Education and the English Syllabus for University Entrance and H.S.C.

(In this article I offer for consideration certain views on English in education at the University Entrance and Higher School Certificate level in Ceylon. In so far as a general intention may be discerned behind the syllabus and questions in the examination, it is that of the Department of English as a whole. But for the particular interpretation of that purpose presented here, I must hold myself solely responsible).

IN the absence of a satisfactory substitute for examinations as a method of controlling and testing education, the best that can be done is to contrive a syllabus which should serve as fully as possible the ends of education. What these ends are, it is not easy to describe in general terms without sounding vague and pedantic; it is better to let them define themselves in relation to the particular syllabus under discussion. One point may be made at the outset. Education must be a process which includes the training to understand and judge the environment. "An education that conceives seriously its function in the modern world will, then, train awareness (*a*) of the general process of civilization . . . and (*b*) of the immediate environment, physical and intellectual—the ways in which it tends to affect taste, habit, preconception, attitude to life and quality of living . . . a critical habit must be systematically inculcated." (*Culture and Environment*—The Training of Critical Awareness, by F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, p. 4-5).

The examination consists of two papers, one on Prescribed Texts and the other on General English. The latter title was selected because of its elasticity.

As the Syllabus for 1948 says:

> "The paper will contain passages of prose and verse for criticism. Candidates may also be required to write an essay on a literary subject and to answer questions relating to their general reading. This paper is intended to test the candidate's ability to read sensitively and intelligently, whether it is a newspaper, advertisement, poem or novel he is dealing with, and to express himself efficiently. Candidates will be expected to have some knowledge of the way in which language works and the various purposes for which it is used; to be able to distinguish between different kinds of writing and to determine the aims, methods, sensibility and skilfulness of a writer by examining the way in which he uses language."

The relation of this paper to the one on Prescribed Texts is close. It is intended partly to help the student to acquire the technique of reading needed for dealing with the prescribed texts, and beyond that it emphasizes the connexion between reading well and writing well, and the relation of these skills to general intelligence and sensibility, and the adequacy of one's response to the difficult and complex conditions of modern living.

Paper I is intended to initiate the young student in a general way into the tradition of English literature through the close and intensive study of specified texts. The texts have to be carefully selected: they must be of undoubted literary merit, suitable to the age group 16 to 18, and must provide a good introduction to English literature. They have to be both representative and worthwhile, and as only a small number of books can be selected, these must be as adequate to the purposes of the paper as possible. These purposes include a training (i) of reading capacity, and (ii) in methods of literary study. These texts are to be regarded not as so much subject-matter to be memorised, but as material for training young people to read intelligently and sensitively, to make first-hand contacts with good writers, and to learn what literary art is, how it works and what it does for us.

The History of English Literature is not prescribed; this does not mean that no knowledge of the history of English literature will be necessary, indeed something more than this will be needed, but this knowledge will be ancillary to the study of the texts. The student will learn something of the life and thought, the social and political history of which these works are a part; he should have some insight into the way of life and feeling this literature represents. Historical scholarship, even at this stage, is indispensable but it is instrumental, not an end in itself. For instance, in order to respond adequately to a play of Shakespeare's a certain amount of knowledge of the Elizabethan Age is necessary—how people lived and thought and felt then, the kind of themes they liked to see on the stage, the structure and conventions of the Elizabethan theatre, etc. A poetic drama of Eliot's is written for quite different conditions, and a play of Shaw's depends for its success on a context and on conventions different from either of the others. Here historical scholarship is an essential aid. But in the critical evaluation of these different plays as works of art the method is the same, it is that of 'practical criticism.' In studying these texts the student, therefore, learns two things simultaneously: how to evaluate a work of literary art, and how to take the historical context into consideration in doing this. In reading a poem by Lodge or Donne or Dryden or Pope or Woodsworth or Arnold or Eliot, the method of critical analysis is the same, these are all structures built up of words, but the conventions are different: in reading Lodge it is important to remember therelation of the Elizabethan lyric to music, Donne was in revolt from Elizabethan lyrical conventions, and so on, and each of these poets belongs to a special cultural context and has an individual poetic idiom.

It is important to select texts to which, *at this level*, a worthwhile response is likely. *This is not the same thing as selecting texts 'within the experience' of this age group; indeed few books would be within the experience of young people of this age, the books themselves assist in deepening and widening experience.*

m this point of view *Julius Caesar* is a more suitable play for a boy or girl 16 than *Macbeth*. It is possible at this age to read *Macbeth* with enjoyment t it will hardly be a literary interest; more benefit could be derived from ss complex play like *Julius Caesar* or *King John* or *Romeo and Juliet*. It necessary, however, to remember that different levels of response are possible ore condemning a prescribed text as being too difficult. Within limits ere is an advantage in prescribing texts to which a wide range of reactions possible.

. The syllabus includes a small number of contemporary poems. This hould not need explanation. "To initiate into the idea of living tradition except in relation to the present is hardly possible. An addiction to literature that does not go with an interest in the literature of to-day, and some measure of intelligence about it, goes with the academic idea of tradition—traditionalism, that is, in the bad sense." (F. R. Leavis, *How to Teach Reading*).

The questions set on these books must be of such a kind as will give both students and teachers the right orientation. Questions of the type 'Write an appreciation of . . .' are as easy to set as to answer; they involve no knowledge in the asking, and can be answered with no first-hand knowledge of the text. Questions which merely solicit facts about the texts are, of course, a gift to the crammer and the coach. The best type of question is that which itself offers a criticism and asks the candidate to confirm or refute it from the evidence of his own reading. A question such as that set at the December, 1946, examination: "'Herbert is a sincere and sensitive poet and an accomplished artist.' Discuss" does not merely ask for facts, though it certainly demands a knowledge of the text; it requires, at a certain level, a critical approach and some skill in the selection and arrangement of material.

Such questions are intended to encourage a fresh and direct response to the text. It is the business of the teacher to try to get this response, and teaching literature, if it has any meaning, is training the reader to be able to make this response. The result of consulting literary histories or critical essays at an early stage in the study of the text is the substitution of the historian's or critic's version for the original, or the uncritical acceptance of a view which, even if it is correct, must be worked out for oneself to be valuable. Notes are even more dangerous; they are guzzled as examination fodder, and thrown up in the exam, no matter how little they have to do with the question. The examination is regarded as a test of memory, not of intelligence. Is there any use in swallowing and regurgitating masses of information *about* books and authors?

What all this establishes in the priority of practical criticism; the training of reading capacity must precede all other studies. This is the special purpose of Paper II.

In literature the aesthetic experience is organized by means of words, and words are the medium in which we live. Words are a part of everyday behaviour, a means of sharing experience, of satisfying our emotional and intellectual needs, of influencing and controlling behaviour, of getting things done. Language (spoken and written) is the art or technique which has made human civilization possible. "From the beginning civilization has been dependent upon speech, for words are our chief link with the past and with one another and the channel of our spiritual inheritance." (Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 320). The decline in speech which has taken place in the modern world is, therefore, significant and alarming ". . . for all kinds of utterances our performances, both as speakers (or writers) and listeners (or readers) are worse than those of persons of similar natural ability, leisure and reflection a few generations ago." (*Ibid.*, p. 340). Skill in using words as a speaker and as a writer, skill in interpreting the words of others as a listener or a reader is not just a desirable accomplishment like dancing or playing bridge: it is one of the basic skills that makes civilisation possible. This skill has to be acquired; it must be a part of everyone's education. The training to read literature should be a specialized form of a much larger discipline: the training to read and listen critically, to know how language works; the training of the critical intelligence to respond delicately and with discrimination to the uses of language at every level: literature, propaganda, advertising, argument, science. The aim of such a discipline will be to develop skill and sensitivity in interpretation and in expression. Mere literacy, without this skill, will not help very much; an unexpected result of compulsory education has been the enslavement of the new literate public by the printed word.

Words enter into all the activities of our lives; they command immense forces in modern civilization: the film, broadcasting, advertising, propaganda, the newspaper, the bestseller.[1] The development of a critical attitude to language gives some defence against these forces. It is the business of the school to educate children to speak, read and write accurately and with a proper sense of what words are doing; to train them to perceive the feelings and intentions behind words and to express their own thoughts and feelings precisely and attractively. Such a training will make the school boy and girl sensitive to the world in which they live, aware of the most significant developments in their environment. An accurate knowledge of the use of words is not only the beginning of literary discrimination; it is a means of clarifying one's own experiences.

