



A LADY GRADUATE OF LONDON UNIVERSITY

### “THAT DREADFUL EXAMINATION!”

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**N**OWADAYS nearly every one who means to do any kind of work in the world has, at some stage of his or her existence, to pass an examination. Yet the prospect seems fraught with terror to all but the exceptionally clever or the exceptionally self-possessed. I believe that this fear has its roots, like all other fears, in ignorance. Much has been said and written as to the faults of examinations and of examiners; in this paper I wish to draw attention to the faults of examinees.

I think we may fairly credit the average examiner with good intentions. He has no wish to “pluck” candidates, and, to the best of his power, he sets fair papers—papers which will test the knowledge of the candidate, and give him scope for the display of varied attainments, while making it as hard as possible for superficial or inaccurate knowledge to pass muster. Yet there is a large class of candidates who persist in regarding the examiner as their natural enemy, and as an enemy who seeks to compass his ends by pit-fall and lurking ambush. To this class belongs the young man who provides himself with



elaborate schemes, after the manner of Mr. Bouncer, or of that more recent youth—

“ In the crown or whose cap  
Were the Furies and Fates,  
And a nice little map  
Of the Dorian States.  
In the palms of his hands, which were hollow,  
Were what's frequent in palms, that is, dates.”

He usually leaves the examination room still more firmly convinced of the barbarity of examiners, who refuse to regard his laborious efforts as legitimate study. To such examinees I have nothing to say. But there is a far larger number who honestly wish to pass their examination, and who prepare for it to the best of their ability. To these I should like to give a few hints, which may help to remove their dread of the examiner.

In the first place I would say—*Conform to the regulations laid down for the examination.* It seems almost absurd to draw attention to so obvious a matter, but experience proves that it is not so. How often examiners complain that “candidates neglect to number their answers, or to arrange them according to the directions.” Or again, they say—“Too many candidates gave to the optional questions part of the time they should have given to the necessary ones.” Closely allied to this fault is that noticed in the following passage:—“Careless reading of the questions was far too common. Several candidates failed entirely from this fault.” Then, besides attention to the mere verbal regulations of the examination, try to conform to the *object* the examining body have in view. For instance, in such an examination as the Matriculation of London University, where the candidate is required to enter for a large number of subjects, and to pass in them all, it is clear that special knowledge is not needed; that good general knowledge is what the examiners demand. Thus favourite studies must be put aside for the time, and the mind made to work at the uncongenial ones till the requisite standard is reached—a mental discipline of great value, apart from all examinations. Again, other examinations, such as the Cambridge Higher Local, which offer a choice of subjects, or in which the examination may be spread over a term of years, demand not so much general knowledge as special. Clearly a very different kind of preparation is necessary in these two cases.

This brings me to a second rule—*Map out your work.* This again is only a rule of common sense, but neglect of it is a frequent cause of failure. Unless you know clearly what portions of your subject must be studied, and how much time you can spare for

each, you run the risk of finding yourself, as the examination day approaches, with sections of your subject still unstudied, and with no grasp of its proportions and of the relation of one part to another. Want of method is one of the most frequent faults, particularly of students studying alone; and its result is waste of time, of patience, and of mental power. The choice of proper text-books is really a question of method. Not only must inaccurate and antiquated works be avoided, but the text-book must be adapted to the capacity of the student; it is no use attempting works intended for advanced students before you possess the elementary knowledge which they take for granted.

Thirdly—*Test your work continually.* Do not be content with a *belief* that you have grasped the subject you read, and an *impression* that you remember what preceded it. Try your knowledge by frequent questions. The papers set in previous examinations, or those which may be found in various educational periodicals, should be in constant use. These will not only help you to detect the weak places in your work, but they will present things to you in a fresh light, and suggest connections hitherto unnoticed. Accustom yourself to answering questions in a given time, and without reference to note or book, so that you may be used to rely on your own powers.

Fourthly—*Study the art of expression.* Many candidates are unable to make the most of their knowledge for want of fluency of word or of pen. They have a clear conception in their minds, but they cannot make it intelligible to the examiner. Others conceal their thoughts under masses of useless verbiage. Nothing but practice in written work will cure these faults. It is well often to read your themes, &c., aloud; you will thus become aware of grammatical errors, awkward constructions, or ambiguous phrases which might otherwise pass unnoticed.

Lastly—*Remember that an examination involves some strain*—that to write answers to questions for six hours a day is hard work for mind and body. It is of the utmost importance to come to your work fresh. A clear head is worth far more than a knowledge of the few facts which could be crammed up just before the examination. I would say, never study between the papers; take plenty of exercise, of sleep, and of food. The candidate who presents himself in the examination room in perfect physical health, accustomed to good methods of work, and having a systematic knowledge of his subject, will have no reason to fear “that dreadful examination.”

