

Joseph Myles Starkie, Senator of the Royal University of Ireland, Resident Commissioner of National Education in Ireland; and Wilfrid Ward, late Examiner in Mental and Moral Science at the Royal University of Ireland. That was the Commission, composed of men who may be regarded as eminent in science, literature, and education. I will read what they say in regard to the system in Ireland: "Accordingly, as regards its main function the university is an examining body empowered to confer degrees on all who successfully pass its prescribed examinations, irrespective of their place of education." The point I wish to make by that quotation is that the University of Ireland was analogous to ours in that it is an examining body empowered to confer degrees on all who successfully pass its examinations. In another part of the report it states that witnesses admitted that the system had failed: "But while those who have administered the system have done their utmost to make it work well and smoothly, the system itself suffers from incurable defects. Every witness who has touched on the question is conscious of their gravity. Of these defects some are inherent in a university whose sole function it is to conduct examinations. Degrees are conferred without any evidence of academic training, except in the Faculty of Medicine, which is subject to the regulations of the General Medical Council." Our University differs in some respects from the University of Ireland, because it gets from non-exempt students a statement that the candidate has undergone an academic examination. "The sole test of merit lies in the examination results. A false conception of learning is thus held up before the eyes of the student. The teacher on his part is expected to keep a close watch on the ways of the outside examiner; if he fails to do so he may seem to imperil the success of his pupils or of his institution. Day by day his teaching is subjected to the tacit criterion—Is it of direct examination value? No more paralysing and disheartening influence on an able and enthusiastic teacher can be imagined than to see that the more thorough his method, the more connected a view he seeks to present to his subject, the more likely is his lecture-room to be deserted, and his teaching branded as excellent but useless. Yet in teaching pass men for the degree of a purely examining university he must be prepared for such a fate. Now, the pass man is precisely the student who most needs to be lifted out of the examination groove; and university teaching for a pass degree ought to be raised well above the pass level. One who is a master of his subject knows how to treat even the rudiments in the spirit of a broad culture. Facts seemingly disconnected are brought into relation with principles; light is thrown back from the more advanced results of study upon the earlier stages. A skilful teacher, by his very digressions, will suggest new ideas and stir a quickened interest. He will open up fresh horizons of thought without losing sight of his central subject. He summons to his aid other branches of learning by way of illustration or contrast. His object is not to impart the modicum of knowledge that is needed for the next examination, but to train the student in the true method of study and to guide the reading. Students under the stress of an impending examination may not unnaturally think that they are encumbered with learning which will not pay; but in later years, when experience has altered their perspective of things, they feel grateful to those who have enlarged their vision. Moreover, there are many subjects—and literature is such in a pre-eminent degree—which are best fitted to discipline and emancipate the mind, and yet least fitted to be brought to the test of mere examination, where an acquaintance with manuals, a repetition of ready-made critical judgments, and in general the exercise of memory, have a value out of all proportion to their real worth. But it is in the higher branches of study that the freedom of the teacher becomes of cardinal importance; and here the vicious effects are most apparent of a system which, divorcing teaching from examination, makes the examination of an outside body the final test of excellence. Freedom is in truth the life of the higher learning. Any collegiate or university organization which, instead of eliciting the aptitudes and original powers of the teacher, prescribes rigid programmes, or in other ways tends to impair his spontaneous initiative, to cramp and formalize his teaching, stands fatally condemned. In science, more clearly perhaps than in any other department of study, the inadequacy of the examination test has been established. The modern conception of scientific teaching requires that much of the time hitherto spent over books shall be spent in the laboratory. Science is in a special sense a living and growing body of truth, and almost every teacher of distinction is an investigator within his own domain. The best of his students are trained to follow his researches. In the laboratory not only are old experiments repeated, but new problems are solved as they arise. Learning becomes vitalized by contact with such problems. The record of the advanced student's work in the laboratory is probably the true record of his progress in science, and of his capacity as an independent observer. Compared with the results of this sustained discipline, carried on over weeks or months, any single examination is a poor and inadequate test. Its natural effect is to exalt the text-book over practical work, and teaching in science directed towards success in examination is apt to become an epitome of facts rather than a training in the processes by which truth is discovered. The importance of laboratory instruction has given the first impulse to a reform which is likely to prove a valuable corrective of the examination system. Interesting evidence has been laid before us showing that, even in universities where teaching is not divorced from examination, there is a growing sense that the work done in the term ought to count for the degree examination. The practice already exists in America, and has recently been adopted in the University of Birmingham. There, as in America, the principle is applied not to science only, but with varying details to all departments of study" (Royal Commission on University Education in Ireland, 1903, pages 22 and 23). In view of these opinions of the Royal Commission in Ireland, I think it is not possible for any one to come down here and say the view we take is a purely local view. I think we state an educational principle which is recognized in the Old World. I think that any one that states that our examination system is sound is called upon to prove that the examination system has not been a failure in London, France, Ireland, South Africa, India, and New Zealand. The worst injury it has done for education in New Zealand is that it implies that New Zealand professors are incom-