1. A good deal of evidence on the perversion of what might have been valuable channels of increased cultural diffusion has been accumulated, and will provide the teacher with useful material. *E.g.* in Leavis and Thompson, *Culture and Environment*; Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and The Reading Public*; Leavis, *For Continuity*; D. Thompson, *Between The Lines*; and *The Voice of Civilization*; Manvell, *Film*; Albig, *Public Opinion*; Lambert, *Propaganda*; Angell, *The Press and The Organization of Society*.

The cultivation of this skill is not the business only of the teacher of language (the medium of instruction); every teacher uses this medium and is in consequence a teacher of language. But it is the *special* business of the teacher of language and literature.

Literature, as it is usually taught in schools at present, is of little educational value. It is a mere knowledge subject. ". . . there is no more futile study than that which ends with mere knowledge *about* literature. If literature is worth study, then the test of its having been so will be the ability to read literature intelligently, and apart from this ability an accumulation of knowledge is so much lumber." (F. R. Leavis, *Education and The University*, p. 67-8). Dr. Leavis is referring here to 'The University' but in Appendix II (which is a reprint of an earlier pamphlet entitled *How To Teach Reading*) he says on the subject of 'Reading In Schools':

> "With the universities ignoring their function, it would, of course, be idle to hope much of education in general. But what has been said has obvious applications at the school level, and much might be done if it were permitted, if there were teachers educated to do it, and if the examination system were not allowed to get in the way. Again the prior stress must fall on the training of sensibility, and this might profitably begin at an early age . . . But a serious concern for education in reading cannot stop at reading. Practical criticism of literature must be associated with training in awareness of the environment—advertising, the cinema, the press, architecture and so on, . . ." (p. 137-8).

What is 'practical criticism'? It is the training of reading capacity. "By training of reading capacity I mean the training of perception, judgment and analytic skill commonly referred to as 'practical criticism.'" (Leavis, *Ibid.*, p. 69). There is no 'Manual of Practical Criticism' which demonstrates in detail the nature of this discipline, its key function, and the way in which it can be extended from the analysis of particular passages to the evaluation of the work as a whole, and thence to the study of a writer's entire achievement and of the period to which he belongs. There is a brief but suggestive discussion of these points, and of the relation of other academic studies (literary and linguistic) to practical criticism, with "a certain amount of detailed illustration" of analytic method in Chapter III of Dr. Leavis's *Education and The University*, and in Appendix II. There is also *Understanding Poetry* by Brooks and Warren, the best introduction to the reading of poetry yet written. For examples of good practice in criticism, there is the work of T. S. Eliot. It is unnecessary to mention other books, bibliographies are easily available. There is now ample assistance in practical criticism both for the general reader and teacher, and for the young student.

Critical theory, like historical scholarship and linguistic studies, is an essential part of the student's equipment, but it is instrumental: all these are aids. It is the assessment of poetry that is called 'practical criticism,' but

the question 'is this a good poem?' is related to the question 'what is Poetry ?'[2] As Eliot says, "... criticism is that department of thought which either seeks to find out what poetry is, what its use is, what desires it satisfies, why it is written and why read, or recited; or which, making some conscious or unconscious assumption that we do know these things, assesses actual poetry." (Introduction to *The Use Of Poetry And The Use of Criticism*).

Criticism must be distinguished from 'appreciation' in the sense of the kind of understanding that is intuitive and undisciplined, an account of the personal feelings of the reader about the literary product. Criticism is the attempt to bring to consciousness and make specific the response to the total organization of the work of art by the analysis of its local and particular effects, and in that process the response itself becomes more delicate and complete. But this is different from a description of the effect of the art-work upon the reader. In a critical analysis the effects on the reader can only be discussed in terms of the object, the poem or other literary work. The poem itself is something created, or re-created, when we are responding appropriately to the works on the page.

> "What we call analysis is, of course, a constructive or creative process. It is a more deliberate following-through of that process of creation in response to the poet's words which reading is. It is a re-creation in which, by a considering attentiveness, we ensure a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness." (Leavis, p. 70).

In analysing the poem, or what is created in us as readers, it is only the words that we can point to—their quality, the patterns they make, the tropes and images, the rhythm, the arrangement in lines. This is what Joyce meant when he said that "The critic is he who is able by means of the signs which the artist affords to approach the temper which has made the work and to see what is well done therein and what it signifies." It is in this sense that criticism is the study of technique and "the only useful criticism must be technical." Here technique is the expression of the poet's sensibility and it cannot be studied and judged apart from the sensibility it expresses. Style is "really a way of looking at things, or of *experiencing* things." Obviously this has nothing to do with the conception of style as something applied from the outside, or with the technical apparatus the student is provided with in such primers as Lamborn's 'Rudiments of Criticism.'[3]

Can criticism be precise and systematic? Is it not true that "taste after all is relative?" What becomes of 'differences of taste'? If there is a precise value to be attached to a work of art, how can one account for the different valuations set on the same work by different ages and by good critics in the same period?

[2] To test this kind of knowledge, 'Candidates may also be required to write an essay on a literary subject.'

[3] John Crowe Ransom gives an interesting, and amusing, account of the errors into which this kind of 'technical critic' falls in the essay entitled 'The Poet as Woman' in *The World's Body*.

The judgment of a critic is, of course, conditioned both by his own personality and by the age to which he belongs. This is why, as readers, we must be equipped to understand and evaluate the judgments of others. Shakespeare criticism, for instance, cannot be appreciated without some understanding of the time and of the place in which it is written, and of the personality of the critic. "The views of Shakespeare taken by different men at different times in different places form an integral part of the development and change of European civilization during the last three hundred years." (Eliot).

It should be obvious that 'taste' is something personal and that one may dislike a work of art which one's critical judgment says is good. "To set before oneself the goal of being able to enjoy, and in the proper objective order of merit, all good poetry is to pursue a phantom, ... the man whose taste in poetry does not bear the stamp of his particular personality, so that there are differences in what he likes from what we like, as well as resemblances, and differences in the way of liking the same things, is apt to be a very uninteresting person with whom to discuss poetry." (Eliot).

This does not mean that there is no "proper objective order of merit"; all the same there will be a certain amount of literary ground whose value will always be in dispute (the controversies over Milton's poetry are an illustration of this). But even here the good critic will be doing very valuable work if he supports his judgment by an intelligent and sensitive analysis of the text. There can be no doubt that where there is a genuine critical discipline, when "criticism has been developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons," there will be little disagreement either in the estimation of general values or in the judgment of particular works, though the emphasis will always fall differently for different readers.

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The paper on General English is designed to encourage the training of reading capacity, and the questions are intended to test the candidate's ability to read attentively and intelligently, and with some understanding of what to expect from good verse and prose. The paper set in December, 1946, contains, in addition to essay subjects, a poem and a passage of prose with questions framed to direct the candidate's attention to particular aspects of the text. It is of some interest to analyse the answers in order to determine what response the schools have made to the requirements of this paper. To anticipate a little, the results show that good teachers can do much even for weak students, and that where the examination has been taken seriously, those preparing for it have been taught at least to read attentively. Even where the positive achievement is not remarkable, most of these young people have been told or have learnt (the influence of Professor Ludowyk's *Marginal Comments* cannot be missed) what reading is *not*. That is a good start. The 'message hunters'

and ' the technical critics (who count the syllables, list the tropes, work out rhyme-schemes) have all but disappeared. Few took refuge in paraphrase, and few regarded poetry as ' fine sentiments in fine language.'

The comments on the prose passage showed that little attention had been given to the uses of this medium. Many, especially those who could not write grammatically themselves, pounced on the errors in grammar and proceeded to condemn the author (identifying him with his creations) as illiterate. But here, too, there were good answers, and signs in others of careful reading, and of an appreciation of what was required. On the whole, the prose passage was a better test of general intelligence : it afforded the merely verbal critics an opportunity of displaying themselves.

On a Dead Child.

Perfect little body, without fault or stain on thee,
With promise of strength and manhood full and fair !
Though cold and stark and bare,
The bloom and the charm of life doth awhile remain on thee.

