

Higher Examination.*Higher English Literature.*

In one way the results of the examination were satisfactory, because none who failed failed badly. But in another way they were not, for not a few of those who passed were little better than those who failed. Most were familiar with the text books, and especially with the introductions, from which, indeed, many were content to answer questions asking for their own work.

Of the two questions which candidates were asked to discuss, the one on Shylock often gave occasion for long essays, obviously prepared, in which any notion of giving the evidence for both sides was absent or incidental. And nearly all treated Shylock as a historical character, and not as a work of art, asking what he was really and what he may have been, of which we know nothing, instead of asking what gives him his interest. But the question was very well answered compared with the other, in which candidates were asked to discuss one of the most important notions in Dryden's *Essay*, viz., that of art as imitation. Few grasped even the meaning of the extract, and only one or two made any attempt to discuss its truth. Most significant, however, was the utter failure of all but the best to explain the lines beginning "I am a part of all that I have met."

I need not offer the usual advice about paying more attention to text than to notes, for I am sure that teachers would only be too delighted to spend time on a passage like this and the one from Dryden, rather than on things of no importance, if they could believe that examiners are not so keen for the pound of flesh that they are careless of the blood. But there are two things to observe. First, when authors like Bacon, Macaulay, Carlyle, and Browning have been prescribed, questions have dealt more with their matter than with their manner. But in essays like Lamb's, in the poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson, and indeed in most poetry, there is little or no history or biography to remember. Hence the questions on them cannot be of the same kind. The best literature is often the easiest to understand, and as no one thinks of excluding it from the syllabus for that reason, it is obvious that the questions must be less on understanding than on appreciation, or, as it is variously called, feeling, taste, aesthetic understanding. Secondly, there is a difference between appreciation and explaining it. The important thing, of course, is appreciation, but that is only indirectly within the scope of examination questions; it has mainly to be judged by a candidate's own work.

Hence it is the explanation of taste or appreciation that the questions require, but so far only, of course, as this is explained by specifying the qualities of poem, essay, or narrative that produce it. The general question always is: Here is a piece of literature that in whole or in part, in matter or in form, pleases, displeases, or leaves me indifferent; I call it beautiful, pathetic, charming, tragic, sublime, or the reverse; what are the sources in it of these effects on me? This is the only reason, apart from learning by heart, why lyrical poetry and other literature easy to understand may be set for the highest examination.

The typical faults in answering any application of this question are two, and both are frequent in answers to the question about the function of rhyme, and to the other about the musical quality of Tennyson's lyrics. One fault speaks merely of superficial and mechanical qualities like alliteration and words that sound like their sense. Many of the candidates no doubt think Poe's *Bells* the best of poetry, and even the poem that begins—

"An Austrian army awfully arrayed,
Boldly by battery besieged Belgrade",

and passes through "Dealing destruction's devastating doom" to other newspaper headings. The other fault is an incoherence of ecstasy, including an utter disregard of the truth, which would be positively immoral if it were quite meant, and is a bad training, especially for girls, whether it is meant or not. The following are typical examples of the fault, and if the last one is considered, the remedy will be apparent: "Rhyme is used in poetry to describe a higher strain of ideas, and the more lofty impulses of nature"; "The function of rhyme in poetry is to raise the fancy to a higher pitch of thought, and thus to beget admiration, affection, and concernment"; "Some of the rhymes are so exquisite that they add beauty to the already lovely thought"; "The flowers of the garden and the scent of the tropical spices, &c., seem to waft their breezes on the reader by the way in which Tennyson chooses words that seem to go home at once by their musical sound. It is almost impossible to describe Tennyson's musical lines and lyrics, so much do they thrill any one who is a lover of music and all that is good and beautiful."

Higher History.

The examiner again urges candidates to study the questions carefully before they begin to write. Thus in Question 2 many candidates wrote careful and detailed lives of Walpole and of Pitt, but made no attempt to contrast their characters or to answer the