

children away from school with impunity, all and every week in which the school is closed for one day. Undoubtedly the best check on irregularity is that which was employed in some districts before the Act of 1877 came into force, and that was, to exclude altogether from the examination all scholars who failed to attend a certain proportion of the school-time. By this method the progress of the regular scholars would not be retarded, as it sometimes is now, by the frequent revision of some part of the work, supposed to be necessary in the interests of the absentees. Independently, however, of any regulations, I think that teachers have the remedy to some extent in their own hands. At the beginning of the year the work of each class should be carefully apportioned (with due regard to really necessary recapitulation) to the time at the teacher's disposal, and this programme should be steadily and consistently adhered to throughout the year, no departure from it being permitted on account of irregular attendants. At first, possibly, the adoption of this plan might entail some hardship on individual scholars, and might even for a time lessen the apparent (but not the actual) efficiency of a school; but the interests of individuals must always be subordinate to those of the people generally, and I feel sure that the gains, even as regards the mere number of passes, would greatly outweigh the losses; for at present, no doubt, many of the regular attendants fail through the delay caused by the absentees. It would, I believe, soon be found that all but really unavoidable absence would greatly diminish under such a system; and as, happily, the judgment of a school is no longer based on the percentage of passes, but upon the general condition and tone of the school, the credit of the teacher could not be injured, but would rather be likely to increase through the more general intelligence of his scholars, and the higher level of proficiency that would prevail throughout the school. I dare say something like this plan is already adopted in a few of our schools, and the sooner it becomes general the better for all concerned.

*General Remarks.*—On the whole, and even with regard only to success at the examination, there is no cause for serious complaint. The failures throughout New Zealand in 1897, expressed as a percentage of the number examined, amounted to 15·32 per cent. (see Minister's twenty-first annual report, page iv.). For the same year in Marlborough the percentage was 16·3, and for the year under review it was 14·8; so that, notwithstanding the disappointing results at some schools, there is evidence of steady, if slow, improvement in the district as a whole. The admirable work done at some of the smaller Board schools is highly creditable to their teachers; and it has been a matter of considerable regret to me to notice that, in consequence of the method of making appointments pursued in this district, it occasionally happens that really excellent teachers seeking for promotion or for a change are passed over. The Board, although it undoubtedly has the power, rarely exercises its right to remove a teacher from one school to another, and consequently misses some of the few opportunities of showing its appreciation of valuable services in a substantial manner. I cannot but think that all School Committees that have a regard for the good of the schools would willingly assist the Board to reward faithful and efficient servants, if the matter were fairly put before them, by consenting to such proposals.

With regard to matters outside the syllabus, and which do not materially affect the results of the examination, I see no cause for complaint, but rather for congratulation. The general behaviour of the scholars in the playground and elsewhere is, on the whole, quite satisfactory. The little courtesies of civilised life are observed; and with the progress of years there is a corresponding improvement in many apparently, but not really, trivial matters. The once common and disgusting method of cleaning slates, for instance, is now almost entirely forgotten, each child, or desk, being provided with a little bottle of water and a piece of rag. The playgrounds, once liberally decorated with unsightly luncheon papers, scattered by the winds all about the premises, are now generally pretty free from this disfigurement. These improvements are most noticeable when teachers take an active interest in the play, as well as in the work, of their scholars. The old idea that a teachers' authority and dignity would be imperilled by any association with the children outside the classroom is happily almost abandoned, and teachers may now frequently be seen directing and assisting the sports as well as the studies of their scholars. Some of the School Committees have added considerably to the attractiveness of the playground by planting ornamental trees, and in several instances either the teacher or the Committee have assisted or encouraged the children to cultivate little gardens—a most valuable means of unconscious education, which ought to be more general in our country schools.

There is one practice which strikes any one acquainted with the extreme poverty so common in the Old Country as being very reprehensible—namely, the terrible waste of wholesome food that prevails at dinner-time in every school in the district, and, perhaps, in the colony. It is a daily experience to see whole slices of good bread and butter or jam thrown away—to the great benefit, however, of the neighbours' fowls; and I am within the mark in saying that there is sufficient food wasted annually in the playgrounds of this district alone to feed scores of hungry little ones almost starving at Home. Surely this is a practice which, on moral and economical grounds, should be discouraged, and as far as possible prevented, by the teachers. An improvement—which is, however, not yet quite general—is evident in the appearance of the cupboards, drawers, &c., used by the teachers. These formerly appeared, in many cases, as if the contents had been “shovelled” in at random, and, when exposed to view, afforded a pernicious example of slovenliness and disorder to the scholars. Such cases are now happily few, and will, I hope, soon cease to exist in the district. The immense importance of these apparently trifling matters is scarcely so generally recognised as it should be. At one of the aided schools, for instance, the teacher and the head of the household waxed highly indignant because I pointed out at my visit of inspection that the schoolroom was in a most disgracefully untidy state, and they seemed to think that, because the building in question was not the property of the Board, the Inspector had no right to interfere. The faintest conception of the true object of schools (and schoolmasters) ought to have suggested to the latter that the inculcation of habits of order and decency both by precept and example is one of the most important duties of teachers and parents, for the neglect of which no amount of mere book-learning will compensate. Moreover, the parties referred to must have overlooked one of the chief conditions