Thy mother's treasure wert thou ;—alas ! no longer
To visit her heart with wondrous joy ; to be
Thy father's pride ;—ah, he
Must gather his faith together, and his strength make stronger.

To me, as I move thee now in the last duty,
Dost thou with a turn or gesture anon respond ;
Startling my fancy fond
With a chance attitude of the head, a freak of beauty.

Thy hand clasps, as 'twas wont, my finger, and holds it ;
But the grasp is the clasp of Death, heartbreaking and stiff ;
Yet feels to my hand as if
'Twas still thy will, thy pleasure and trust that enfolds it.

So I lay thee there, thy sunken eyelids closing,—
Go lie thou there in thy coffin, thy last little bed !—
Propping thy wise, sad head,
Thy firm, pale hands across thy chest disposing.

So quiet ! doth the change content thee ?—Death, whither hath he taken thee ?
To a world, do I think, that rights the disaster of this ?
The vision of which I miss,
Who weep for the body, and wish but to warm thee and awaken thee ?

Ah ! little at best can all our hopes avail us
To lift this sorrow, or cheer us, when in the dark,
Unwilling, alone we embark
And the things we have seen and have known and have heard of, fail us.

Death is a common occurrence, and we associate with it a certain pattern of behaviour, a set of tendencies to behave in a certain way, to feel certain emotions and to think certain thoughts. Yet the fact of death comes home differently to each one of us according to the particular occasion, our upbringing

and our nature. Few, even of those who have the ability, make the effort to clarify this (or any other) experience, to look at it with detachment, as one inspects an object, to analyse it and place it in relation to other experiences. Our thoughts and feeling are vague and unorganized ; they tend to escape from the precise occasion into generalizations. Such emotional experiences are also the material of the literary artist. But while our experiences remain disparate and unorganized, the artist because he is more sensitive, and because of his greater awareness and receptivity, is compelled to give order and shape to his experiences—in the case of the literary artist, through words. " He is the point at which the growth of the mind shows itself." (I. A. Richards), or in the words of Joyce " The poet is the intense centre of the life of his age."

The good poet does not describe his feelings or make general statements. Ideas and emotions are abstract and general ; poetry is concrete, it furnishes us not with generalizations but with particular instances. Poetry presents thoughts and feelings " by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world." (Eliot). That the experience is objectified means that the poet has given *form* to his feelings and thoughts, found a specific situation, an " objective correlative " for his experience.

The basis of this poem is a common, even commonplace general idea ; and yet an important idea. A poet may imagine he has experienced it freshly, in a new way, but may in reality be reacting merely to the idea or situation in the abstract ; his thoughts and feelings may be the general ones that are connected in our minds with the idea of death, especially the deaths of children. The particular death may be only an occasion for giving vent to these preconceived and ready-made ideas. Or the poet may really have had an individual experience but have failed to create it in words. In either case the result would be a bad poem.

A reader may fail in his judgment of a poem because he is responding to the idea or situation in the abstract (here to the ' poetical ' treatment of death), and not to the poem in its particularity ; the poem may automatically release in him ' fixed conventionalized reactions ' or ' stock-responses ; ' or he may attend to the poem but misconstrue it.

It is not possible to decide whether a poem is good or bad by ' the light of nature '; it requires intelligent and trained attention to the materials of which poem is composed. *At the level required here,* no more is asked for than the ability to read attentively and intelligently, and this supposes some knowledge of what poetry is and how it works, and some experience of fairly obviously good and bad poems ; that is to say, some elementary work in practical criticism, discussion-work on a variety of examples, designed to train reading capacity and to give the reader a growing confidence in his ability to discriminate. He

must have learned to respond appropriately to the words by means of which the experience is organized, so that the experience, such as it is, is re-created for him. He must be alert, discriminating, suggestible and try to keep out of his reading irrelevant associations and interfering elements of past experience such as other treatments of the same theme; he should have no pre-suppositions as to the state of mind or method of treatment 'appropriate' to such a subject.

In the case of this poem, the theme itself is a common one; the basic themes of poetry are limited in number and recur. It is capable of many different developments, and many poems, good and bad, have been written on it. But if this is a good poem, the reader will feel it as a new experience, either as an actual experience of something fresh, or as a deepened and widened version of the familiar. What we have been familiar with on the level of general statement comes to us with the vividness and the surprise of the actual. The kind of response we give to the poem will depend on its form; if we are able to respond freshly, as to a new experience, it is because the poet by his selection and arrangement of facts and details, by his use of metre, imagery, diction, tone, etc., has bodied forth his own attitude and feelings; has dramatized the experience, created a new way of thinking and feeling about death.

Into our judgment of the poem two factors would have entered: the quality of the ideas, and that which makes them poetry, the technique. Obviously the prose content, that which can be detached from the poem by a process of abstraction in the form of a paraphrase, must be reasonably serious and important; however simple and familiar the ideas may be they must not be such as a normal adult mind would consider childish or silly and superficial. They may not accord with the reader's own belief or experience, but they must be such as a serious and intelligent person can hold in the dramatic situation implied or stated in the poem.

The prose content is something thin, abstract and general; it is like a scientific formula, or a moral adage, or the text for a sermon. The poem itself has the density, complexity, the richness of suggestion and particularity of an actual experience or an actual object. Criticism is the examination of the poem—the form into which the poet has cast his utterance. The critic has to consider the part played by the fictions and inventions of the poet, his selection of detail, the metrical structure, the tropes, images and combinations of images, the diction, idiom and verbal play—all, in short, out of which the poem has been built up, not as separable elements but as integral parts of the total organic structure which the poem is.

Candidates were asked to write an analysis of the poem involving the following points:—(*a*) The feelings suggested to the poet by the dead child. (*b*) The use of concrete detail in the poet's treatment of his theme. (*c*) The function of the rhythm in supporting and stressing the poet's meaning.

The level required could not be high. Candidates were asked to define the feelings suggested to the poet, which of course involved considering whether the feelings were appropriate, and they were practically told that the right way to decide this was to read the signs afforded by the poet, in particular the use of detail and the rhythm. They were not asked to say how valuable the feeling was—questions of relative value are obviously outside the experience of readers of this age—but the analysis would involve deciding whether this is a good, that is to say, successful, poem.

There were candidates who were able, at this level, to recognise the difficulties and dangers of the subject, and to define reasonably well the kind of feelings suggested to the poet, and the function of the details and the rhythm in the poem.

(In the following extracts from the answers of candidates the prefixed letters are used to divide the extracts, roughly, into groups. For example, A1 to A11 are excerpts from the answers of eleven different candidates dealing with the poet's feelings, his selection and use of details, phrasing, etc. B1 to B7 are the comments of 7 candidates on the rhythm of the poem. Where quotations from the same candidate appear in different groups, he is identified by a double letter, thus: B2 (A3). The groups A, B, D represent the work of good readers; E to H are examples of unsatisfactory, poor or bad reading. I have used italics wherever they seem helpful. It is unnecessary to distinguish the few cases where the italics are the candidates).

A1. There is a tremendous and bitter regret that runs throughout the poem . . . (This critic is given to overstatement). Nowhere does the sorrow diffuse out into vagueness or generalized expression. The emotion does not turn to sentiment (he means 'sentimentality'), though one does note a certain suggestion of this in the line.

'Go lie thou there in thy coffin, thy last *little bed*' which has too much associative and evocative echo of Richard II's self-pitying 'a little, little, little grave.'

(The candidate's association of 'little' in this context with sentimentality is mainly a private one, his reading is infl enced by his recollection of the line in Richard II).

The poem opens directly without any expression of sorrow or grief.

'Perfect little *body*, without fault or stain on thee.'

The use of the word *body* is remarkable. It brings out *in a sudden contrast* the whole essence of the poem. 'Body' has simultaneously the meaning of being a corpse and secondly 'body' concentrates within it a certain associative suggestion of physical loveliness, strengthened by 'perfect' and 'without fault or stain' . . . Throughout the poem this contrast is skilfully maintained by the detailed description of the dead boy—for each detail serves to emphasize the initial contrast of death and life, present together in the boy—

'Promise of *strength* and *manhood* full and *fair*
Though *cold* and *stark* and *bare*.

