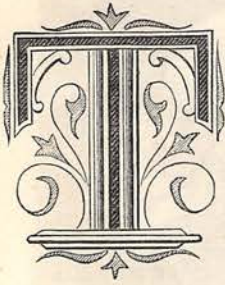


AN EXAMINATION FOR WOMEN.

SKETCHED ON THE SPOT.



THE weather has just made a sudden change from cold to excessive heat, and the sun is pouring down upon the roofs at South Kensington, and making even the big rooms and galleries there unpleasantly warm. The examination-room, indeed, is thoroughly ventilated, and as cool as any such place can be on such a day; if there were any air stirring out of doors, some of it must come in through the three great windows which stand open for its admission.

It is a bare, ugly place, this torture-chamber after the modern fashion, and has a horribly grim look to the anxious eyes of the candidates who flock into it. Small deal tables, each with a chair in front, are ranged in rows all down the room; there are eight rows, so placed as to leave narrow passages between them. The floor being of tiles, every movement of the chairs causes a harsh, grating noise, which, in the busy silence of the place, sounds ten times louder than it really is. At the upper end is the high desk occupied by the examiner, and near it a small table and couple of chairs for the secretary and the other lady or ladies of the committee who are on duty. Fastened up here and there on the white walls are notices, in very large type: "The candidate's name must be on the first sheet. The index-number on the right hand of every sheet. The punched hole on the left hand corner." "Notice your index-number before entering the examination." (By-the-way, what use is this admonition to people who have already entered? The list of names, with their corresponding numbers, is posted up in the dressing-room.) "Refreshments are to be obtained in the museum." Each table is supplied with paper, pens, ink, a pen-wiper, and a clip for fastening the loose sheets together, and has a number clearly marked upon it.

And now the hour for beginning work has arrived, and the candidates for the coveted teaching certificates troop in. Of the eighty tables this room contains, about half are filled, and there are nearly as many in another room. All the tables are appropriated, and will sooner or later be occupied; but the subject at present in hand being Religious Knowledge, which is not compulsory, there are a great many absentees. In the rules for the guidance of students is the following passage:—"The papers in Religious Knowledge in group A may be omitted by any candidate who, at the time of application for admission to the examination, signs a printed statement of objection to be examined in Religious Knowledge." I suppose, however, that in many cases the candidate's objection really consists in a wish to reduce, as much as possible, the amount of work to be done; as it is difficult to imagine a conscientious objection to the study of the books pre-

scribed by the examiners on the part of women belonging to any Protestant church.

The candidates are in their places, the scraping of the chairs has ceased, and the secretary and her aids have gone their rounds, distributing the question-papers, and seeing that all are ready to begin their work. The examiner stands before his desk, and makes a little address to the assembly.

"Write both your name and number on the *first sheet*," he says, "and your number on the right hand corner of every sheet, keeping the punched hole on the left. Write only on one side the paper, and number your answers to correspond with the questions."

He speaks distinctly and emphatically, having, alas! experience of the extreme difficulty of getting these simple directions obeyed; and then the room becomes silent.

It is a curious sight. The youngest girls here must have passed their eighteenth birthday; but there is no other limit of age, and the variety one sees is startling. Out of the forty-three in this room, half-a-dozen certainly are forty years old, or very near it; that is to say, they are within ten years of the time when a woman's teaching powers begin to deteriorate very fast. At least half the remainder appear to be over five-and-twenty, and more than two-thirds of the whole number bear the unmistakable stamp of the working woman. Perhaps one needs to have gone through the ordeal oneself to be able to read the language of those intent faces bending over their task, or stopping to rack their brains for some half-forgotten fact. Far away down the room is a woman whose grey hair and worn face make her look fifty, though she is probably much less. She studies her question-paper slowly; not a muscle relaxes into an indication of interest or of hope as she begins to write. Why is she here? The question is but too easily answered: she has bread to earn for herself, or perhaps for others; she is no longer young or hopeful, competition presses hard upon her, and she thinks that a certificate, if she can but obtain one, will give her back some of the advantages she has lost. Poor soul! probably she will fail; for what chance has she against these younger women, who have still some hope in their heart and some vigour in their brain? At fifty, or even at forty, the power of "cramming" is lost.

Two years ago I was told of a woman, grey-haired like my present neighbour, who came up for three successive examinations, and failed in each. She was a schoolmistress in the country, and wished to pass in French and German. Whether her repeated attempts were successful at last, I know not—her perseverance seemed to deserve it; but supposing she passed, it by no means follows that she would be capable of teaching either language. I who write know one instance of a candidate obtaining not merely a certificate, but honours, in a modern language, in which she is in-

capable of holding the simplest conversation, or writing the shortest letter.

