the well-arranged ( $16\frac{3}{14}$ ), and we find 56.—I am, &c.,

PROVISIONAL TEACHER.

Hundred of Hall, April 16, 1883.

P.S.—If I am right the only ambiguity in the question is in the words, "80 per cent. of the candidates sent up their papers;" 80 per cent. of the 49 sets would appear more correct.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—Any one who has had anything to do with examinations will, I think, agree with Mr. Northmore that the examiners have a most felicitous way of finding out what the candidate does not know. Indeed it seems that the professors ransack the text books from beginning to end to find some obscure note upon which to hinge a question. I have before my mind now in particular the paper set in grammar for certificates at the Training College in 1879 and 1880. While most of the questions were fair, some were abominable, as no one ever dreamed of trying to remember the absurd notes which abound in Davidson and Alcock's grammar. The following is a fair sample of what were set:—What were the original terminations of "ing" in the following:—"A wailing of infants was heard;" "Doing good is better than getting rich;" "folding his hands he prayed;" "He is tired of acting his part." Let any fair grammarian unfold these knots without looking up Davidson, and I will forgive him. These papers were set by a professor, and the students thought that neither tutor nor examiner was sufficient for them unaided. The problem which Mr. Northmore has put in to-day's paper does not seem so difficult of solution if my faculties have not also been dimmed—for if A gets 80 % and B the remainder of the votes it seems something like this:—49 votes = whole or 100 per cent., and 80 per cent. or  $39\frac{1}{2}$  are A's, and B's  $9\frac{1}{2}$ , for  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a man are of no consequence to these savants. Hoping to see our examinations appeal to the intelligence rather than to satisfy the capricious whims of an examiner—I am, &c.,

INTERESTED.

Blyth, April 17, 1883.

From the Advertiser  
April 20<sup>th</sup> 1883

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—If my memory serves me, amongst the curiosities of natural history which were impressed upon my youthful mind was the fact that certain species of insects when pursued and in danger of capture, possessed and exercised the power of discharging a cloud of acrid vapor, which partially blinded the pursuers, and under cover of which they endeavored to make good their escape. Your correspondent "'Possum's" tactics appear to me to have much in common with this manœuvre of otherwise helpless and defenceless insect life. Unable to support his dogmatic assertions by argument or facts, and unable otherwise to get out of the "fix" he is in, he attempts to do so by throwing out a cloud of acrid aspersion under cover of which he trusts his flight will be undetected, and enable him unobserved to "drop" what is evidently too "hot" to hold, and cover his discomfiture with all the airs of injured innocence and dignified disdain. I think there are very few of your readers but will come to the conclusion that your correspondent "'Possum's" skin would be the better for a little tanning if even when encased in the armor of anonymity it is so easily irritated by what he is pleased to term "offensive personalities." As "'Possum" is so very sensitive to "offensive personalities" of course he is extremely careful of being guilty of indulging in them, and equally of course there are no "offensive personalities" or insinuations in his first letter. In this matter also a parallel occurs to me which is very apropos of a good many other people's actions besides "'Possum's." In an appendix to "The New Pilgrim's Progress" Mark Twain says, "Everybody knows my liberality in these matters—that I am always ready to give and take—when it is for me to give and other people to take;" and "'Possum's" ideas of literary amenities appear based upon much the same principle. There is one trait in "'Possum's" letters which commands my unqualified admiration: it is the cool and unmitigated egotism with which they are saturated. "I have said it" is apparently the Alpha and the Omega of argument with him. It is quite enough for him that he assumes he has proved my mountain to be a molehill, and that I have cut the throat of my own argument; it signifies nothing to him if others think that be it mount or be it molehill it has been too much for him to "sur-mount," or that an answer to the four questions in my last letter would have far more effectually settled the question than his bare assertion. By the footnote to my last letter I gather that you are under the impression that I thought your correspondent "'Possum" was connected with the University. If so I am sorry for it; I had no intention of insinuating anything of the sort. The concluding sentence of my last letter was intended, in view of the somewhat ostentatious manner in which "'Possum" paraded the statement that he was neither a candidate for University honors "nor interested in the subject," to intimate that I considered the opinion of the authorities quoted by the *Saturday Review* quite as valuable as anything likely to proceed from the pen of "'Possum," even if he were a University professor. But why "'Possum" should waste his time and your space about a subject he had no interest in passes comprehension, unless it was to air his "acquaintance with the common rules of arithmetic" by solving a problem which I had previously stated could be very easily solved by admitting an impossibility and ignoring a flagrant misstatement. In conclusion, I think there can be no difference of opinion that in the choice of a pseudonym "'Possum" has clearly demonstrated that sometimes there is what Yankees call the "eternal" fitness of things that "'Possum" is where 'possums generally are; to use a common euphemism "up a eucalyptus."—I am, &c.,

JOHN A. NORTHMORE.

April 18, 1883.