The way in which the feeling is related to this contrast is noted by most of the good readers :

A2. The three words 'cold' and 'stark' and 'bare' portray the horror of death and this is heightened by juxtaposing the idea of the fullness and richness of life in the next line: 'The bloom and the charm of life.'

A3 connects this contrast with the dramatic situation:

In this poem the use of concrete detail serves to make the picture more realistic. The poet represents the picture as if he were actually looking on the dead child. This adds poignance to the scene for *we are made to see the presence of death amid the bloom of life*.

It makes us think that the poet is describing the picture and his feelings as they come to him. We see him watching as all this passes inside his heart.

A4. The word *cold* not only suggests the sensation of cold touch but also cold in the sense of unresponsive.

A1 provides us with a starting-point for considering some interesting comments on the significance of certain words and details.

In stanza 3 the boy, for a sudden instant, seems to come alive under his hands . . . 'Startling my *fancy fond*.' He is startled by the sudden experiencing of *the two seemingly contradictory emotions*. Here the word *fond* is used with unusually brilliant precision. First it suggests his affection, his love for the dead child, in the modern usage of the word 'fond,' while simultaneously 'fond' in the sense in which it was used in the 17th century means 'foolish.'

This candidate has noted here one of the most striking characteristics of the poem: the poet's Tone—his attitude toward his subject. The poet is *conscious* of the impulse to give way to his feeling, there is a fine, grave restraint with which the poet sees this :

A3 comments: In 'fancy fond' the poet suggests both the foolishness of his imagination as well as his love for the child.

On 'a freak of beauty' A1 notes: *Freak* is of special interest here—it is a word which though meaning 'different from the normal' is generally used in connexion with disfigurement and deformity. Now it is used unusually, 'a freak of *beauty*' and thus the contrast of the dead child being so lovely is maintained.

In stanza 4, A1 sees the impulse "toward sentimental indulgence" and the way in which it is controlled :

'Thy hand clasps, as 'twas wont, my finger, and holds it : '

This seems to veer dangerously toward sentimental indulgence in the 'as 'twas wont,' until the harsh statement which follows in its tremendous poignancy of grief, corrects the view.—

'But the *grasp* is the *clasp* of Death, *heartbreaking* and *stiff*.'

Here . . . the grasp of the child's hand, full of evocative and affectionate memories, as the previous line conveys, becomes suddenly to him the hard grasp of Death.

A5. The ideas conveyed to the poet are that in that little handclasp of the dead child are confidence and joy—the thought that the child clasps the poet's hands of his own accord. Death seems to the poet something 'stiff and heartbreaking', and the feeling is one of great grief at this death.

A6. The familiar reference to a child grasping a finger does much to bring the dead child close.

A3 brings out the effect of the rhythmical arrangement :

In 'But the grásp is the clásp of Déath,' we get another example of rhythm well used. The anapaests in 'but the grásp' and 'is the clásp' emphasize 'grasp' and 'clasp'; so does the functional internal rhyme. These anapaests with their fast movement are followed by an iamb, 'of Déath.' It gives a great emphasis to 'Death' and creates an impression of finality.

The 'sense of finality,' so strong an element in the feeling, was noted by others :

A7. 'Go lie thou there in thy coffin, thy last little bed !' expresses the poet's sense of the utter inability of man to thwart his fate—the coming of death—and the sense of final end that death brings with it in spite of the hope of continued life hereafter . . . (The word *last*) gives a sense of finality, a sense of irrecoverability. This feeling finds confirmation in the 'last duty' of the third verse. The repetition of the word gives emphasis.

A8. 'Last *little* bed' suggests the extreme fondness of feeling. His repetition of *last*—'last duty', 'last bed'—shows how he feels —everything being over ; a gloom is attached to it.

Three other comments are worth quoting for their evidence of careful reading :

19. The use of the word *little* conveys a feeling of fondness for the child ; it is suggestive of a child's weakness ; while the rest of the line conveys his innocence, 'without fault or stain on thee.' Here we find the poet using the concrete image of *stain* to convey the abstract quality of innocence.

A10. The word *together* shows that his faith is broken and scattered.

A11. The poet must be given credit for the phrase 'gather his faith together' which implies that the child's death had shattered the father's faith.

An experienced reader would probably pick out the rhythm as the most significant element in the organization of the poem. It is in tune with the mood of intimate communion with the dead child, and of serious and quiet reflection. It carries the shifts of thought and the flow of feelings, through the rather elaborate pattern and rich texture of the stanzas, with the flexibility of idiomatic speech. It is due to the absorbing power of the rhythm that one's attention is never distracted from the thoughts and feelings to the metrical structure, or the (on inspection) elaborate end-rhymes and rich effects of alliteration, assonance and internal rhyming. The elegiac effect of the feminine rhymes in the first and fourth lines of the stanza, and the prominence of the short third line, work unobtrusively. Even the use of the biblical or liturgical 'thee,' 'dost,' etc., goes with a general effect of ritual created predominantly by the rhythm.

Many candidates recognised the quality and importance of the rhythm in this poem.

B1. Though each stanza has a pattern of enclosed rhymes, this is almost apt to be ignored since the speech rhythm dominates. The speaking idiom which is employed throughout the poem gives it a certain sincerity and immediacy of feeling :

So quiet ! doth the change content thee ? . . . (Quotes the stanza). The broken rhythm of this passage brings out the doubt and conflict that reigns within the poet's mind. Further the frequent occurrence of run-on lines gives the poem a peculiar smooth-running and unified effect.

B2 (A3), whose analysis of the rhythm of the 2nd line of stanza 2 has been quoted notes the stressing of each of the adjectives in

Though cóld and stárk and báre.

". . . The repeated 'and' also gives the impression that the poet is adding these qualities as they occur to him . . . in the 5th stanza the accented syllables following one upon the other make us pause after each, adding emphasis to their meaning, as in 'wise, sad head' and 'firm, pale hands.' The pause after 'So quiet !' gives us, when we take it in connection with the meaning, an impression of the poet amazed.

Here is an interesting comment on the effect of the placing of 'Unwilling' in the last stanza :

> B3. The comma after 'Unwilling' produces an effect of groping and hesitating in the dark.

B4 makes a good effort to follow the rhythmical effects in stanzas 4-6:

> The poet's sorrow seems to choke him, for this verse comes jerkily :
>
> Thy hand clasps, as 'twas wont, my finger, and hold it :
>
> But the grasp is the clasp of Death, heartbreaking and stiff ; . . . and the rise in tone at 'heartbreaking' seems to express the climax of sorrow. Slow rhythm, however, ends the verse (*i.e.* stanza). The next verse, as it describes the poet's actions on the child, has a slow even metre (he means 'rhythm') suggesting resignation. The next verse—its rhythm shows that the poet is *not* resigned. The questions are quick to the ear and in contrast 'So quiet !' and 'Death ' are decidedly slow-moving.

B5 remarks that–

> . . . what in fact gives us the greater perception of the feelings of the writer, *that preserves the poem from any possibility of being banal, is the rhythm*, . . .
> And as here—
>
> Must gather his faith together and his strength make stronger
>
> The effect is one of contemplative deliberation, succeeding as it does to the references to the 'treasure' and 'pride.' Or here, again, with the pauses and the hesitations, it is almost a slow monody of pain.
>
> But the grasp is the clasp of Death, heartbreaking and stiff
> Yet feels to my hand as if
> 'Twas still thy will.

Two stanzas in this poem seem to offer some support to the unsympathetic reader, whom the subject has put on his guard, and who hastily concludes that the poem is a 'wail of pity and sympathy indulged in.' Even quite good readers are made uncomfortable by them and only a few are able to see that those features which seem to be objectionable when viewed in isolation are successfully assimilated to the tone and feeling of the poem. The suspicious and not-to-be-caught out readers have a good time at the expense of the poet :

> H1. The whole treatment of the theme is the usual lachrymose style which is found only too often in the obituary columns of the Ceylon Daily News. The poet feels that this is an occasion for the display of sorrow and he commences to give vent to his feelings by an unstinted use of marks of exclamation—'alas ! no longer ' . . ., 'ah, he must ' . . ., and so on . . . And in the end he tries to strike a moral tone of the futility of life . . .