To come back to the present. Quite near to me is a young girl, of a type totally unlike that of the woman predestined to failure. She is rather pretty, dressed in grey, without ribbon or ornament of any kind, and entirely occupied with her work. Her eyes pass from the question to her manuscript without looking up. She knits her flexible brows over some knotty point, and holds her pen suspended while she considers. She works like one thoroughly trained to it; one feels certain that she has gone through at least two or three previous examinations. She does not change colour, as so many of her neighbours do while they go through the cycle of hope, anxiety, despair, and hope again, with a terrible background of self-distrust behind all. Probably failure would not be very terrible to her; but that she does not mean to fail is evident. She writes, so much I can see, in a scrawly schoolgirl hand, but thoroughly as if she knew what she wanted to say, and how she wanted to say it. Very possibly, her real cultivation is small, her ideas narrow, or nil; but she has the kind of technical skill which is the best of all things to bring into an examination.

I do not feel by any means so sure as to a neighbour of hers, who is of the buoyant and over-confident order. She looks up from her papers continually, with the air of being quite at ease and at leisure. She watches the movements of the examiner with evident amusement, and has a smile, which is almost a laugh, ready at every moment. She is not very young—five or six-and-twenty probably; her dress and general appearance, even the arrangement of her abundant fair hair—which is by no means *soigné* as it deserves—indicate that she does not belong to the class of amateur students. I guess her to be a governess—what a modern writer calls “a middle-class governess,” that “unfortunate product of our modern civilisation;” but being still young enough to be hopeful, she seems to take life easily, even under the immediate pressure of an examination. But she is too unconcerned. She looks destined to play the part of the hare in the race; it seems strange that she should have thought it worth while to come here at all.

These three are exceptions. Looking over the expanse of tables with their occupants, I see over and over again the same anxious faces, the same puzzled eyes raised to the ceiling for inspiration, the same changing colour and nervous, trembling hands; one candidate grows hysterical between heat and excitement, and can scarcely keep her place. She lays down her pen, and resting her elbows on the table, looks vacantly at the paper before her. She has almost lost the power of comprehension. She would perhaps faint, in spite of her struggle to control herself, but for the kind secretary, who suddenly appears by her side with a glass of water and a flask of Eau de Cologne. The water, and still more perhaps the consciousness of having a friend within reach, helps her to master her faintness. She sits still for a minute or two, and then resolutely takes up her pen again. Miss —, having helped her through the crisis, goes away, but does not

forget to keep a watchful eye upon her. “How glad I shall be,” she says, “when I can see her safe out of the room!”

What is the quality of work done by all these women? Experienced examiners have given it as their opinion, that the very worst work ever done by men or boys is less bad than the worst produced by women and girls. But, on the other hand, unless a considerable quantity of really good work is the result of these examinations, it seems certain that the present system is worthless. It is, perhaps inevitably, a system of *cram*; and probably a mathematician would be able to work out the problem: given a certain quantity of knowledge obtained by cram, what residuum will the crammed brain contain six months later? I suppose the gentlemen who undertake the laborious and disagreeable work of examiners are satisfied with the results on the whole; but there is still another way of looking at the matter.

In the midst of all the discussion of the great question of education for women, there has been no very clear light thrown upon the object to be attained. Is that object the production of teaching machines, or of intelligent women? I doubt whether it will serve either end. An intelligent woman *must*, except perhaps in some very rare cases, be the natural growth of a home where to understand is as much a matter of course as to breathe. A good teacher, on the other hand, is like the poet—born, not made. For both teacher and poet, education polishes and sharpens the tools nature has given, but is powerless to supply them where they are wanting. Everybody knows that there is an enormous crowd of incapable female teachers in the world at present; but everybody does not stop to consider whether, if they could all pass with credit out of this room to-day, they would be at all less incapable of teaching to-morrow.

It is well for the women and girls now busy here that most people have not yet found out what education means. The fight for a decent living is hard enough without any fresh complications.

The time allotted for the Religious Knowledge paper is drawing to a close. The examiner announces distinctly that at half-past three papers must be given up, and that five minutes before that time he will give notice, in order that the sheets may be arranged and fastened together with the clip. Some of the candidates have already finished, and now begin to put their sheets in order. One by one they rise, give their papers to the examiner who goes to receive them, and then pass quietly out of the room. But the greater part remain, and there is a visible flutter. One turns over her manuscript hastily, in search of a blunder which there is yet time to correct; one puzzles distractedly over an unanswered question; one scribbles hurriedly, urged on by the idea that quantity will be allowed to weigh against quality. A few calmly revise their work, putting in omitted words and stops. The fair-haired candidate has lost her confidence; her eyes wander round the room in a desperate effort to seize an idea; she writes something, crosses it out, writes again, and is again at a loss when the fatal moment arrives.

