

I hope it will not be imagined that no progress has been made in the work of education, for I am pleased to say there is ample evidence to the contrary; but it is necessary to point out the cause of this increase in the number of attendants at school below Standard I., showing, as it does, how many children there are in the district whose education has been almost, if not entirely, neglected. During the past year no less than 658 children, or 21 per cent of the total number on the registers throughout the district, were brought for the first time within the influence of the Board's operations, the majority of whom had never entered a school before. These children have mostly gone to swell the ranks of the classes preparing for Standard I. next year, although many among them are children from ten to fifteen years of age. To people living in towns it can hardly be realized to what an extent ignorance prevails in some of the outlying districts. Hundreds cannot read and write, and, in many instances, do not know a score of words of the English language. Surely it cannot be said of the children in this district that they are being over-educated, when 1,385 out of 3,005 examined in the district schools could read words of one syllable.

If those who decry against the present education system, on the score of the education being too advanced, would visit some of the country and bush schools, and see for themselves the ignorance which prevails, I feel sure they would feel humiliated, did they possess the least spark of humanity, to find so many European children—the future men and women of the district—unable to decipher either in script or print the commonest words of the English language. It is true that an attempt is made in the upper standards in most of the schools to break the dull monotony of a school course, where reading, writing, and arithmetic of necessity must be the chief objects of attention, by the teaching of several other subjects; and those who know the benefits and pleasures the children themselves derive from a course of well-arranged lessons, leading them to observe, to compare, and to examine, will never begrudge the efforts made by teachers in this direction; but the following results will show how very few of the children attending the primary schools ever get beyond the merest rudiments of instruction:—

Of 3,005 children who are recorded as attending school at the date of my examination, 1,440 passed in reading, 1,456 in writing, 855 in arithmetic, 583 in spelling and dictation, 289 in grammar, 137 in geography, and 73 in English history. That is, 2 in 5 could read and write, 2 in 7 could add simple numbers together, 2 in 21 could distinguish the parts of speech, 2 in 43 knew something of geography, 2 in 82 knew something of English history. But, besides the large influx of untaught children who found their way this year into the schools, and greatly lowered the general standard of education as compared with 1879, there is another reason, which calls for some notice, why so few children in the district give evidence of satisfactory progress, although they may be said to be attending the district schools.

Irregular attendance has been, and still is, perhaps, the greatest hindrance to the progress of education in the district. With all the opportunities now afforded to parents in the various school districts to send their children to school, and with the power in the hands of School Committees of enforcing attendance for at least half the school year, if found necessary, there exists a state of affairs which I can only characterize as disgraceful. In 1879, when on my visit of inspection, several teachers drew my attention, when examining their registers, to the irregularity of a large number of their children, but I inferred it was in consequence of the building operations which were then general throughout the district, and I suggested that the attendance would probably improve on the completion of the schoolhouses; but, on comparing the attendance results for 1879 and 1880, I find that irregularity among the children is growing worse and worse. To show to what an extent irregular attendance prevails in the district, I have prepared a list of the attendances made by every boy and girl attending the schools in the Hawke's Bay District during the year, as regulated by the date of my annual examination. The attendances are taken from the examination schedules, which were filled in by the teachers, and are copied from the daily class registers in use. Out of 3,005 children whose names appear on the schedules, the following attendance results were obtained: 1. That 886 children, or 29·49 per cent., had attended 300 or more times during the year. 2. That 709 children, or 23·59 per cent., had attended 200 and less than 300 times during the year. 3. That 612 children, or 20·36 per cent., had attended 100 and less than 200 times during the year. 4. That 798 children, or 26·55 per cent., had attended less than 100 times during the year. On the average the schools in the district were opened 435 times during the year.

In England, where school fees are generally paid, I find that, during the year 1879–80, 73 per cent. of the pupils examined in standards, and actually 63 per cent. of the 3,710,883 children on the school registers, between the ages of three and thirteen years, made at least 250 attendances each; yet here, with a free system of education, where nothing is required from parents except for them to send their children to school, there is the spectacle of 26 per cent. of the children on the school registers staying away three times out of every four that the schools are open, and another 20 per cent. staying away two out of every four times. It is no use for me to expect good results and satisfactory progress either in the general management of the schools or in the annual examinations, unless something is done to alter this wretched state of affairs. The Board has built schoolhouses, supplied all necessary machinery, and made efforts to befit all the teachers alike to undertake the work of education. The conditions, as far as the Board is concerned, are most favourable to success, but the work of the Board is rendered almost useless by the evident indifference of parents, and the refusal of the majority of the School Committees to put in force the compulsory clause of the Education Act. In some of the school districts I certainly find an energy displayed, which, though sometimes misdirected, affords evidence that the people are awakening to some of the many advantages derivable from the adoption of a good system of general education. With the compulsory clause, however, many of the Committees, especially in the country districts, hesitate to deal. They are perfectly aware that its enforcement is necessary, and they would like to see the clause in operation compelling the attendance of children at school; but, as it has been often put to me by Chairmen of School Committees, when inquiring whether the clause was introduced, "We cannot afford to quarrel with our neighbours on this subject." Hence it happens, owing to a circumstance over which the Board