> H2. The next stanza is maddeningly cheap and artificial. I cannot for one instant see how and why one whole stanza has been devoted to portray the grief of the parents and that too in a manner that savours too strongly of a cheap funeral oration. '*Thy mother's treasure . . . wondrous joy* ' is a very unsatisfactory and far too long a description. 'Wondrous Joy' has biblical associations and 'mother's treasure' is cheap fiction, and when combined with *the father's grief*, again exaggerated, serves to produce a feeling of repulsion on the part of the reader. Every line is a mournful wail. Indeed it is sickening . . .
>
> The last stanza is positively ridiculous. 'To lift this . . . dark ' is a sonorous nothing. The last line has been used in countless sermons and should never have been included.

> H3. All the conventional counters are juggled with a conformity which is tedious in the extreme. (Quotes stanza 2).—the pious sentiment of motherly love, with the love of the father thrown in for weightage, and a pat on the shoulder to the

> father to round off the verse. '*Thy mother's treasure*', '*wondrous joy*'—one could hardly employ more hackneyed phrases . . . even if one tried . . .
>
> . . . when in the dark,
> Unwilling, alone we embark.
> Andthe things we have seen and have known
> and have heard of, fail us (!!)
>
> The last line is a particularly choice morsel of platitude.

Here is a more moderate criticism of stanza 2 :

> A7. He refers to the child as the '*mother's treasure*'; it is a rather common and hackneyed image used without much precision. The poet mourns over the fact that the child can no longer be his mother's '*wondrous joy*', a vague and blurred image again, nor his '*father's pride.*'

The objection to 'mother's treasure' and 'father's pride' is that they are cliches ; when considered apart from their context in the poem, they jar. But the context gives them particularity (they are used deliberately by the poet), and the rhythm assimilates them to the flow of feeling. B5 (who has already been quoted on the function of the rhythm) says of stanza 2 :

> Now there is in the reference to 'mother's treasure, and 'father's pride' and especially owing to the presence of the 'alas!' a certain danger of sentimentality—probably because of the commonplace nature of the sentiments expressed. But, however, one is prevented from the necessity for that conclusion by *the concrete detail* which the poet employs, and which point certainly to the poet having definitely experienced something intensely.

> B6(A8). The difference in metre in the second verse helps to accentuate the poet's feeling at the death of the child. He seems almost incoherent as is suggested by the placing of the word 'alas !' and by the exclamational 'ah ' as it occurs at the end of the line occupying a place of emphasis. The slightly discordant rhythm of this verse expresses the poet's troubled state of mind.

Many candidates, good and bad, noted the 'tendency to philosophise' in the last stanza :—

> C1. The last verse seems to be the moral of the poem.

> C2. Right up to the beginning of the last verse the poet keeps steady and even, but having come to this he breaks off trying to moralize . . . 'Ah little at best can our hopes avail us ...' and plunges head foremost into an abyss of Tennysonian philosophy.

It is the rhythm predominantly that makes us feel the thoughts in this stanza as a strongly personal attitude. The distribution of stresses is worth noting ; in the second line one feels the sense of an oppressive burden through the image called up by the heavily accented verb '*lift*'; the placing of '*Unwilling, alone*' is very effective ; the movement of the last line, which brings one with a slight shock to '*fail us.*' In this last line the rhythm suggests that it is all of a piece—the hopeless wanness is to continue—when the '*fail*' comes as a little surprise ; although the meaning needs it, it comes through as something unexpected.

Perhaps the following comment is an attempt to describe this effect of the last line :

B6. In the last line there is the monotony in the rhythm with which he emphasizes the unhopeful and dreary nature of our hopes.

And the things we have séen and have knówn and have héard of, fáil ús.

But there is a slight alteration when it comes to the last stress, when the stress falls on 'fail,' and brings the poem to a successful end.

One or two final points :

D1 comments on " The orderly development of the feeling."

D2. The poet is absolutely in the grip of grief for the dead child. He is overcome by it, still there is neat order in all that he has to say.

D3. Right through the poem one finds that there is a kind of firmness of feeling. Nothing is vague. He does not lose himself in his sorrow or give himself up to rampant emotionalism.

No question was asked specifically on the Tone, but these, and other candidates, noted how well the dramatic situation is put, and the attitude and mood of the poet.

The main success of the poem is in the Tone—the poet is able to place himself in the situation of the pathos of the death of the child whom he loved and yet able to detach himself from it and perform the last duties. There is a satisfying adequacy in the attitude—the impulse to give way to the sentimentality of moaning for the loss of the loved object is there, and at the same time there is a fine, grave restraint with which the poet sees this ('fancy fond,' and stanzas 4 and 6 particularly). It is good reverie. The poet gets his attitude across in the rhythm of the stanzas, there is a good balance between the tendency to moan and quiet statement.

The extracts quoted, from the answers it is true of quite a large number of candidates, give a fairly complete picture of the kind of success this poem achieves. No candidate could reasonably be expected to notice everything, but a fair number were able to read the poem responsively and to given an intelligent analysis of it.

Those who could make nothing of the poem were the hopelessly unintelligent, and the inarticulate. It is useless asking a person who cannot understand and use a language to read poetry written in it. Between these hopeless cases and the good readers, there were candidates who exhibited defects of various kinds. The most annoying were the 'clever' and 'knowing' type, those with just enough ability to be corrupted by a smattering of critical theory. They suspect the presence of 'stock-responses', 'insincerity', and 'sentimentality' everywhere, and are much too clever to be caught out. Then there were those for whom no amount of critical training can do much—he merely dull. 'Practical Criticism' becomes in their hands a kind of abracadabra. There were the lazy readers who could not be bothered to make the effort of

concentraton required of them. Having glanced through the poem, they proceeded to produce a highly imaginary version of it in prose. Finally there were quite a number who showed signs of ability and interest but had received little assistance, or the wrong kind of training.

This candidate is hardly literate :

E1. He delves his mind on to the heights the child would have attained on reaching manhood . . . 'Bloom' suggests effectively the tenderness, puerility, the young years, and these awake strange memories to the reader : 'The days of our youth were the days of our glory.' . . . 'a freak of beauty' suggests the beauty of the young body. It is almost a stone's throw from Keats' 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'

There are much worse cases, candidates who cannot write English at all. The inability to understand and use language goes commonly with general inexperience of life, a blunt intelligence and deficient sensibility, of which the inability to respond to literature is only a symptom. Here are young people who lack even a minimal knowledge of their environment. How else is one to account for the nonsense in their interpretation of the simple situation implied in 'last duty'?

E2. The poet gives a very pathetic account of what the child would have been if he grew up into manhood . . . The poet may have been one of the polebearers (sic,—'pallbearers ?') as he says –' To me as I move thee now in the last duty.' The poet feels that it is the last honour one can give to a dead person . . . He wonders if the dead child would peep out from the coffin and respond to his thoughts . . . Having taken the coffin to the burial grounds he lays it down, for the child to rest in peace in his last little bed which is the coffin (grave) . . . The poet comes to the conclusion that when everything fails us, we will comfort ourselves saying that a little thing done well is worth while than a great thing done hopelessly . . .

E3. From the 3rd stanza one can assume that here the poet is the grave digger or perhaps a person whose task it is to bury dead bodies.

The inability to understand the ordinary prose sense of words is naturally accompanied by literalism :

E4. Cold no doubt, but why stark and bare ? except if unclothed, which is an unsupported view . . . The stanza (2) shows the poet's incapacity to understand the true significance of death. The cry 'alas !' shows it. The theme, of the whole poem seems 'We look before and after And pine for what is not.

Occasionally one meets in an intelligent candidate the kind of literal mind which is not suggestible to the effects of poetry, it turns all to prose :

F1. The use of 'stark' is brilliant, and brings in its train all the stiffness, *the blood-congealed associations of a corpse.* The last verse shows that the boy is just dead, that the body is not in '*the advanced state of decomposition*' that one reads about so often in the newspaper descriptions of dead bodies . . . The 'disposing' of the hands across the chest is the conventional attitude *in which a corpse is lowered into the grave.* The word 'firm' is used in the sense of being deathly stiff, unyielding, *due to the coagulation of the blood after death.*

He takes the words piece-meal, turns the poem into prose, and finds the result " very mediocre." " There are no exquisite turns of phrase, no effective

manipulation of detail, only the mere setting down of observations on the body of a dead child and the consequent regret which, everybody knows, will obviously follow :"

Here is the reader who adds out of his imagination and invents a poem of his own :

> G1. It was sad to look at the child's head, full of golden curls and a fine broad forehead . . .