Once again the examiner repeats his directions as to name, number, &c. There is a rustling of papers, and the harvest begins to be gathered. Would anybody believe that, after all, one candidate gives up her papers loose, and another, still more aggravating, sends hers in without either name or number? Is it any wonder that a few very sharp words are spoken on the subject? The room does not clear rapidly, for there are always some who work on to the very last moment, and some who get their manuscript into such utter confusion that it takes ten minutes to put it in order. Gradually, however, they do disappear, and disperse themselves into the dressing-room and into the museum itself, to get half-an-hour's refreshment for mind or body.

The room, meantime, has to be put in order for their return. The ladies go to work vigorously, putting fresh paper, &c., on every table, and restoring its look of fresh, if grim, orderliness to the whole place. All is scarcely finished when the half-hour has expired.

Once again the candidates troop in; the same directions are given, the same silence settles down over the

room, the same little dramas are enacted. To-day's work will not finish till half-past six o'clock, and the examination will occupy the whole week. Few of the candidates, however, take up more than six subjects out of the eighteen or nineteen open to them. The compulsory ones will begin to-morrow, and then the rooms will be full, the numbers growing smaller and smaller as the progress is made from Arithmetic to Greek. But the lady who generously devotes her time and energy to the work of secretary must be here all the while; and whatever may be thought of the mode or of the results of the examinations, there can be no doubt of the gratitude due to her by all interested in the matter, and especially by the candidates themselves.

As for her aids, they come and go; they spend an hour or two in the company of these anxious faces, not surely without interest; and it is to be hoped that the thoughts which must needs pass through their minds in the silence, tend to a fuller comprehension on the part of the fortunate minority of women, of what the battle of life means for the great majority of their sisters.

LOCAL DISHES, AND HOW THEY ARE MADE.



WILL you not tell us what amuses you so much, Bertha?" said Frank, as he saw his sister laughing over her book.

"Yes, I must indeed," said Bertha. "I am reading the account of that American minister that papa was telling us about.

It is very interesting, and he is a very clever and original man. I was amused at the way in which he talks about oatmeal porridge."

"Oatmeal porridge!" said Frank. "Is not that rather a queer subject for a minister to discourse about?"

"Perhaps it is," said Bertha. "You see, this gentleman was not born in America. He went out there from some part of Yorkshire, and in his young days he used to eat porridge——"

"And I suppose 'the light of other days' illumined every basinful of that most excellent preparation that he came near," said papa, joining in the conversation. "It is always so. I have been amused many times to see how people really appear to *love* dishes that are peculiar to the part of the country from which they came. Again and again I have met with epicures and grave-looking people who were as particular as possible about what they ate, and if by any chance an uninviting-looking mess was brought to table which belonged to their 'ain countree,' their appetite and enthusiasm knew no bounds."

"It seems to me that local dishes generally are uninviting-looking messes," said Frank. "Nevertheless I like porridge. Whatever enthusiasm Bertha's

friend indulged in about porridge was quite justified, in my opinion. What does he say, Bertha?"

"He has been telling some friends how to make porridge, and he says, 'Porridge is not mush. Mush was never heard of either in England or Scotland. In Yorkshire when we speak of porridge we say "they" are hot or cold, or good or bad. Porridge must be eaten, or, as we used to say, "supped," when they are freshly made. You can no more keep them good if you let them stand round to wait your leisure than you can keep champagne good in a platter. The true way to eat your porridge is to tumble in your milk while they are in the kettle, and stir it well in, then pour your porridge into basins, and eat them up. Don't set them on the table in one dish as the heathen do.'"

"Ah," said papa, "we need no one to tell us that was written by a Yorkshireman. Of course he can tell how to make porridge properly."

"Yes, he puts half a teaspoonful of salt into a quart of water and boils it. When it is boiling quickly he sifts a pint of oatmeal slowly into it with the left hand, and beats it quickly with the right hand. He lets it boil two or three minutes, and has it served at once."

"That is the only right way to make porridge," said Frank. "A basinful of that with milk and treacle would make a breakfast for a king."

"And, taken regularly, would make the king strong and robust, and able to do kingly work," said papa. "I wish all the poor, pale little children in our large towns could have a good plate of oatmeal porridge made in that way every morning. They would soon have a different look. See the Scotch, how hale and hearty they are. It is all because they eat porridge."