

must be pursued, at whatever cost of labour and irksomeness to those engaged in it. The change of conditions is justified only if it produces better results, and by these results it must be gauged." Yes, that is the true standpoint. "The schools are for the community and the children," and whatever is done must be done for their benefit, not the benefit of the teachers and Inspectors.

But, after all, it may be asked, wherefore all this pother about elementary education, about primary teaching in our State schools? There is a tendency on the part of some to associate spurious or half-deprecatory ideas with the terms "elementary" and "primary." These terms, however, should in this connection always suggest another, and that is the term "fundamental." The education given in our primary schools is the fundamental education, and if that be not efficient all subsequent training will be as unstable and baseless as an inverted pyramid. To quote Sir Henry Craik again:—

"Elementary education used to be deemed a process for putting each child in possession of certain tools and instruments—the three Rs—which obtained among men, and which were necessary to them before they could learn anything. We have now got much further, and we mean by elementary education much more than this. We include within it the laying of the intellectual foundation upon which anything more which is to be built must rest. We mean by it the first steps in the cultivation of the faculties, the stimulating of observation, and the process by which the children may be made more awake to all their duties, more fit to enjoy the inheritance that is theirs as citizens of the Empire, more alert to use their opportunities, helping them to fill up their lives with more of interest."

To return to the starting-point of the paragraph. These are changes demanded, changes impending. We are even now in a transition stage. This is a condition of affairs not peculiar to our colony. It is common to the Empire. Almost every issue of every reputable magazine, periodical, or review attests the statement. It is well that teachers should be forewarned.

We sometimes hear the remark made that our pupils are not so well fitted for certain classes of employment as they might be. Business-men, for example, occasionally challenge our pupils' handwriting, or their proficiency in practical arithmetic. We believe that much good would be done if such bodies as chambers of commerce, manufacturers' associations, trades and labour councils, and similarly constituted bodies were to give free expression to their opinions on the educational matters in which they are immediately interested. In this way weak points could be strengthened, and to certain branches of instruction there could be given a practical turn that would prove of great use when pupils come to begin their life's work. Of course, the proper function of the school is to prepare pupils for life, not for any particular position; still, without any undue interference with this main function, teachers might do much by way of fitting pupils in certain districts for the kind of employment that will in all probability fall to their lot.

We do not propose on this occasion to deal with the subject of instruction in any exhaustive manner. We content ourselves with noting some of the effects produced on certain subjects by the regulations of last year.

There was considerable improvement in reading. We attribute this improvement not so much to the fact that proficiency in the subject is now a *sine quâ non* for a pass as to the fact that more time was devoted to the teaching and practice of it. In this supremely important branch of school work there is yet much to be done, and we feel confident that it will not receive the amount of attention due to it till three suggestions made at the recent Inspectors' Conference are carried into effect—viz., (1) The abolition of the standard pass; (2) fewer subjects for the smaller schools, and (3) less arithmetic in all schools. Passing to handwriting, we found it necessary at several schools to censure the teachers for the comparative neglect into which this subject has fallen. There are, no doubt, cases in which children are physically unable to write well, but these cases are extremely rare. We may be permitted to quote the following from Ian Maclaren, in essays on "Homely Virtues," as being well worth taking to heart. The virtue under consideration is "thoroughness."

"There is the man who writes so badly that he is convinced himself that he has a literary gift, in which case the profession of letters has the easiest condition of entrance and the largest number of members among all the departments of human activity. Illegible writing is a slovenly habit, for which no excuse can be offered except want of education, and its punishment falls on innocent people—on postmen, on clerks, on busy professional men, and on friends who cannot understand the news that has been sent. The school, large or small, which does not teach its boys to write should be marked inefficient, and the people who will not do their best to write legibly should be classed with the illiterate."

The inferior writing shown at some of our schools seemed to be due to the notion that, in accordance with a provision of the new regulations, work equal to that of the class next below would be sufficient for a pass. But in this subject what is bad in one class would be bad in another, and in every class the pupil's work should bear the impress of tidiness and carefulness.

The quality of the composition, has on the whole, been well maintained. There is, however, a tendency on the part of some teachers to rely too much on themselves, and too little on their pupils, for the supply of the matter of the exercises. The syllabus, it must be admitted, gives some countenance to this method of treatment, and, as might be expected, teachers sometimes follow the line of the least resistance. But the line of least resistance is not always the best route to a desired goal. There can be no doubt that in the teaching of this subject the surest way for the teacher to enable his pupils to put their thoughts into words is to teach principles, and to insist that the matter shall come from the pupils. If good models are wanted the pupils should be encouraged to commit to memory choice portions of prose literature.

Taking next the subject of arithmetic, we may mention that comparatively few of the teachers took advantage of the provision in the new regulations whereby pupils may be taught and presented for examination in this subject in a class lower than that in which they are placed for other subjects. There were some notable exceptions, pupils being turned into lower classes in a wholesale manner