

No. 2.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR.

SIR,—

Institution for Deaf-mutes, Sumner, Christchurch, 19th April, 1899.

I beg to report on the School for Deaf-mutes for the year 1898.

The number of pupils present during the first half of the year was forty-nine, and during the last half of the year fifty. Their ages varied from seven to eighteen. With the exception of one little boy of ten, who lost his hearing about eighteen months before his admission, all these pupils were born completely deaf, or nearly so, and entered the school without the least notion of how to use their vocal organs for the purposes of speech. It must also be stated that the roll—fifty—includes all the *bona fide* deaf-mutes of school age who have during the last few years been brought under the notice of the Education Department. Statements made by opponents of the oral system implying that only the bright and intelligent applicants are admitted cannot be regarded, therefore, in any serious light.

The balance of numbers in the school is still in favour of the boys, there being twenty-nine boys to twenty-one girls. Of these pupils, Dunedin sent us 5; Portobello, 1; Invercargill, 1; Riverton, 2; Pembroke, 1; Balclutha, 1; Mosgiel, 1; Lawrence, 1; Warrington, 1; Gorge Creek, 1; Moeraki, 1; Christchurch, 4; Rangiora, 1; Timaru, 2; Temuka, 1; Winchester, 1; Lyttelton, 1; Akaroa, 1; Halswell, 2; Greymouth, 1; Hokitika, 1; Kumara, 1; Nelson, 1; Wellington, 6; Lower Hutt, 1; Masterton, 2; Foxton, 1; Auckland, 4; Upper Waiwera, 2; Onehunga, 1. Looking at these figures from different points of view, it appears that the southern element in the school is still predominant, and that the number of pupils from the four centres is greater in proportion to the population than the number from the inland towns and country places combined.

Nine children entered the institution at the beginning of the year, and two later on; eight left in December.

One boy with a broken leg was away for some time in the hospital, and another had to lose a few days' schooling in consequence of a broken arm. On the whole the health enjoyed by the inmates of the institution during the year was good, and there was very little interruption to school work.

The domestic arrangements were again, as for the last five years, under the supervision of the steward and matron, Mr. and Mrs. Buttle. To them is also intrusted the care of the inmates when out of school and not under the supervision of the assistant teachers.

For instruction the children were, as formerly, grouped into divisions. Of these there were eight; but classification of deaf scholars is not always as simple as it would appear. Frequently pupils are too slow to keep up with the average of their class, and then they have to go over the same work again. It also happens that pupils gifted by nature with specially good faculties, and with a slight sense of hearing to boot, progress at double rate, and so can pass into a higher class in a few months. Further, deaf children are sometimes sent to us who cannot be classified with the rest of our pupils. An afflicted boy of this description gained admission shortly before the mid-winter holidays. His case being a typical one, likely to recur from time to time, I describe it in detail.

J. P., a New-Zealand-born boy, ten years of age, fell ill with fever about two years ago, and lost his hearing. He is now totally deaf. Previous to his illness he could speak in a perfectly natural way like other children, and for some time attended the public school. He reached Standard I. What were the serious results of this boy's illness? (1.) The nerve of the ear was destroyed. (2.) As a result, communication between him and his parents or his teacher was no longer possible. (3.) The boy's speech, though distinct for some time after his recovery, soon deteriorated both in tone and in articulation. (4.) As time passed by, so this process of deterioration went on, until finally the lad ceased to speak altogether. In general terms, there was paralysis of the auditory nerve, involving stoppage of intellectual supply, ruin to vocal utterance, gradual diminution of mental vocabulary, and well-nigh complete isolation of the mind. And what measures were the most urgent to afford relief to this little fellow? (1.) To partly re-establish the lost chord of communication by teaching him lip-reading. (2.) To preserve the remnant of his speech by enticing him to pronounce names of objects, &c. (3.) To encourage the reading and the writing of very simple words. (4.) And, later on, to utilise the acquired art of lip-reading and the recovered speech for the purpose of building up his general education. It was also important to support these measures by boarding the lad out with a respectable family, so as to keep him in the society of hearing people, and by providing him with special and individual instruction. By these remedies a remarkable change has already been wrought, for not only has the boy's pronunciation been improved, his former ability to read a few simple words restored, and his memory of lost English refreshed, but he has also made excellent progress in the reading of easy stories, in arithmetic, and above all in the art of lip-reading; so that he can now hold communication with his teacher and others.

Numbers of visitors have availed themselves of the privilege to see the domestic arrangements of the institution on Wednesday afternoons. In the case of interested relatives of pupils, or of professional men specially desirous of seeing the *modus operandi* of the articulation method, opportunities have been given of entering the class-rooms; but as a rule visitors to these are not encouraged, on account of the serious interruption to the regular course of school work.

On the 15th of June last the school was honoured by a visit from His Excellency Lord Ranfurly, the Governor of the colony, who had a special desire to gain an insight into our educational work. No pains were spared to give him every opportunity of seeing and hearing nearly all the pupils in the institution. After it had been explained by examples how the classes for beginners and the intermediate classes were carried on, all the pupils of the upper class were introduced to