

3. EXAMINATION AND INSPECTION.

Primary Examination and Inspection.—In visiting the primary schools of Britain I made careful inquiries regarding the new system of inspection adopted by the Education Department in lieu of examination. The generally expressed opinion is that it is proved to be a more real guarantee of a proper distribution of public funds than the annual examination. The question is one of the highest importance to technical education, for by means of the change to freedom of classification manual instruction, domestic economy, and an extension of the kindergarten methods to the standards have become possible, and I am glad to say have been freely adopted by the teachers with very excellent results.

The "new education," as it is called in England, has been forced upon her by continental example, and, as the teachers themselves inform me, the system has proved itself immeasurably superior to the old one. Such being the case, we must, if we are to keep in touch with education, adopt similar lines. I suggest, therefore, a trial of the system in, say, the Wellington Education District, taking the large schools, inspection being substituted for examination, and the syllabus being so relieved as to permit the introduction of manual and domestic instruction upon the lines of the English schools. My remarks with reference to the nature of this instruction are amplified in the earlier chapters of this report.

Regarding the question of inspection, I quote the report of the Committee of Council on Education, as follows: "We regard the changes which we have made in the rules of inspection as being of the utmost importance from the point of view of the efficiency of those schools which are deemed to have reached a high standard of excellence. In the general reports of your Majesty's Chief Inspectors for the past year will be found valuable summaries of the educational effects which can already be traced to these changes recently made in the code. We note with satisfaction that the teachers are proving themselves worthy of the trust which is placed in them; that the relations between them and the Inspectors have become more cordial; that the mechanical forms of teaching, induced by a more mechanical method of examination, are tending to disappear; that the teachers, relieved from the nervous anxiety inseparable from the formal test of an official examination of the scholars, with its inevitable tendency to assign less importance to the daily process of patient teaching than to the carefully prepared display of possibly superficial results, are more at liberty to improve their methods of instruction, and to think rather of the development of the intelligence of their scholars than merely of the effective reproduction of a certain amount of knowledge on a given day."

Drawing Examination.—The first-grade drawing examination has produced such beneficial results in the development of industrial work that I suggest the examination be held by the Education Department throughout the colony until such time as superintendents of drawing are appointed to each district, when the work may be then examined at the visit of such superintendents.

Secondary and Technical Schools.—There is an unfortunate tendency to judge the value of a school's work by the number of passes obtained at examinations, and the efforts of the school are therefore naturally aimed in that direction. Such statistics, however, give no idea of the real value of school work, but only of a small percentage of the higher-grade students. Professor Armstrong, speaking of certain English schools, remarked, "The execrable system of examination we have allowed to grow up has engendered an altogether false conception of what a boy is and can do; we are fast coming to regard the pupil as a kind of animated set of pigeon-holes into which every sort of fact can be crammed and taken out again when required. Experience shows, however, that the boy behaves much as the pigeon-holes would, taking in and giving out information more or less rapidly, but without digesting it—without ever learning to properly apply it."

The worst effects I have noticed in connection with theoretical examination work is the tendency to stereotyped teaching, following a particular text-book, possibly compiled by the known examiner, or working up previous test-papers by the same examiner, who, possessing a particular "fad," may be sure his "fad" will receive special attention, to the detriment of the rest of the work.

That this is so is unfortunate; and I am of opinion that, wherever possible, examination-work should be dispensed with, more reliance being placed upon the teacher to give sound and systematic instruction of the best kind, with a view to the real educational development of his students. There are, of course, cases where examination is a help and a necessity—such, for instance, as teachers and trade students; but otherwise I would not urge students to present themselves for examination in general work.

Examinations for technical schools should, in my opinion, be held solely by the Education Department. The teachers' examinations are now so held, but the local technical examinations, being conducted by the various Boards, are wanting in uniformity. I suggest that the Education Department should undertake all technical-school examinations throughout the colony, and that regular trade certificates be issued by the department, which should be recognised by the various trades, and considered as a part of apprenticeship by those holding the same under certain ages.

Persons desirous of holding special certificates under British institutions would at the same time have the privilege of presenting themselves for examination under the following institutions: The City and Guilds of London Institute; the Science and Art Department, London; the Society of Arts, London.

It is hardly possible to restrict examinations to these three institutions. Local examinations are a necessity in trade subjects, for there are many cases in which candidates would attend only the local one in order to qualify for their trades. There are, again, great advantages in doing so, inasmuch as local interest is aroused, and the masters and men are induced to interest themselves, greatly to the benefit of the trade concerned.