This candidate is also susceptible to the imaginary effects of sounds :

> The 'l' sounds in 'last' and 'little' are weak and they remind us of the weakness of a small child.

Another candidate found in the l-sounds of the last stanza "a strong suggestions of loneliness."

The technical critics were, however, few, and, happily, this type of note was exceptional :

> The rhyme scheme is a, b, b, a and the 3rd line is shorter than their predecessors, and is followed by a long line. Rhythm here has greatly helped the poet to emphasize, smoothly condole, and thus make the meaning vivid.

Three examples of 'superior,' slashing criticism have already been given ; here is a little more from H3, who takes the poem apart and condemns it piece-meal, without regard to the relation of the elements to one another and to the total organization of the poem.

> H3. 'With promise of strength and manhood full and fair.'
> This is a grandiose platitude in the best tradition of the Daily News Blue Page. The contrasting sentiment expressed towards the end of the first stanza is equally vacuous:
> 'The bloom and the charm of life doth awhile remain on thee.'
> The unfortunate bard seems to be labouring under the delusion that the use of words like 'doth' for 'does' and 'thee' for 'you' without having anything to say is enough to write poetry . . .
>
> I have tried to show that 'the poet's meaning' is here nothing but a mass of conventionality and unrealized personal regret. The question of 'stressing and supporting the poet's meaning' does not, therefore, seem relevant here, for conventionality of sense usually carried with it an emptiness of rhythm. The rhythm here is as barren as the content, if one can split them in that arbitrary fashion. (Excactly what he does). . . The verse with its 2 short lines (evidence of careless reading) sandwiched in between 2 long ones is in no way integrally connected to the sense, and does not help at all in reinforcing it.

Here are, finally, two quotations from candidates who have been fed on a diet of critical theory ; they have the technical jargon pat :

> H4. A careful analysis of the poem reveals *the unrealized response* he tries to convey . . . these feelings and ideas *bear no touch of freshness or particularity* . . . they are *stock responses* to an event of this nature . . . This *sentimentality* . . . His use of language *tends towards elaboration rather than concentration*, which we expect from poetry.
>
> H5. In the next 2 stanzas the writer attempts to be 'poetic' and the result is maudlin *sentimentality*. The poet's fanciful thoughts concerning the grasp of the child are incongruous with *the powerful charge of sorrow that we would expect* in this kind

> of poem. . . . Although the poet's experience may have been valuable in itself yet he has not succeeded in communicating it. The chief defect of the poem is the rigidity of the metre, the close *attention given to rhyme at the expense of meaning* . . . Death is so real in human life that any attempt to be 'poetic' about it inevitably results in semtimentality.

Candidates who write like this have been led to believe that poems fall into well-defined classes, and that when you have spotted the class (Poems on Death for instance), you can apply to the particular example your model critique.

The Prose Passage.

Candidates were asked to "read carefully through the following passage and then attempt the question below :—"

> The door of the cavern was big enough to roll a hogshead in and on one side of the door the floor stuck out a little big and was flat and a good place to build a fire on. So we built it there and cooked dinner.
>
> We spread the blankets inside for a carpet, and eat our dinner in there. We put all the other things handy at the back of the cavern. Pretty soon it darkened up and begun to thunder and lighten ; so the birds was right about it. Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely ; and the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby ; and here would come a blast of wind that would bend the trees down and turn up the pale underside of the leaves ; and then a perfect ripper of a gust would follow along and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild ; and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest—fst ! it was as bright as glory and you'd have a little glimpse of tree tops a-plunging about, away off yonder in the storm, hundreds of yards further than you could see before ; dark as sin again in a second, and now you'd hear the thunder leg go with an awful crash and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling down the sky towards the under side of the world, like rolling empty barrels down stairs, where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know.
>
> 'Jim, this is nice,' I says. 'I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here. Pass me along another hunk of fish and some hot corn-bread.'
>
> (a) What is this writer's intention ?
> (b) What methods does he use in carrying out his intention ?
> (c) Would you call this a successful piece of writing ? Give reasons for your answer.
> (d) What kind of book does this extract come from ?

From a close examination of the passage one could infer that it is probably an extract from a work of fiction (a story of adventure perhaps) ; it tells how two persons have made themselves at home in a cavern—they are probably out on a picnic or an adventure, they are obviously enjoying themselves. The speaker uses the natural colloquial idiom of a person who hasn't had much schooling, if any at all. Presently there comes on a terrific thunder-storm. From the warm shelter of the cave the course of the furious storm outside is followed with enjoyment. The snugness of the dry cave in which they have built a fire, spread their blankets, and are enjoying their dinner of cornbread and fish, makes the storm seem all the more violent by contrast, just as the fury of the storm makes the cave all the more cosy and delightful.

One would expect, in a good answer, a grasp of the following points :—

(i) The dramatic situation.

(ii) The contrast between the snugness of the cave and the fury of the storm.

(iii) The attitude and state of mind of the speaker.

(iv) The vividness of the description of the storm.

(v) The appropriateness of the language to the speaker.

It is too much to expect that any one candidate could grasp all these points ; but good readers see quite a lot.

(X1, X2, X3, etc. are used to distinguish between different candidates from whose answers good comments are quoted. If a misreading or incorrect judgment is quoted from one of them, a small (x) is added to the identifying letter and numeral, thus : X1(x), X2(x), etc. Z1, Z2, Z3, etc., are bad or weak candidates whose answers illustrate various types of error).

(i) Here are fairly good accounts of the dramatic situation :

X1. The writer's intention here is to describe to us a storm—rather a summer-storm, which he, as I think, has done quite satisfactorily. The storm is better described because he has brought in two characters who have come to face the storm when they have come out for a picnic.

X2. The writer's intention is to give a vivid description of a storm as seen and felt by a common uneducated man, who though unschooled expresses himself in concrete images. It is possible that the writer's intention is to show the great depth of feeling in the common working man. (The irrelevant "possibility" is due to the reading of Steinbeck, Farrell, etc.)

X3. He gets one of the characters themselves to relate it in his own words, which gives it the freshness of the just-happened, and the feeling of adventure.

X4. The writer's intention is to describe in the language of a rather illiterate man, a summer storm. In his description he wants to bring out the effects of the rain, the thunder, and the lightning, and make his description so realistic that the reader can picture it.

X5. The writer's aim in this passage seems to be to convey the sense of satisfaction and security which a certain *type* of individual enjoys ' out in the wide open spaces.' . . . The writer wishes to describe a certain class of individual. He can do so directly, by means of dialogue, and indirectly, through the attitude to the situation. In the present instance he avails himself of both methods. The dialogue makes it quite clear that the individual to whom we are introduced is ' no gentleman.' " Pretty soon, it *darkened up* . . ." The dialect . . . is that of a semi-literate adult, . . . I do not think it can be an educated picknicker or a schoolboy, since the turns of phrase seem to be those of one who is in constant contact with the out-of-doors, while at the same time they are too mature for the lips of a schoolboy . . . To give an impression of realism, the writer uses imagery and phraseology which would come most readily to the type of individual whom he describes.

(ii) On the contrast :

X6. The writer of this passage is trying to convey a feeling of cosiness and comfort and self-satisfaction, which he experiences in spite of the thunder-storm outside.

(Even good readers, who made other points well, identified the speaker with the writer. There are other examples below.)

X7. The writer's purpose is to praise the open-air life. This is conveyed in ' Jim this is nice . . .' Outside there is a storm raging and inside there is security and comfort. From the comparative safety and comfort inside you can enjoy the view of the storm raging outside, with the knowledge that it will not hurt you.

X8. It is a very vivid description of a terrific storm, with lightning and thunder and trees crashing round about and so on. But in violent contrast with the noise and turbulence of the storm outside is the quiet complacency of the folk inside.

The following is the best account of this contrast :

X9. The writer's intention is to convey to his readers the contrast between the outside of the cavern and the inside—the storm raging outside and the beauty of it, and then in contrast the perfect shelter and cosiness of the cavern . . . ' Jim, this is nice, I says ' is very ordinary and gives us a sense of the security within the cavern . . . From all the noise of the thunder and rain it is the sudden change to the peaceful atmosphere inside the cavern, where there is a fire blazing and the people are perfectly dry, that is most forceful in marking the contrast the writer is trying to show.

