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December and January are a time of acute anxiety for both children and parents. Those children who are already in school will have the results of their annual exams announced soon; some schools have already notified their pupils of their scores. Those lucky enough to have passed will be required to buy new text-books.

On both counts, the complaints for the past decade or so have grown shriller and more specific. Parents write to us to say that children from families which cannot afford to pay for private tuition by the teachers of the schools they attend run a greater risk of failing than those who can engage private tutors. The allegation is that very little teaching is done in the classroom; the teachers, most of them that is, limit their work to indicating what the pupils should read, and it is said that no explanation or demonstration is given. To request for better help from pupils who have no private tuition to fall back on, the invariable reply is, allegedly, "Do it yourself" or "Join my tutorial home".

The pupils of a girls' school in the old city have represented to us that they were given to understand that their exam papers would be treated with greater leniency this session because of the floods, but in the event the assurance, they say, has not been honoured. Allowing for the element of exaggeration that complaints of this kind contain from failed students, one is inclined to think, judging by the near-unanimity of allegations of the same nature from other schools, that something is wrong somewhere. The fact that private tutorial homes run by teachers in the employ of many schools do actually exist lend some credibility to such allegations.

This is not a matter that can be isolated from the question of teachers' pay-scales. Ill-paid employees anywhere will have a tendency to what is called moon-lighting that is, seeking a second line of income. If standards of education have to be improved, we must see to it that teachers, whether in public or in private institutions, receive salaries commensurate with their responsibilities. It is unrealistic to expect that a man or woman who is not paid a living wage will nevertheless be able to perform their duties with the energy and dedication necessary. But no teacher can be true to his profession unless he brings to it an awareness that he is engaged on a task whose importance cannot be measured by money alone.

If exam results are cause for anxiety, so are the text-books. Most of them, even those marketed by the National Text-Book Board, reach the schools late and in some cases, in the villages specially, may not be obtainable until nearly the first quarter or half of the school-year is over. Booksellers who are prevented from asking higher prices than those marked on the publications refuse, it is alleged, to sell books to those who would not purchase unreasonably priced 'aids'. We have had occasion ourselves to examine some of these so-called 'aids'. They were found to be replete with every kind of error one can imagine: printing mistakes, wrong date, misleading interpretations. Obviously, they were manufactured hastily by hacks and put on sale without revision.

This amounts to a regular scandal which has been going on in this country right from the fifties. We ourselves published as early as 1955 a reasoned complaint from an educationist who pleaded for a change in the procedure followed in the production and marketing of text-books. But the situation has from year to year grown worse. The text-books have not only not improved but have deteriorated in quality. They are such—(again we take care to say that there are exceptions)—as not to inspire and attract young learners who treat them not as things to be pored over with delight but as bitter medicinal pills to be swallowed for the sake of their examinations. Neither they nor their teachers approach them with the excitement and pleasure which good reading material should evoke.

What is needed is not theoretical advice on the improvement of standards but attention to detail.