

A PARIS LAW EXAMINATION.

If the examinations at the Law School of the University of Paris are less searching than our hours-long written tests, I believe that they are a harder trial of the nerves. I came to this conclusion on seeing for the first time a French student lose his self-assurance and facile flow of words in the examination room before the gowned arbiters of his fate. When a Frenchman loses his speech it is certain that the cause is a serious one. "Quand un Français a des idées, il vent les imposes aux autres. Quand il n'en a pas, il le vent tout de même."

The examination I propose to describe was of the second year, for the degree of *licence en droit*. This degree corresponds to our bachelor of laws. It is the gateway through which one passes to all the judicial careers and is the gentleman's course for those who look forward to a political career.

The course for the degree occupies three years. If the law school examination in the United States admitted to court practice, the examination which I attended would have been in all respects parallel to a second-year final in one of our schools offering a three-year course. Our state bar examinations are an additional hazard which the French law student escapes since his law school is a state institution and two sets of examinations would be obviously superfluous.

I wandered into one of the amphitheatres of the Paris Law School one afternoon late in June after the lectures for the spring term had closed. I took a seat well forward among a score of students, a more than neatly dressed young girl, and two elderly gentlemen who had come presumably to see their sons give an account of their year's work.

The three candidates for examination were seated close together at a large oval table placed between the lecture rostrum and the banked rows of seats forming the amphitheatre. In each of two other rooms three more candidates were waiting the

entrance of the gowned professor, encouraged or discouraged according to their psychic make-up by an audience of interested friends and relatives, a few foreigners who, like myself, were there simply to observe, and a scattering of students who, I imagine, came to learn the particular professor's style of questioning.

The day, hour and examination room have been fixed for each student according to his order on the alphabetical list of the class.

To each of the three examination rooms a professor has been assigned. Together they form the jury. For about ten minutes the professor questions each of the candidates in turn upon a particular course, noting down the degree of excellence of their answers. Having questioned them all he moves to another examination room. Meanwhile in each of the other rooms the same process has been going on. At the end of a second period each professor moves on to a third room. By this simple scheme of rotation three professors examine orally nine students in an hour and a half. Put in this arithmetical form, one is tempted to calculate how many hours will be required by one faculty to examine seven thousand five hundred and seven students matriculated. But fortunately for the faculty of the Paris Law School all those thousands are not matriculated for degrees, and so, of course, do not come up for examination.

The examination terminated, the jury of professors confer. A vote is taken upon each of the candidates, whose merits are measured by a scale of five colors. White represents excellent; white-red, good; red, fair; red-black, poor, and black, bad. Thus each student receives three colors, one from each of the examining professors. A student who receives two red-black balls or worse fails.

The vote of the jury occupies but a few minutes. Within a half an hour after the examination, the results are posted. The name of a student *ajourné*, that is, who has failed, is never published, the letter *X* being substituted.

The curriculum of each year comprises six main subjects. Two periods, such as I have described, suffice to complete the

examination of the student in all branches. A student who fails to pass one of the periods of interrogation may present himself for re-examination in the fall.

Some weeks previous to examination each professor distributes a program of his course, indicating along very broad lines the subjects for which the student will be held responsible. It may happen that in a particular subject the student may not be examined by the professor who gave the course. He is supposed to be protected by the program in such case.

The questions I heard were of a general nature. It must be remembered that a whole year's work in a given course is examined in ten minutes. However, it must not be imagined that the questions cover the whole field. Beginning by some broad question, the professor easily lead the inquiry into the finer sub-divisions of the subject. The questions were such as could be framed upon a course of lectures supplemented by the reading of text-books. As the case system of study is not used, examination by hypothetical problems is not employed. Economy of time, too, requires an examination of a theoretical and text-book character.

I have no intention of putting in question the relative merits of oral and written examinations, but simply to conclude by pointing out certain important features of the French system.

Not only the professor's manner, putting the candidate at his ease or inspiring him with fear, may easily in a short oral examination tip the scales to one side or the other, but also his manner of framing the questions may have a great influence. In the examination I attended the shades of difference were clearly perceptible. One professor framed questions of a very leading character; another, in case of failure, made his questions more general or more specific as the case might be, striving to develop the subject in the student's mind; another never commented upon a question once put, but in case of failure passed to a new subject.

It will have been remarked that the two marks *admis*, "passed," and *ajourné*, "failed," are voted upon an *ensemble* of three subjects. While a student knows that his "passed" mark

consists, let us say, of a white and two red balls, he does not know what vote he received upon a particular course.

While the chances of cheating are reduced to a minimum, it would seem possible for a professor in rare cases to be influenced by political or other causes to pass or condition a student. It is interesting to know that cheating is punished by an imprisonment of from one month to three years and by a penalty of from one hundred to ten thousand francs.

Such, then, is the French law examination. I left impressed with the orderliness and dignity of it and I felt that it was held in respect by those who had to undergo it.

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Paris.