

work that was done was in many cases written and arranged in a careless and slovenly manner. It was also clearly apparent that the conditions under which they were being examined were not favourable to their usual modes of working, the demeanour of the girls during the examination showing a marked contrast to that of the boys. The latter, as soon as the papers were given out, settled down at once to their work in perfect silence, looking to neither one side nor the other. The girls, on the contrary, were gazing about in all directions, and a constant buzz of whispering was with difficulty repressed, but not until I had called them to order with threats of dismissal. Notwithstanding, moreover, that the scholars were arranged in such a manner as to reduce to a minimum the opportunities of copying and prompting, there were amongst the lower classes of girls several pairs of papers bearing a very suspicious resemblance, some being word for word the same, and containing the same errors and absurdities. From the foregoing statement it will be evident that there must be something radically wrong in the girls' department, either in the teaching, in the management, or in both. I am inclined to believe that the chief cause of failure is due less to inferior teaching than to a weaker government and imperfect organization; and I am informed that the teacher's *bête noire*, irregular attendance, is particularly rampant in this department of the Blenheim School.

The whole of the arrangements of the Blenheim School are, in my opinion, most unsatisfactory. Under one roof we have a headmaster, the most of whose time is occupied in teaching about fifty boys with the assistance of a pupil-teacher; and in an adjoining room the headmistress is engaged in exactly the same work with fifty girls. These were the numbers at the date of the examination, but doubtless at the beginning of the year there were many more. In the lower standards the same wasteful duplex system exists. Apart altogether from the economical aspect of the case (though that is by no means to be disregarded in a small, and consequently poor, district like this) the separation of the sexes in public schools is, I believe, a grave mistake, and absolutely useless for the cause supposed to be served. They really are no more separated under the existing plan than they would be in a well-managed mixed school. They meet together on their way to and from school, and during the midday recess, and (owing to faulty arrangement) even in the playground, and are only really separated when in the building, which they would also be, practically, in a properly-conducted mixed school, where the girls enter from their own playground by their own door, and sit on one side of the schoolroom, whilst the boys occupy seats at the other side. Whilst in the room they are always under the eye of the teacher. In most moderately large schools in the colony (with the exception of the Nelson District), and, of necessity, in all country schools, the boys and the girls are taught together, and the advantages to the scholars are many and well recognised. A healthy spirit of emulation is evoked, which acts on both boys and girls, and often shows that the latter, when sharing the same advantages, can generally equal and frequently surpass the boys in most of the subjects of an elementary school course. The presence of the girls also exercises a restraining and humanising influence over the generality of boys, and renders it possible to preserve the highest discipline, with the minimum of severity. After seventeen years' experience amongst mixed schools both as a parent of boys and girls attending them and in my official capacity, I am convinced that under a proper system of management the girls are largely benefited by being taught and trained under the same conditions as the boys. An acknowledged authority on educational matters says, "*Ere long I hope it will be admitted even by the most refined of parents that, with reasonable care as to the associations which their daughters form out of school, they may, not only without risk, but with great advantage, permit them to share all the advantage of good public day-schools; and need feel no greater misgivings as to the result of association for school purposes than they do in respect to their meeting together on Sunday in some place of worship.*" Although Dr. Fitch is speaking more particularly of public schools for girls, I am convinced that, with the important proviso which I have italicised, the same argument applies to mixed schools, whilst without it no such flimsy precautions as separating them from their brothers in school will avail to avert the deplorable results of careless or insufficient parental control.

With regard to the head teacher of the Blenheim Girls' School, I have no doubt that she is fully qualified intellectually for her important position; but the very best teaching is comparatively wasted unless supported by good discipline. It must, moreover, be admitted that—other qualifications being equal—men are as a rule better teachers of large public schools than women. At nearly all the high schools for girls the most important part of the teaching is placed in the hands of visiting masters, and it is no disparagement to the mistress of the Girls' School to express my belief that under the mixed system, and subject to the discipline and tuition of the headmaster, a greater intellectual activity would be aroused amongst the girls, whilst a more independent and therefore honest performance of their school duties would be the certain result of a firmer discipline and more vigorous and vigilant supervision. On the foregoing ground I trust that the Board and the Committee will take the matter into their most serious consideration, with the view of placing the school on a satisfactory footing.

Before leaving the subject of the Blenheim School I must express my dissatisfaction with the building occupied by the junior division. It is simply disgraceful that a town like this should be compelled to crowd its little ones into the very inconvenient, ill-constructed, unventilated and yet draughty, congeries of wooden sheds which is at present used as an infant-school. A new building is urgently needed, and, looking at the large proportion of the scholars in the Marlborough District to be provided for at this school, I consider that the Board would be justified in taking steps for the immediate erection of a suitable infant-school without delay.

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SCHOOL-BUILDINGS.—The gradual growth of the population of this district has left its record most unfavourably upon many of the school-buildings, which from very humble beginnings have advanced by successive additions until they have attained their present dimensions. The inevitable result has been to leave them with scarcely any of the recognised characteristics of good school-