(iii) On the attitude and state of mind of the speaker :

X10. The intention of the writer here is to present a picture of the storm that arose in the place where he camped. Storms are usually associated with gloom but here the writer does not want to create such an impression. He says ' I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here.' But even before he says this we are given a sense of the writer's exhilaration at the storm by the description . . . The attitude of exhilaration is well brought out by the last sentence where he asks Jim to ' pass him another hunk of fish and some hot corn-bread.'

X11. Thunder and lightning is not meant to awe, just to delight.

X12. In order to explain the terribleness of the storm that broke out, and that it was pleasing to him, while saying that it is ' dark ' and ' blueblack,' he adds ' and lovely.'

X13. The word ' lovely ' immediately after ' blue-black,' is strange, yet it brings out the attitude of those within the cavern to the storm and nature in general.

(iv) The vividness of the description of the storm :

X4. The word pictures are very realistic. We see the rain thrashing along, and then, the interlude, as it were, of a bright flash of lightning, and once more the blue-black of the storm, while the thunder would go rattling.

X5. " And the rain would thrash along so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby "—where the feel of the rain is brought home to the reader by the onomatopoeic quality of " *thrash* . . .so *thick* . . ." and the single adjective *spiderwebby* effectively conveys the misty haziness of trees seen through rain.

X14. It is clear that the writer has closely observed nature during the thunder-storm or else he would not speak of it in such detail . . . *spider-webby* : the word-combination is so apt ! ' *turn up the pale under side of the leaves.*' Then the fact of it being darkest just before the flash of lightning, and the sudden prospect of seeing trees ' hundreds of yards further than you could see before '—it being ' *blue-black* '—the descriptive detail is very appropriate.

X15. It is said that some birds can sense the approach of a thunderstorm. Having observed the movements of the birds he writes about it. The direct rain and the wind coming at the same time again tends to give a tropical atmosphere to the picture. ' All *blue-black* outside.' He describes with precision the effect of very dark clouds. ' And the rain would thrash along . . . dim and spider-webby.' This gives

us the most concrete picture of the thunderstorm, '*thrash*', '*thick*', '*dim*', '*spider-webby*' are well chosen words ,which communicate the exact picture. '*And turn up the pale underside of the leaves.*' The writer seems to be a keen observer. He describes the leaves when ruffled and blown by the wind.

X16. The picture of the gust of wind turning up the pale underside of the leaves is one that is true to the eye, and the 'perfect ripper of a gust' is just as a schoolboy would phrase it. Tossing their arms as if they were *just wild* . . . helps us to imagine the fury of the storm.

X17. The epithet *blue-black* is about the best word he could have used to describe the peculiar colour of the sky just before a heavy shower of rain . . . The thick volume of the shower is conveyed by the description of the trees which looked frail and insignificant, '*spider-webby*, as he says.

X18. The dim vague outlines of the trees in the distance is described as *spider-webby*, a very suitable adjective.

X17. . . . and then the sudden flash of lightning, startling them with its dazzling brightness as it comes unexpectedly stabbing the darkness, as is suggested by the use of the single expressive onomatopoeic sound 'fst !'

(Not, of course, onomatopoeia which can strictly be used only of words which denote special *sounds*; here the ejaculation suggests the suddenness and rapidity of the flash—as this candidate very well describes it).

X19. '. . . would bend the trees down and turn up the pale underside of the leaves . . .'—*bend* strikes as possessing a tremendous physical force, and '*turn up* . . . is extremely vivid.

X20. To qualify the thunder he uses a homely simile which clarifies the idea instantly. This colloquial language also suits descriptive passages. The fury of the storm is successfully described because of the harsh suggestive words used—'*ripper* of a gust,' '*blast*', '*crash*', '*thrash*', etc.

X21. Apart from his utilization of the powers of contrast the writer uses several other means to carry out his intention. For instance, he uses words which in their very commonplaceness help to suggest the force of the storm and the cavern-dwellers appreciation of it. *Ripper* with its slangy effect and connotation is very expressive in describing a gust of wind because it can also mean ripping up the trees with its force . . . The writer's choice of words for their sound . . . For instance his description of the thunder. (Adds, unfortunately, 'Here the rolling of 'r' conveys the groaning of the thunder with graphic exactitude.' !)

X9. . . . his most effective description of the thunder which goes '*rumbling, grumbling, tumbling* down the sky' like '*rolling empty barrels down the stairs.*' This last sentence also shows us how long the peal of thunder must have lasted for the sentence is long and breathless-sounding.

X22. 'You'd hear *the thunder leg go* . . .' In this line one is able to hear the far-off sound of thunder . . . and the sound drifting away to the distance.

X17. '*The thunder leg go* . . .' with its suggestion of heaviness and clumsiness, goes—crash and then goes *rumbling, grumbling, tumbling* down the sky towards the under side of the world.' This last sentence is very vivid for it gives correctly the idea of the sudden crash of the thunder and then the gradual diminuendo of the awful sound (the rumbling, grumbling, tumbling) as it fades into the distance ; and in continuation of suggesting the prolonged length of the sound he adds—'*like rolling* . . .'

Here is an example of good analysis followed by condemnation on the ground that the language is ungrammatical, the construction of sentences poor, etc :

X23(x). He says 'it rained like all fury.' The word *fury* shows how hard it rained, as though the rain was in a rage or passion. The darkness outside is shown beautifully by the word '*blue-black*.' . . . One can picture the rain falling in torrents so that the trees looked dim because the rain was like a veil which made the picture misty and dim. (And so on, making good points, to the conclusion :) By the use of appropriate similes and words to bring out sights and sounds that occur in a storm, the writer is able to place before our eyes a real and beautiful picture of a rainy day, and we can almost hear the rumbling of the thunder as it crashes by.

Then follows the startling statement : "This piece cannot be called a successful piece of writing. 'The picture is drawn very vividly before our eyes . . . Words are used which help in conveying the picture to us. But the language could have been better. The grammar is faulty." And so on. There are many such. It is the old error that literature is fine writing. One of the candidates says 'It has nothing noble about it'—for him literature is 'fine thoughts in fine language.' Another says : 'This piece of writing is successful so far as it presents to us a clear picture of the intended storm. But as a piece of literature it has no claim at all.' One more quotation, from a candidate who has praised the description of the storm, and made other good points :—

X1(x). I would not call this such a successful piece of writing. No doubt it is successful from the point of view of its description which is quite realistic, but as a work of art it has not much traits by which we could class it as a work of art. It is a mere description which any one of us with a bit of practice could do . . . There should be other qualities [not specified] which go to make it a really successful piece of writing.

(v) The appropriateness of the language to the speaker :

X17. This is supposed to be the description of a person with not much familiarity with literature, but with a fertile imagination, who can use ordinary everyday things to suggest comparisons with sounds and sights of natural phenomena.

X4. He portrays the uneducated man well by his use of faulty English, especially where tenses are concerned, and by his use of crude though genuine expressions, like 'it rained like all fury', and ejaculations like 'fst !' . . . In depicting an unlearned man's narration, the style of expression has to be simple, and here it is so. The ideas are expressed as they are felt. The sentences are all short and not in the least complicated, [this is really so, the one long sentence is broken up into a number of short ones] and the similes are very homely ones.

X21. Has an interesting note on the long sentence 'with its frequent colons and semi-colons':

Just as the storm is continual the idea expressed in the sentence is continual, it is not broken up by full stops. The short pauses effected by the colons gives breathing space for the reader's mind to adjust itself before receiving a view of still another aspect of the storm.

X9. The language used creates the right atmosphere.

X3. What is most noticeable is the speaking voice rather than the written word.

X5. The peals of thunder compared to " rolling empty barrels down stairs, where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal " is effective not only on account of the intrinsic aptness of the image . . . but also in that it is the kind of simile that would have occurred easily to the character set forth. " Under side of the world " is another example of this " unlearned aptness " of imagery ; and so is " dark as sin.' "

X24. The writing is successful because the writer has been able to convey the scene vividly and at the same time to infuse it with the natural feelings of the person concerned.

