
The London College of Preceptors

Source: *Science*, Vol. 9, No. 223 (May 13, 1887), pp. 471-472

Published by: American Association for the Advancement of Science

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1762160>

Accessed: 20-08-2021 05:45 UTC

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in the mode of carrying out such examinations. It is obvious that any elaboration of the scheme of examinations, of the kind which I have very imperfectly suggested, would increase the labor and cost of conducting them. To insure satisfactory results, it might prove needful to engage a whole committee of examiners where but one is at present employed. Still, in view of the overwhelming importance of the effects of these examinations upon the education of the youth of this country, any objections to change founded upon considerations of economy must be regarded as trivial.

In conclusion, I may say that there appears to be a consensus of opinion in favor of the pass examination, with the subsequent arrangement of candidates alphabetically in one, two, or three divisions, thus reducing competition to a minimum. The College of preceptors has, I believe, never swerved from this principle, and a justification of it is surely afforded by the very marked success which has attended their examinations for a long period of years. The dangers, such as they are, cluster round the competitive examination, with its order of merit attached; and it is pretty generally agreed that young people should not very frequently be called to engage in these contests.

G. S. CARR.

THE LONDON COLLEGE OF PRECEPTORS.

THE erection and dedication of a handsome new building for the use of the London College of preceptors has called renewed attention to a most serviceable institution, and one which American educators should know something about. A writer in the *Athenaeum* gives a summary of its history. It is this college, far more than the ancient universities, that regulates and directs the education of the English middle classes.

The College of preceptors had a humble beginning. In 1846 some private school-masters, impressed with the ignorance and incompetence of numbers who called themselves teachers, met together, and ultimately resolved to form themselves into a society with the object of affording to the public a test of the qualification of teachers, and of thus, in course of time, excluding from the ranks of the profession all charlatans and impostors. The college increased rapidly in numbers, and secured the interest of distinguished patrons, among them the late Marquis of Northampton and Sir John Lubbock, by whose aid it succeeded in obtaining the royal charter by which it was incorporated in 1849. The preamble of this charter embodies very clearly the views of the original founders. The college is incorporated

“for the purpose of promoting sound learning, and of advancing the interests of education, especially among the middle classes, by affording facilities to the teacher for acquiring a knowledge of his profession, and by providing for the periodical session of a competent board of examiners, to ascertain and give certificates of the acquirements and fitness for their office of persons engaged, or desiring to be engaged, in the education of youth.” These primary objects of the college, it may at once be said, have hitherto been carried out but to a limited extent and with small success. At first, by a strange irony of fate, the result of its operations was to aggravate the evil it sought to cure. In the report of the schools inquiry commission, Mr. Fitch stated that in his district the objects of the college had not been fulfilled to any appreciable extent, and that several school-masters of good standing who had once supported it “had withdrawn themselves in disgust at the shameless use which was made in advertisements of the letters M.R.C.P. by men who were wholly unqualified;” and as late as 1868 Mr. Joseph Payne, in a paper read at a meeting of the college, put the plain spoken question, “Can any one wonder that school-masters by hundreds, finding that high rank in a learned corporation was to be obtained at the rate of seven shillings a letter, should have availed themselves of the golden opportunity?” The council have ever since steadily discountenanced the use or abuse of these mystic letters. The only grades the college recognizes for which diplomas are granted are associate, licentiate, and fellow. These grades are conferred after examination, partly in general knowledge, and partly in the theory and practice of education. The qualifications for the lowest grade are about on a par with those of a first-class certificated teacher, the licentiate corresponds to an ordinary degree, and the fellowship may fairly rank with an honor degree at the universities. The College of preceptors deserves full credit for having first recognized the necessity of a professional examination, and for setting an example which the older universities are slowly following. So far, it has succeeded in attracting few teachers, and those mostly of an inferior class; but the failure is due, not so much to any defects in the scheme, as to the general indifference of the public.

