

Good humour, combined with ready obedience, prevails everywhere, and it appears to me that most of the teachers have now acquired the difficult art of enforcing strict discipline without resorting to anything like harshness. In one point, however, closely connected with discipline, there is great room for improvement. The attendance on examination-days falls far short of what it ought to be. Although my visits were made, with two or three exceptions, in perfectly fine weather and after ample notice had been given, no less than 210 scholars, more than a sixth of the number on the roll, failed to appear.

To discuss the general merits and defects of the present system of examination by standards would be a pure waste of time. For good or for evil that system has now fairly taken root in this colony. But, without touching on the larger question, I must deplore a growing tendency, not only on the part of the general public but on the part of many teachers who ought to know better, to gauge the success or failure of a school exclusively by the tables of results. The "sweet simplicity" of a list of passes and failures, which make but slight demands upon the time and thought of a reader, appears to obscure if it does not altogether efface the impression made by an Inspector's detailed estimate of each school, which, unfortunately, must deal with troublesome limitations and qualifying circumstances. It is wiser to try to make the best of this apparently inevitable tendency than to complain about it. And although the record of passes and failures, taken alone, can never present a complete picture of the state of a school, some improvement may be effected in this direction by a more rational system of presenting scholars for the several standards than that which now prevails. The two worst faults committed by teachers in this respect are: (1.) The bringing forward for standards of children who have not "attended with reasonable regularity," or who are naturally backward; and, (2.) the presenting of scholars for the First Standard at too early an age—a mistake at the outset, the consequences of which usually extend throughout the rest of the victim's school life. I am constantly being compelled, in spite of my repeated protests, to pass children of little more than six years of age, who, though undeniably able to fulfil the very simple requirements of the First Standard, after a more or less prolonged struggle with the increasing difficulties of the higher standards break down at last, undergoing in the meantime much suffering themselves, besides causing unspeakable annoyance to their teachers and their examiner. There is no conceivable excuse for this oft-repeated act of folly. No stress in this respect is put upon teachers by the Education Department—none, certainly, in this district by the Board or its Inspector. On the contrary, so far as I am concerned, I have steadily discouraged the presenting of scholars who are either of tender years, or who cannot pass with ease. If this canon, which is laid down very distinctly in the regulations as to standards, were universally adhered to, and if no scholar, however precocious, were presented even for the First Standard before he had completed his eighth year, the number of doubtful or partial passes, which fill so large a space in the examination schedules, would be marvellously reduced, and a pass would mean something more than it does at present. It ought not by this time to be necessary to repeat that a teacher need not restrict the work of a class to the bare work of the standard taken up, but that the average of attainment should be considerably in advance of that minimum.

With regard to the amount of irregularity of attendance which would justify a teacher in not presenting a scholar, something more definite seems to be required than the expression used in the regulations, "*reasonable regularity*," if one may judge by the very varying practice of teachers in this respect. I am not unaware of the danger of laying down a hard-and-fast rule, but suggest that it ought not to be incumbent on a teacher to present for a higher standard any scholar whose attendance during the twelvemonths before the examination falls short of 65 per cent. A teacher can hardly be held responsible for the progress of one who has been absent during more than a third of the school year.

I am by no means disposed to underrate the difficulties attendant on the passing of a scholar through a higher standard every year; but these difficulties have been absurdly exaggerated, especially by teachers. Take, for example, the Fourth Standard, which appears to be the chief stumbling-block. I have good reason for believing that the examination papers set in the Nelson and Marlborough Districts are, on the whole, about equal in point of difficulty to those set in other parts of the colony. The two subjects which tax most severely the powers of the scholars—leaving out of account history—are, undoubtedly, grammar (including composition) and arithmetic. But all that a candidate need do to obtain a pass in the latter subject is to work correctly three out of six sums, including a question in practice, another in reduction, and the making-out of a tradesman's account, containing four or five items. In grammar the candidate is required to name the parts of speech in a short sentence, to decline a pronoun, to give the degrees of comparison of half-a-dozen adjectives, and to write a short letter on some familiar subject. Surely a boy in his thirteenth year, who, having probably attended school for six or seven years, cannot manage at a pinch, to do so much as this, is either a hopeless dullard or has been miserably taught.

If this view of the real value of a bare pass be the true one, it follows that the effusive rejoicings of parents and the jubulations of teachers that usually follow the passing of a large percentage of scholars are altogether out of place. For the teacher voluntarily states, in effect, when entering the names of his scholars on the examination schedule, that they are able, in his opinion, to satisfy the requirements of the several standards, as interpreted by the Inspector. And at this stage there ought to be no doubt as to these. The work does not vary or increase in difficulty, but is just what it was three years ago. If the performance of a large proportion of the candidates falls short of what has been promised on their behalf, this must be set down, I fear, not to the inseparable difficulties of the standards, but to causes for which the teacher has himself only to thank. In many cases he has obviously overrated the attainments of his scholars: frequently he persists in presenting scholars who have attended very badly, and who are, therefore, foredoomed to failure. Sometimes he yields, against his better judgment, to the importunity of parents, who pester him to "push their children on," by which is usually meant the placing them in a higher class than they are fit for. But all this does not affect my proposition that the passing of a large percentage of scholars is not, taken by itself, a fit subject for glorification. To boast of having obtained 90 per cent. of passes is much as if a tradesman