Most of the candidates whose answers were satisfactory agreed that the passage was probably from a book of travel or adventure. *E.g.*, ' It is probably from some adventure tale or school-boy story.' Many compared it with the work of Henty, Ballantyne and others ' books meant for vigorous young people.' ' A modern American adventure novel.' ' This kind of extract comes from books like Martin Rattler, Masterman Ready and the like.' ' This seems to be an extract from a school-boy adventure story.' ' This extract is taken from the kind of book that deals with adventure, as is evident from the references to the cave, and the hogsheads.'

The unsatisfactory and bad answers divide themselves on the same lines as those on the poem.

Here is the ' superior ' person but not endowed with much intelligence :

Z1. If one were to grasp the main idea of a fire, and blankets, dinner and wine, and the rain and thunder outside one would say it was good. But then those are only the outlines. A closer examination would soon reveal its fatal weakness—the lack of orderly continuity and a disjointed description. He starts with ' The door of the cavern was big enough to roll a hogs-head in . . .' but leaving the hogshead as it is he goes off at a tangent talking of the floor sticking out and being large and flat enough to build a fire on. Curiosity would make one wonder what happened to the hogshead. Then he cooks dinner but forgets all about it till he has observed in detail the whole landscape. So now, he has cooked dinner, spread the blankets, noticed the thunder and lightning—incidentally the birds *was* right about it—(other sarcastic references to the grammar). . . then he wants *another* hunk of fish . . . How in the world, without eating anything at all, he should want another *hunk* of fish . . ., would I think give sufficient cause for mental indigestion to any rational man . . .

This type of passage can only occur either in the ' cow-country ' novels or in novels abundantly available on the ' Tu-penny—Thru-penny ' market.

A variety of the ' superior ' person is the facetious, whose tone is as obnoxious and ability considerably less. They are, fortunately, a very small group and one which deserves some sympathy, since there is evidence that they have caught their tone from a teacher who has confounded facetiousness with humour.

Z2. The writer is excited about the storm, and makes me laugh (to myself of course). I can imagine a more terrible storm described in ' Return of She '—a Tibetan storm that no one gets excited about . . . He is not serious, like the writer describing the storm in icy Tibet. He has therefore noticed the ' pale undersides' of the leaves. We do not feel its danger, but enjoy it and say with the writer " This is nice. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else but here. Pass the fish." (Not available till I go home).

Another writes in the same tone :

Z3. A dark cloud has settled on the picnicers and they want us too to feel the same. But why should we ? There is absolutely no necessity when we are enjoying the pink of weather (not at present anyway). I am merely sorry that the picnicers were disturbed by the storm but if they did not feel it much disturbing, Well then ! it rouses little feeling within me. There are no feeling tones in the lines, the words are just thrown on the paper—sprawling in all directions . . . (*d*) Why need the question be asked ? Most probably a page from some hay penny, tup penny novel. If it is otherwise well I am gone bughouse ! ! ! (Yankee !) Tell that to the Yanks, or better the Horse Marines.

The unintelligent literalist :

Z4. He says that it was dark and then he says it was " all blue-black outside and lovely." It can't be dark and blue-black at the same time and lovely too.

Z5. " Dark as sin " reveals his ignorance of God and sin, because he believes sin is an object black in colour.

The romancer, whose imagination needs but the smallest stimulus :

Z6. The writer's intention has been to portray the feelings of a girl watching a thunderstorm from a cavern, with a boy. He has attempted to give the reader an intimate picture of the girl's mind and her exact attitude towards the violence of nature. He knows, and she knows, that there is someone to protect her and therefore she can indulge in a bit of fanciful thinking. It is the sort of picture an uneducated girl would conjure up, when, secure in the cave, she was drawn towards her male companion and finds that the attraction is mutual.

The hopeless cases—those who have neither brains nor language, and those who can express themselves but write nonsense :

Z7. The writer's intention : He wants to reveal how interesting, how worthy of study changes in weather, storms, rain, in short all natural phenomena are.

Z8 regards it as a dinner table yarn : "pass the fish."

In this case the writer seems to be narrating this to somebody, most probably at their dinner-table, anyway he is narrating this incident at meal time for the listener is asking the narrator to pass along another hunk of fish . . .

Z9. His intention is to remain in the cavern and he writes asking for some provisions of cornbread and some fish. He probably wants permission to stay at the cavern. He writes to Jim describing the place and its situation and condition.

Z10. Then a slight breeze blows. ' A perfect ripper of a gust ' suggests this wonderfully. (Is the clue provided by the candidate who read ' ripper ' as ' ripple '?)

Z11. . . . then the wind, then the storm, then blasted winds and at last rippers of gust.

Many of those who could scarcely write English condemned the passage as very poor writing. Some attempted to correct all the mistakes in grammar, others suggested improvements.

Z12. Judged by the canons of traditional ' good English ' set by the king's grammarians, this cockney attempt would be delegated to the waste paper basket.

Z13. (Who gives a careful account of all the grammatical and other errors with corrections) : The adjective of ' web ' is not *webby* but *weblike*.

Z14. The piece of prose is not a very successful one. It has too many details and the reader generally finds that his intelligence is being insulted.

Z15. They take shelter in a ' cavern ' which probably is a tavern, for it is said to have a door and floor.

Z16. Like several others read 'cavern' as 'caravan' (a psychologist could possibly explain this):

> The mention of the caravan brings to one's mind immediately the possibility of their being of gipsy origin. The mention of the oracle that the birds gave about the bad weather forecast confirms this ... The picture is one of two old people, Jim and his companion, who strike upon a deserted caravan in the course of their wanderings.

Z17. The writer's intention is firstly to give a detailed description of the caravan and their trip ... The gypsies inside the caravan were quite happy and contented while the storm, lightning and thunder were going on outside ... The writer shows clearly that the gypsies loved their caravan so much that they did not want to live anywhere else but inside their own caravan. 'Jim, this is nice ...' The English in this passage is awfully poor ... The matter in this piece of writing is good, but the language is simply awfull—almost sounds like Cockney English ... numerous grammatical mistakes ... Every sentence almost is wrong English. More-over the writer has used many 'colloquel' words ... The punctuation too is very poor.

He concludes that 'this extract must have been taken from a local journal.'

These candidates would probably have done quite well at something else; they are certainly unsuited to a literary education and English literature is something they will never make contact with. It is not merely that they are weak in English; they have not the kind of ability appropriate to University studies.

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It may seem surprising to one who does not know the conditions in Ceylon that English could do all that has been claimed for it in this article. But English occupies an extraordinary position in Ceylon, for, though it is the home language of a very small minority, it is the medium of instruction in those schools to which the intelligentsia and all others who could afford it have hitherto sent their children. It is also the language of society, of business, of administration, and of the newspapers, journals and books read by people educated in English—a small but powerful minority.

But what has been said of English applies to any language which has become the medium of civilized intercourse. My intention has been to show that skill in the use of language is one of the basic skills on which civilization depends and that it must be an important part of the business of education to teach this skill. As words are so important a part of everyday living, and so powerful a means of controlling and influencing behaviour, it follows that there is a direct relation between the control of language and the capacity to live intelligently. Language is a tool and can be wielded like a sledge-hammer or like a stiletto. The way in which it is used tells us a great deal about the personality and motives of the user—his character, intelligence and sensibility. A blunt intelligence, and rough and ready responses to life are the usual accompaniments of the crude handling of language. One's mind is in the state of one's speech.

An accurate knowledge of the use of words is a means of clarifying one's experiences; it is also the beginning of literary discrimination. The study of

literature includes a great deal—background information about books and authors, literary, historical and linguistic studies, and critical theory. But all this is instrumental; these are aids to the understanding of actual works of literary art. In the critical judgment of literature practical criticism has an obvious priority and key importance. It provides the technique for dealing with literature. But that is not all. It has great extra-literary importance as developing an indispensable skill. It is possible to pick up something of this skill casually, and most of us, according to our abilities and opportunities, become more or less skilful in the technique of language. But that is not good enough. It is a basic skill which must be taught with a full consciousness of its importance.

The English syllabus for the H.S.C. and University Entrance emphasizes the key importance of the training of reading capacity. The analysis of typical answers to two questions in the General English paper set in December, 1946, reveals examples of inability to read, and I have tried to name causes, but what is most strikingly illustrated is how much can be accomplished by good teachers and intelligent students at the H.S.C. and University Entrance level.

H. A. PASSÉ.