

Reflections of An Examiner

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[Prof. E. M. Wheeler was Professor of English, Logic and Philosophy of Bangabasi College during 1899-1905 ; he won a reputation as teacher of English. His illuminating discourses on all subjects were characterised by clarity of thought and abundant sense of humour. The present article was published in the College Magazine in 1905, it seems that the present one is the continuation of a previous essay ; unfortunately the first part of the essay could not be traced out.]

Our Examiner feels that having inflicted a set of serious reflections on his readers, he owes them some little compensation. He proposes therefore to permit his readers to share in the enjoyment afforded him by considerate examinees who relieved the monotony of his task by welcome gifts of humorous and original observations. The exigencies of space compel him to make only a small selection from the abundance provided for his amusement. He hopes, however, that the scantiness of his selection will not be interpreted as a slur upon the quantities of humour and originality for which space cannot at present be found. The subject in which he examined was Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution." The reflections on Burke furnished by the examinees not infrequently surpassed Burke in depth and freshness. Here are a few examples.

"During the Restoration," says one candidate, "we find that Henry VIII at least showed the law and confiscated the

monasteries. Here we find Henry's regard for law. Hence we find the principle of conservation and correction at the time of the Reformation." The historical insight and logical faculty displayed by this candidate could hardly be surpassed. "The nobles," says another, in explaining how the nobility is the Corinthian Capital of polite society, "though they are born rich yet had great power and they are generally born from parents of ability so their rights and their manners are noble and they had the power to gain a great amiable qualities which can be found in the great capital of Corinth and which is supposed to be very much polite in manners and customs." This however differed from the view put forward by another candidate who informed our examiner that "The Greek Architect is very famous. But the Corinthian Architect is most famous of all. As the Corinthian Architect stands on the top of the pillar so the nobility ought to stand on the head of the polished society" This view seems to have affinities with that maintained by yet another candidate who remarked that "Corinthian Capital was the name of a very famous man in Athens who used to stand on the top of a pillar." But a fourth candidate boldly differed from these and maintained that "as Athens is the capital of Corinth so nobility is the capital of polished society," a view similar to that of another who writes, "Corinthian capital was a distinguished place known by all, so a person of noble birth is treated as a Corinthian Capital." More enigmatic is the utterance of another candidate who says, "Nobility is like the Corinthian capital which does not take any interest to the kingdom." Another was as enigmatic : "Corinthian was the greatest of Greek architecture," he writes, "Nobility like the Corinthian Capital is the head of the nation and for this reason it should be disregarded and destroyed."

The "Encyclopaedia" seems to have been no less provocative of originality than the Corinthian Capital. The Encyclopaedia was variously stated to have been "a body of men who were fatal to religion," "a book containing the elaborate meanings of various objects," "the doctrine of the Encyclopaedists," "the books on atheismatic wrote by D'Alembert &c.", "a particular kind of literature that arose on the discovery of science," "a class of political men of letters" regarding whom we are told that they "spread proselytism to a great extent." It was inevitable that the enterprise of *the Times* should influence the views of candidates on the *Encyclopaedia*, and we consequently find the statement of one gentleman that it was "a volume of books which became so voluminous that the whole of it was never published", corrected by the statement of another, that it was "a dictionary commenced by the National Assembly and completed a few years later under the title of Encyclopaedia Britannica."

The story of Medea seems to have furnished a fruitful field for original research. A connection was established between Greek mythology and the Scottish history of Macbeth which will doubtless prove interesting to students of comparative mythology. "In Macbeth we are told," writes one candidate, "the daughters of an old man being advised by a witch cut and mangled their father's body and boiled in a kettle." "Medea," says another with greater detail, "promised the witches in Macbeth that she would bring their father into the former position by boiling him in the kettle : but Medea refused to do so by the incantations of her music because they burnt her father-in-law." Others consider that the persons so advised and encouraged were "the daughters of Penelope," or "the daughters of Peloppo-

nesus of Greece.' The utensil in which the old man was boiled seems also to have excited differences of opinion, the majority concluding that it was a kettle, while others considered it was either "a cattle" or "a kettledrum" or a "chaldron." The magic of Medea, it would appear, was even more wonderful than that usually ascribed to her, for she turns out to have been a "witchess" who "restored his father-in-law to youth by boiling her father's body."

The distinction between levelling and equalising was set forth by many candidates with a profundity not to say obscurity which even Hegel might envy. "It is a natural law of God," says one, "that wealth preponderates over property and common people must follow the rules framed for them by men of genius." "Those who attempt to level never equalise," writes another, "*i. e.* there are many positions in society according to which all positions will be distributed. There are many personal inequalities in every man." A third remarks: "Burke says that the poor must remain in society to pander to the luxury of the rich. Burke is right." But the brain reels at such dark sayings and we seek relief in lighter things.

Facies Hippocratica numbered its victims by the score. Here are a few of the more pathetic cases. "It was," said one, "a kind of disease which can be known by seeing the face of the deceased," another adding that "the disease was invented by Hippocrates;" while a third constructed the equation, "*Facies Hippocratica* = manifest symptoms in the constitution, which may be liable to suffer for our consumption," a weird saying pointing darkly to cannibalistic orgies. Poor Hippocrates! after adding a new scourge to humanity what does it avail that he "could easily diagonalise

diseases," (no easy feat we should imagine), or "introduced the system of digonesis." It may however be some consolation to him to know that he has been awarded an University diploma and may now describe himself as "Dr. Facies Hippocratica."