By far the most important event in the history of the college was the establishment of the examination of pupils. This was begun in 1850, and was in full operation in 1854; that is, four years before the university local examinations, and two years before those of the Society of arts. In spite of the competition from these and other examining boards, the college examinations have steadily

grown, till in the last year the numbers who presented themselves for the college certificates amounted to more than fifteen thousand, representing over four thousand schools. This number considerably exceeds the sum of the Oxford and Cambridge local candidates for 1886. Not only was the college first in the field of examinations, but it also took the lead in admitting girls to equal privileges with boys. Nor, as far as we can judge, is there any ground for the prevailing belief that the standard of the college is lower than that of the universities. Certainly this is not the opinion of the best judges, masters who prepare pupils for both examinations; and there can be no doubt that the examination syllabus of the college is more scientifically constructed, and insures a better curriculum for students, than that of either university. The explanation is obvious: it was originally drawn up, and has since been modified, not by university dons, but by practical school-masters.

A few words may be added as to the future of the college. In the past the main energies of the college have been expended on the examination of pupils; and probably few of its members are aware that there is not one word in their charter referring to such examinations, and that it is only by implication that they are authorized in conducting them and granting certificates. Now that the preceptors have built themselves a house, it is hoped that they will set to work in earnest to carry out the main intention of their founders. To offer examinations in the art of teaching is something; to provide lectures for teachers by such competent professors as Mr. James Sully, Canon Daniel, and Mr. Fitch, is more: but both these provisions combined fall far short of the training of teachers. This hope, we are glad to say, is likely to be fulfilled. At the last general meeting of the college, two resolutions were carried unanimously, — "that for the next three years a sum not exceeding three hundred pounds a year be devoted to scholarships for intending teachers, male and female;" and "that part of the surplus funds be allowed to accumulate for the purpose of establishing a training-college, or for promoting some other scheme for the training of teachers." These proposals appear to us most reasonable and prudent. The experiment of the Finsbury training-college proves that a superior normal school for men must for the present depend mainly on external support, and to launch out on such an undertaking without sufficient funds would be again to invite failure.

There are various other objects included in the charter of the college, to which it will doubtless hereafter apply itself. Such are a benevolent

fund for teachers, a pedagogic library, a bill for the registration of teachers; but, useful as all these objects are, they are subordinate to the primary aim of the college, the promotion of the training of teachers.

INFANT-SCHOOLS AND THE KINDERGARTEN.¹

Now that the universal necessity of education is recognized throughout the civilized world, the contest that remains is that concerning methods; and of this, the most important branch is that which relates to the very earliest period of education, namely, to the choice between the old system of the nursery or the infant schools, and that of Froebel, known as the kindergarten.

It would be obviously impossible to attempt here to give any thing like an exposition of this method, which was elaborated by its author as simply the first step and foundation of a systematically progressive education, extending from the earliest dawn to the ripening of the human faculties. The utmost that can be hoped for, in these brief remarks, is to bring into clear relief some of the most salient points of difference between the old and the new methods of infant-training.

First, then, apart from the inevitable effect of any school discipline upon the habits and conduct of children, the former aims mainly at instruction; the kindergarten, at harmonious development of the child's whole nature, instruction being a portion only of the training required for that purpose.

Next, as to the nature of the instruction given. The infant-school, which is bound to produce at a given time a certain proficiency in reading and writing, laboriously teaches the child to recognize and reproduce certain symbols, the real importance of which he naturally cannot realize. The kindergarten trains the child first to observe form, dimension, and number, in a great variety of amusing ways, with the help of color and of objects he can handle and examine. It teaches him to reproduce the forms observed, whether of natural objects or geometrical figures; to copy or combine out of his own fancy a variety of symmetrical designs, thereby giving a facility of apprehension and execution which makes the subsequent effort to recognize and trace letters and words comparatively easy. Thus the kindergarten system enables the children to attain the same proficiency in reading and writing, while much else has been learned on the way, and while the foundation has been laid for that accuracy and

¹ From the *London Journal of education*.