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UNIVERSITY REFORM.

During the last two or three days several letters have appeared in these columns on the subject of University reform. In one of them Mr. Chapple, the Head Master of Prince Alfred College, distinctly denied the truth of the premises laid down by us, and of consequence dissented from our conclusion. May we point out one or two errors into which a superficial reading of our article led Mr. Chapple? It was *not* one of our main contentions "that competition between schools and scholars is detrimental to true education." We did not endorse Mr. Leary's view that the matriculation examination here is harder than it is at the London University. That nothing was further from our wish than to cast a slur upon the whole-heartedness and ability of the teachers in the colony is proved by our desire to give more power to them and less to outsiders. What we did say was to this effect:— That the regulations of the University as they are now carried out exercise a cramping influence upon schools; that they compel them, if they value their reputation, to teach on the lines laid down by the University; that, while they would often desire to substitute another course of reading, they are forced to keep in the common track or run the risk of losing caste. Will Mr. Chapple say that he has never in the course of his experience here found the University curriculum worse than one which he would himself devise? He begs the whole question when he says that the collective wisdom of "committees, Council, professors" is greater than that of one man. We would discriminate. The "one man" is a schoolmaster, whose sole object in life is, or should be, to teach boys, to lay in them the foundations of a good cultured manhood. The possessors of the "collective wisdom" on the other hand, are—we are of course speaking of the local University—men of high attain-

ments in various walks of life, but not schoolmasters. It is a very difficult matter for men who have never learnt how to teach boys, to examine them. And that is why we consider that it would be better for schools, for their own sake, to be more independent, to fix their own courses themselves, and not to be so exclusively guided by the matriculation examination. If the head of a great school is unable to fix a curriculum in his judgment better suited to his circumstances than outsiders, he is ill-adapted for his position, and we are sure that Mr. Chapple himself could draw up a course by means of which boys would be better taught and more really cultivated than by passing all the matriculation examinations in the world. He must know that it is not always the best boy who passes at the top of the matriculation list; and that the unsuccessful candidates are sometimes more fully educated than the successful. One word more in answer to Mr. Chapple's reproof. He thinks that "if the standard were reduced boys would pass sooner, leave school earlier with less information and culture for life." But does he not see that by the lowering of the standard this good effect, amongst many, might be gained? Boys would not think their education finished the moment they had passed. They could not do it—public opinion would not allow them. In the great English Universities men are not

found boasting of having passed their entrance examination. It is a matter of course that they pass it—not to succeed would be a disgrace. And here, if the standard were lowered, we would, we maintain, find the same results. The boy who does not enter for examination, but who possesses the same amount of knowledge as one who has passed, is as well educated. Thus it is not the examination, but the boy's education which supplies culture. And, again, the storing of the mind with *facts* is not education. The true teacher aims at opening the minds of his pupils and making them apt to learn. It will be noticed that Mr. Chapple does not attempt to gainsay our contention—this, indeed, is our main contention—that the schools teach mainly with a view to passes. He has not pointed to one single instance of a subject taught which has not in some way got to do with the University examinations.

“Didaskalos” has been good enough to spare us the trouble of answering him. “The University curriculum,” says he, “contains far more than our boys can thoroughly prepare.” This is just what we wrote, put into different words and a handy form. It is just because the University curriculum—especially at its entrance—contains far more than ordinary boys can thoroughly prepare that we suggested making it less far-reaching in its range. “Didaskalos” is very indignant with us for several things. We regret this, because we, like him, are only actuated by a desire to make the standard of education higher. We go about it in a different manner; that is all. We may point out that we in no way implied “that preparation for an examination and thorough mental training cannot exist side by side.” It would be rash thus to limit the potentialities inherent in things. But we do say that, generally speaking, preparation for an examination and the best mental training do not exist side by side. What mental training is required for the production of correct answers to such questions as

those quoted the other day in the letter of our correspondent "Cocker's Ghost." Would it not be fairer to say that the system likely to be most successful would be the "cramming" system? And here we most unhesitatingly repeat that there is cramming in our schools—cramming of a pernicious kind. Or, again, what sort of mental training will make a boy able to tell how many pips there are in a pack of cards? Will Mr. Chapple or "Didaskalos" tell us that, because one of the examiners chooses to ask such a question as this, the boys under their several charge have been indoctrinated into the mysteries of card-playing? And yet, if examiners, drawing on the wealth of their exuberant imaginations, want to know the combinations of poker or the chances at billiards there is nothing to prevent their asking the questions. In a word, do our correspondents believe the Council of the University an infallible and unimprovable authority on matters connected with education? They must answer in the negative, and, if so, they can hardly logically refuse to view in sadness with us the unfavourable influence which the University matriculation examination as it is now conducted and regarded is apt to have upon our schools.