The phrase *Maroom Slave* led to much diversity of opinion. Some considered that he was a slave "used in the service of ships," others that he was "a slave as existed in Africa," others again declared that Maroon slaves "were a gang of slaves who live on a Malabar Coast in India." Some with greater simplicity declared that they were "slaves of Maroon." while one candidate with deep suggestiveness propounded the view that they were "a class of slaves famous for ther notoriety."

Theban Orgies were described with at least equal freshness. They were we are told "the places of worship of the heathen gods in Greek mythology." Others hold that they were "Furies which prevailed in Athens." But the climax is attained by a candidate who described them as "Women distinguished for ther ferocity." Classical allusions seem to have been peculiarly stimulating to our candidates. "The Euripus of funds and actions" afforded no little scope for originality. "It was", said one with great truth and insight, "a place where nothing could be built." Another held that "he was the god of stocks and shares." The intricacy of its tides was admirably described by another as a "flow and webb" and compared by another to the "ebb and tune of the funds." A beautiful instance of complete personification was furnished by another who described Euripus as "a straight between Eubia and Beotia known for constant change in daily current of fund and shares."

After the refreshment of this interlude we may return to weightier matters and profit by a perusal of some of the political maxims enunciated on the authority of Burke. "Public affections," we are told, "begin at home and then spread to inns municipalities and the resting places"—a convincing glorification of municipalities (not excluding we trust the Calcutta Corporation), hotels and dak bungalows. Their defects it is evident must for the future be tolerated for the sake of the public affection they evoke. Another candidate considers that public affection begins with loving "the little platoons." "To love the little platoons around us," he writes, "is the first doctrine of public affection, that is, we must learn to love the little children that are around us and then to love the persons that are around us and then to love the public at large." The Qualification for Government was the subject of many sphinx-like utterances of which we may select these three: "all occupations shall be open to all men *i.e.* meritorious men in whatever position shall be accessible to every post:" "Rank and quality in whatever rank of life is found is a sure passport to heaven:" "Qualific men have a right that their wants should be provided for by their wisdom." A real contribution to our knowledge of the French Revolution is made by a candidate who embodies the result of his researches in the following description of the National Assembly "The members of the Association which called itself the National Assembly, chiefly composed of dissenters but not without a mixture of churchmen, a few peers, and good many members of the House of Commons." Is it any wonder that the Assembly should have "failed measurably"?

Nor are contributions to lexicography lacking. The

contributions under this head are indeed so numerous as to embarrass the collector. One or two of most valuable may be given in addition to those collected under the heading "orgies." "Mess" in the phrase "Mess Johns" is we are told a "Latin contraction of the Scotch 'master' : a view differing from that of another candidate who declared it to be a contraction of "Mesiah" and explained "Mess Johns in robes and coronets" to mean "prismatics with the dress of a clergy." The phrase was however paradoxically interpreted by a third to mean "laymen who are also clergymen," while a fourth declared that they were "persons in their dress of emery and gold" ; while yet another held that they were "parishers who were only in name priests." Their dress was however more simply described by another who wrote, "Robe is the cord worn by Roman Catholic priests round their waists and coronet is the crown of a bishop," though this view would appear to conflict with that of the candidate who considered that the phrase describes "dissenters crested in their helmets." As if to show that lexicography calls for no small attainments in logic and no little power of connecting effects with causes, we have a definition of "officious" which errs perhaps in being somewhat too obscurely philosophical. "Officious" we read means "of a meddling disposition, *i. e.* that which follows necessarily." (We wonder whether this candidate would regard his failure in the examination as being officious *i. e.* as having followed necessarily.) The following contribution is evidently that of a spelling reformer : "The three bases of representation were the legislative, the exiquitive, and the juditial." But perhaps "exiquitive" is only a portmanteau word and is intended to convey the idea of an inquisitive executive, just as the phrase "ideaquett representation" obviously meant a representation that was adequate and

even ideal. A subtle distinction in meaning between the spelling ordinarily employed and that used by the candidate is suggested by the remark that "a man often likes what will only halm him and this was not very injurious." Perhaps here too the harmless halm is a combination of harm and balm.

As an example of felicitous quotation we may cite the following explanation given of the remark that wisdom is not the most severe corrector of folly. "Ignorant men," it was said, "are always very preciseous in correcting the faults of others but a wise man will say.....'First take out that little particle of straw that has got into your own eye, and then you will not be able to see the mote that is in your brothers eye,'" But our examiner is exhausted though his store of original extracts is not half done, and we may permit him to close with an instance or two of criticisms on Burke himself. Of Burke's comparison of the interaction between individual rights and the social organism to the phenomenon of the refraction of light, we are told that "This like Burke's many other jokes is too laboured" which perhaps explains the somewhat difficult remark that "The House was deaf to his ears." But this disparaging criticism is counterbalanced by the observation that "the righteousness of his case and the femanine feeling of his heart contributed to his politics." And if any further vindication were needed it would be amply found in the following eloquent judgment.—"His alacritic introspection into the past, his equitable view of the present, and his far-sighed glimpse into the future, tempered with the whetsfone of moderation and possible possiblity combined with the filtered conceptive product of the political heat of the past present and future, combine to raise the level of Burke's politics above the level of ordinary politicians."