

CONVERSATIONAL LESSONS IMPORTANT.—A most interesting feature in the work of the junior classes in several schools is the conversational lesson which is held each morning as soon as the children assemble, as to what they have seen on their way to school. The little ones are encouraged to tell in their own pleasant ways all they have seen, and the teacher, adopting a conversational style, fills in by means of word-picturing points of interest for the benefit of the class. The curiosity thus aroused among the children in this way is very great; besides, the combination of “things with words” is in my judgment the highest form of all school training. It is the Socratic method applied to the training of infants. I hope to see the plan here described introduced into all the infant schools at no distant date.

STANDARD WORK AND MORAL TRAINING IMPROVING.—In the work of the standard pupils commendable progress in most of the schools has taken place, and it is pleasing to report that much more attention is being paid to the training of the children in good manners and right conduct than was customary a few years ago. The new regulations of the department may have something to do with the improvement in this direction, combined with a higher tone perceptible among the teachers themselves. But there is still wanting in most schools a harmony between the mental, physical, and moral training of the children, and it is very desirable that the teachers in the service of the Board realise that upon them rests the responsibility as to the harmonious training of the children. A man who has bad habits is not the proper person to train children in good ones; and, if physical, mental, or moral defects are found in some schools, I think they may safely be set down to the possession of similar defects in the teachers concerned. My experience in the work of the different schools daily strengthens the conviction that each school is the reflex of the mind and character of the teacher in charge, and that one of the highest, if not the highest function to be discharged in connection with the schools is that which relates to the choice of the teachers. The following remarks made by Mr. Locke on this subject in his “Thoughts on Education” are as appropriate to-day as when they appeared, nearly two hundred years ago, and I venture to quote them here even though an official report. He says, “Under whose care soever a child is put during the tender and flexible years of his life, this is certain: it should be one who thinks Latin and languages the least part of education; one who, knowing how much virtue and a well-tempered soul are to be preferred to any sort of learning or languages, makes it his business to form the mind of his scholars and give them a right disposition, which, if once got, though all the rest should be neglected, would in due time produce all the rest, and which if it be not got and settled, so as to keep out ill and vicious habits, languages and science and all other accomplishments of education will be to no purpose, but to make the worse and more dangerous man.” I commend these wise remarks to the favourable consideration of Committees who have the selection of teachers for the schools in their own hands.

The condition of the schools in each county, and the changes which have taken place during the past ten years in the accommodation provided and in the general efficiency of the schools, will be gathered from the following description of each district: [Not reprinted].

From this brief review of the Board's schools it will be gathered that most of them are well organized and staffed and give good promise for the future. Although some of the schools fared badly under the new standard regulations, I have at no previous time felt so encouraged in my work as during the past year. Improvement is perceptible in many directions in the preparation of the standard subjects, and my only regret is that the syllabus, admirable though it is in many points, is not better adapted to meet the special wants of the districts. I am satisfied that were the syllabus modified in the direction suggested the effective and permanent work in the schools would be far greater than it now is, and that a horror of reading and of books after leaving school would not be one of the chief characteristics of our growing youth.

With regard to the various subjects taught in the schools, I shall only refer to certain of the class subjects and additional subjects, such as drawing, elementary science, military drill, calisthenics, singing, and sewing. Drawing is becoming a favourite subject in the schools, and it is taught with rare skill and success in several cases. I have it on the authority of an Art Master, a former examiner of the Science and Art Department, South Kensington, London, that the majority of the freehand drawings inspected by him from the Gisborne and Norsewood Schools would have passed as “Second grade” in England, and some of them would have gained the mark “Excellent.” The drawings were simply the ordinary class work of Standards V. and VI., and a number of other schools are doing nearly as good work. To me this statement from an outside competent authority is very encouraging. Singing continues to be taught with great success at Napier Central, Gisborne, Hastings, Norsewood, Hampden; and in a number of other schools the results vary between good and fair. The concerts which are held annually in some districts are very popular with the children; but there is the growing danger of taking away too much time from the other school work whilst preparing a cantata or other piece for public rehearsal. Singing for a special purpose should not occupy any of the hours set aside for ordinary instruction, and I hope that this hint will suffice to stay a growing abuse. A fife and drum band has been formed at the Ormond district school, and the children have made good progress under the guidance of the master. Elementary science is well taught at Hastings, Woodville, Gisborne, Napier, Norsewood, and Kaikora, and a fair beginning has been made in most of the other schools. Military drill is excellently taught at Gisborne, where there is a cadet corps, at Napier, Hastings, and Waipawa; and in a number of other districts, including Woodville, Norsewood, and Waipukurau, the progress made is satisfactory. The teaching of calisthenics to the girls is only carried on at Gisborne, Waipukurau, Waipawa, Woodville, and Wainui; but the results are so beneficial to the girls, and the subject is so much appreciated by them, that I look forward to the time when the training of the girls in calisthenics will be considered as necessary as is the training of the boys in military drill. It seems to me that every lady teacher in the service of the Board should be required to gain a knowledge of this valuable means of physical training.