

mitted, of course; but when committing is done it ought to be for life.

The examination gives prominence to text-book memorizing, rather than to breadth of knowledge. If a student thoroughly acquaints himself with his subject by independent reading, it rarely affects his grades in the slightest degree. Yet a broad and independent view of any subject is by far superior to a servile submission to the words of any man.

The examination, again, encourages the substitution of appearance of knowledge for knowledge itself. This tendency is too evident to require a word of proof or illustration.

Then there is an inherent injustice in any arbitrary measurement of the products of a mind. No one would think of looking through the poems of Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, and Browning, and then giving to each a grade on the scale of one hundred. We are not Shakespeares or Brownings, of course, but we are human, and the products of our minds are just as peculiarly our own, whatever be their merit. They are not to be subjected to a mathematical comparison with the mind-products of anyone else.

With the system of class-instruction now in vogue it is difficult to suggest any method that will take the place of examinations. Such a method may in time be found, however. But even now there are improvements upon the old system. For example, we understand that at the Illinois State University a student making a class record of eighty-five or over may receive his grade as term standing, without taking the examinations. If he is ambitious and desires to raise his standing, he is given the privilege of attempting it. To those who fall below eighty-five, the examination is compulsory. This is certainly an improvement, and it deserves some thought, at least.

#### A NOTE.

Elsewhere in this number we have given expression to some of our views on the subject of examinations. Now it is contrary to the custom of this paper to admit reprint, but we think the cause justifies violation of the custom. A few sentences from recent articles by eminent British educators are given below.

We do not wish it to be understood that we think the examination in America is more than the shadow of the monster that the English examination is; and a very little observation will show that the University of Nebraska is less a slave to the practice than the average American university. And yet the system is, unfortunately, becoming more popular even in our own country, and it is time for people to do some thinking on the subject before too much injury is done.

Professor Mueller says: "From what I have seen at Oxford and elsewhere, all real joy in study seems to me to have been destroyed by the examination as now conducted. Young men imagine that all their work has but one object—to enable them to pass the examinations. Every book they have to

read, even to the number of pages, is prescribed. No choice is allowed; no choice is left to look either right or left. What is the result? The required number of pages is got up under compulsion, therefore grudgingly, and after the examination is over what has been got up is got rid of again like a heavy and useless burden. Nothing is converted *in saccum et sanguinem*. The only thing that seems to remain is an intellectual *nausea*—a dislike of the food swallowed under compulsion."

"The mischief done is, I believe, most serious. It will poison the best blood of England, if it has not done so already."

Professor Freeman writes as follows: "I have deeply to thank my Oxford undergraduate course for causing me carefully to read several books, Aristotle's Ethics at their head, which I otherwise might not have read at all or might have read less thoroughly. But I do not thank it at all for examining me in anything."

"I read with very little comfort or pleasure, while there was before me the spectre of an examination, deadening everything and giving a wrong motive for one's work."

And here are some of the words of Professor Frederic Harrison: "At least nine-tenths of any over-pressure on students arises from examinations and not from simple study."

"Above all trust the student. Encourage him to study for the sake of knowledge, for his own sake, and the public good."

Are these men wasting words?

C. F. A.

#### LITERARY.

Many people have said that General Wallace wrote *Ben-Hur* because he realized the field for popularity which that novel contained, but most of his readers resented the ascribing of mercenary motives to him. However that may be General Wallace has certainly not given much cause for an exalted idea of his motives in writing, by his tragedy "*Commodus*" in the January *Harpers*. A glance at the illustrations will show the moral tone of the production. Of course it is no worse than—indeed not as bad as—the times which it portrays. The foot notes, with which it is abundantly supplied, will clearly demonstrate that. But is there any good reason to bring up such eminently corrupt life for inspection again, or will good taste permit it? The charge that General Wallace wrote *Ben-Hur* from mercenary motives, though it shatters the sympathetic regard which one is apt to have for the author, is not grave; but if we have to admit—and it seems as if there was no good reason to deny it—that General Wallace is following *Amelie Rives*, and is reduced to a selection of salacious materials for what he writes, we have a bad state of affairs indeed. Why not return to *Wycherley* and *Congreve* at once.

What the author's motives in writing were is, after all, of little consequence. We would ignore that question, as many did in the case of *Ben-Hur*, if the production was meritorious, as is that novel. But it is a genuine surprise that the man who wrote the "*chariot race*" and the "*galley fight*" could write so inspired a play, and particularly—if indeed it needs any further emphasis—when furnished with such excellent material, dramatically considered. If there is a strong line in the play I have failed to find it. The situations are there, in several cases, particularly in the scene at the baths between the wife and the mistress of *Commodus*. But school-girls, with nothing more important than their little everyday jealousies, would have made as forcible work of the dialogue,