

Register May 30th 1885

THEORETIKOS AND HIS CRITICS.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—As the reputation of a statement conveyed in a single sentence may require the setting forth and comparison of a mass of minute details, it will be obviously impossible for me to notice all the statements in Mr. Leary's reply to which I take exception, but he may be assured that his letter has been read with great care. It will be better for me to enter into a detailed discussion of only one principal point, viz., the difficulty of the Adelaide matriculation as compared with that of other Universities, especially of London. The compulsory subjects in the Adelaide matriculation are the following:—1. Reading and writing from dictation. 2. English grammar and a short English composition. 3. Elementary arithmetic. 4. Outlines of geography. 5. Outlines of English history. 6. One Latin book. 7. Mathematics. The mathematics include arithmetic, algebra to simple equations, and Euclid (Books 1 and 2). Now, it would seem that any person, boy or man, laying any claim to the possession of education ought to find all these subjects, except perhaps the Latin book, not too difficult, especially with some little special preparation. Besides passing in these subjects the candidate must also pass in two out of three optional subjects. We will suppose him to pass in French and chemistry. At the London matriculation the candidate must pass in the following subjects:—1, orthography—writing from dictation; 2, the grammatical structure of the English language; 3, arithmetic; 4, questions in modern geography; 5, the history of England to the end of the seventeenth century; 6, one Latin subject, with questions in ancient history and geography arising therefrom; 7, mathematics, including arithmetic, algebra to progression and proportion, and the first four books of Euclid. Thus far the examination is almost exactly the same as in Adelaide, but where it differs it is more exacting. Now, suppose that up to this point the examinations are equal in difficulty. From this point the Adelaide student has only to pass in French and chemistry to ensure success, and if he takes up three optional subjects, passing in any two ensures success. Compare this with what the London student has to do. He has to pass in French and in chemistry; and besides these subjects he must pass in natural philosophy, subdivided into the four heads of mechanics, hydrostatics, optics, and heat, and in another language, which may be either Greek, German, Sanskrit, or Arabic. It will be seen by those who follow this comparison carefully that the London student has a third language and natural philosophy in addition to all the Adelaide subjects. Yet Mr. Leary writes:—“Any one who will take the trouble to compare the subjects for matriculation in Adelaide and London will see that those in the former are quite equal to if not more numerous than those in the latter.” Plainly, Mr. Editor, I could not trespass so far upon your space as to compare the Adelaide examinations at such length as I have done the matriculation

examinations here and at London with Oxford and Cambridge examinations, as the details required for an adequate comparison would be very numerous. Your correspondent Mr. W. Robertson confirms the view I took of the matter when he says that "decidedly dull boys have by dint of well-directed work passed comfortably." Further, even if the examinations appeared on paper to be of exactly equal difficulty (and this is far from being the case) the keen competition in London and the high standard adopted in English Universities would make the London examination much more difficult than the Adelaide. I have known pass examinations in England in which a candidate was expected to answer every question in a paper, and five-sixths correctly. Mr. Leary further says that an examiner ought to set a reasonable paper, and then "care not whether all fail or all pass;" but I venture to think that any examiner, especially in a colony like this, must adapt himself in some degree to the candidates, and fix such a standard as will permit of his passing a reasonable number. In the older Universities it is notorious that at examinations it is easier to get a first-class in some years than in others, and these years are known as "good years" and "bad years." This proves that the candidates for an examination do, to a certain extent, fix the standard of the examination, and I venture to think that this is a consideration which has more, instead of less, weight here than in England. Mr. Leary says that I "could take either side equally well" in this discussion, but I am bound to say that I cannot understand any person (except one who has a case to support) saying that he believes the London matriculation to be no harder than that of Adelaide.

The writer of the leading article in your issue of the 28th says that "Theoretikos" "in comparing Adelaide with London has made a fundamental mistake." Now it was not I who instituted the comparison; that was done by Mr. Leary in his article on University reform. Nor did either of us compare Adelaide with London, but only the matriculation examinations at the two Universities.

The writer of the leader has here tried to play off a familiar trick of critics, viz., the trick of extending a term used by an opponent in a limited sense to a much wider sense. He also hardly represents me fairly when he says—"Theoretikos alludes to the easy curriculum, and singularly enough does not see the evil done by making the entrance hard and the course easy." As my point was that the entrance was easy, it is not by any means singular that the discrepancy did not strike me. But the real point at issue is as to the province of a University, and here I am glad to be able to agree to some extent at any rate with my critics. In England the two great Universities are looked upon as places in which the sons of the rich or well-born may secure a certain amount of higher culture and social intercourse, or the clever boys from the large schools may contend with each other for honours and prizes. It is considered that few except those who belong to one or other of these classes, with the addition of young men intending to take holy orders, have any business to be there. But it seems that a University in the colonies has to perform the functions which in England are performed by Institutes, such as the Midland Institute at Birmingham, or by Science Colleges, such as the Yorkshire College, i.e., that it is a place where young men who have had few opportunities of culture in early life may in some degree supply their deficiencies by attending lectures on various subjects, and may get some proof of having reached a certain point of attainment. Such work is done at home by the Science and Art Department, and by Oxford and Cambridge local examinations conducted in various large towns throughout the kingdom, and to some extent by the London matriculation, which is passed by many boys who have no intention of pursuing their studies further in that direction. The great drawback to making the attainment of a degree in arts or science easier than it is at other Universities is that it brings the degrees into disrepute, and lessens their value to those who already possess them. Surely a degree is meant to be a distinction, and the essence of all distinctions is that they are not possessed by everybody. If every other man one met was a K.C.B., the anxiety to be one would be much diminished. One cannot help thinking, too, that shopkeepers would not like to have Bachelors and Masters of Arts or Science behind their counters. Though much more might be said on this matter, I think I have now trespassed sufficiently upon your valuable space.

I am, Sir, &c.,

THEORETIKOS.

May 28.

UNIVERSITY REFORM.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—In to-day's *Register* I notice a letter from Mr. Chapple, in which he repudiates the idea that working for public examinations fosters cram in our large schools. In reply to his disclaimer, allow me to ask Mr. Chapple, through your columns, whether boys in Prince Alfred College who had absolutely no previous knowledge of German were last year pitchforked into the textbook for that language prescribed by the University. If so, all these well-sounding phrases about "opening minds" "freshening

about "opening minds," "fresh young lives,"
"hopes and possibilities," "massive arches
ring with heavenly music," &c., are so many
platitudes that find an exact parallel in the
action of the grocer who directed his shopboy
to sand the sugar well and then come in to
family prayers.

I am, Sir, &c.,
Adelaide, May 29.

ONLOOKER.
