

The changes recently introduced by the department considerably modify the standard examinations. I regret to see geography taken out of the Fourth Standard as a pass-subject. I also regret that physical geography, which ought to be very easily taught, is put off till the Fifth Standard. "One of the first things a child asks his mother is 'What becomes of the sun when it goes down?' and as soon as he has read two descriptions of travel—in polar and in tropical countries—necessarily he will ask why palms do not grow in Greenland. We are bound, then, to give notions of cosmography and physical geography from the earliest childhood."—(*Nineteenth Century*, December, 1885.) The majority of pupils leave school when they have completed the Fourth Standard; they will then go into the world without a hint of any of these things. I think it very undesirable that such an important subject as the laws of health should be put into the background, as it appears to be by regulation 19. It appears to be optional with a teacher whether he shall teach laws of health, or elementary mechanics, or botany, or some other subject. This, I think, is a grave mistake. Hear what Herbert Spencer says on the matter: "We infer that, as vigorous health and its accompanying high spirits are larger elements of happiness than any other things whatever, the teaching how to maintain them is a teaching that yields in moment to no other whatever, and therefore we assert that such a course of physiology as is needful for the comprehension of its general truths, and their bearings on daily conduct, is an all-essential part of a rational education." Surely it ought to have a prominent place in the education of a people. I notice another change which I fear will cause much mischief. "Knowledge of subject-matter of the reading lesson" is torn from the reading, and made an "additional subject," as if there would be any good and intelligent reading without a knowledge of the subject-matter of the lesson. In some of the Maori schools, many years ago, the pupils read English. Many of them did it with some fluency. But they did not understand the meaning of a single word they read. I know this of my own knowledge. I am afraid this regulation will have a tendency to get us back to this absurd manner of English-Maori reading. I do sincerely believe that a child would be more intelligent if he had not learned to read at all than he would be if he had learned to read without knowledge of the meaning of what he read. Nothing so dulls the intellect as the habit of repeating words to which no meaning is attached. I feel I should be acting wrong if I did not give expression to the opinions I have formed on these matters.

I perceive that a recommendation has been made to the department which I trust will not be given effect to. It is that the pupil-teacher regulation throughout the colony should be uniform, and that all pupil-teachers should serve for a period of four years. Now, this means the taking-on of pupil-teachers at an early age, and the making general the spectacle of the little pupil-teacher teaching and toiling. Here a pupil-teacher is seldom taken on till he is sixteen years of age, and has passed an examination more than equivalent to an ordinary pass of the Sixth Standard. To a person who has passed that examination it should not be hard to pass the other examinations required. By this arrangement many of the objections to the pupil-teacher system are at once got rid of.

I have come to the conclusion that the usual system of teaching—or, rather, hearing—reading is altogether wrong. Teaching should take the place of this hearing. If pupils can be made, say, in a week, or even in a month, to read a sentence of a paragraph as it should be really read, much will have been accomplished. As increased power to read correctly comes, larger quantities can be attempted. The system, which is too general, of allowing the pupils to mumble over their sentences with little or no attempt at guidance or correction is as ineffectual as every one allows it to be, and as it cannot fail to be. A good reader is rarely to be found in any walk of life; and, when one comes to think over the subject, it does not appear strange that it should be so—indeed, the wonder would be if it were not so. I would again remind the teacher that there can be no good reading when he must have the book before him in order to understand what his pupil says. I would also remind him that the nearer reading comes to telling or relating, the better it is.

I have been very much disappointed to find how deficient in many schools is the knowledge shown of the simple grammar required from the Third and Fourth Standards. In the Fourth Standard no syntax is required, as there ought to be. The pupils are merely required to name the parts of speech. Yet this knowledge—which ought, for the most part, to be picked up incidentally in the Second Standard—is often more than they can compass. We find pupils mistake nouns for verbs, adjectives for adverbs, and the like. This invariably comes of insufficient teaching. It is very easy to make children distinguish the parts of speech, and in a rational manner too. It should be impressed on them that there is only one way to tell what part of speech a word is—that is, *by the work they find it doing*. If they find a man shoeing horses they conclude he is a blacksmith. So, if they find a word telling the name of a thing, they know it is a noun; if it tells what sort the thing is, that it is an adjective; if it tells what the thing does, that it is a verb; if how it does it, as an adverb. I was lately horrified to find a teacher telling his pupils to distinguish adverbs by their ending in "ly;" and he stated that he found it a very useful plan. I need hardly say that the grammar in his school was very deficient.

I find that the knowledge of how to begin, end, and address within, various kinds of letters is becoming defective. This comes of not keeping before the pupils the skeleton form of letters, as the instructions provide. I am glad to find that the new standard regulations provide that pupils in the First Standard should know "the relative values and chief aliquot parts of current English coin; and relative lengths of yard, foot, and inch;" and those in the Second Standard "the relative values and chief aliquot parts of the ton, hundredweight, quarter, stone, and pound; relative lengths of the mile, furlong, chain, and rod."

I have more than once pointed out the absurdity of practically assuming that children cannot learn those things of which they speak and some of which they see every day. In time, perhaps children in the Third Standard may be allowed to amuse themselves by learning a little simple mensuration.