

The INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS to the Hon. the MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

Hon. W. C. Walker, C.M.G.

As the pressure of other work in the Department has hindered me from visiting all of the secondary schools, it will probably be best that this report should consist of a few general observations and suggestions, which I am perforce warranted in applying directly only to the schools I have seen, but which in all probability have a somewhat similar application in regard to the others.

I may say at the outset that in none of the schools are there lacking signs of earnest, steady work being done by staff and pupils. There is not among all our secondary schools a single one that cannot be fairly called efficient. Whether the efforts of those who control them are always wisely directed is, I think, more open to question. There is doubtless at the present time a distinct desire among our secondary school masters and mistresses to take part in the onward movement—in the rationalising of the curriculum and in the improvement of methods of teaching—now so evident in connection with secondary education in other parts of the world. It was said by an eminent headmaster a few years ago that during the last twenty-five years a greater change had taken place in education than in the two hundred years before, and he was bold enough to prophesy a still greater change during the next quarter of a century. If this be the case, and if we in New Zealand are to move with the times, I venture to say that not only must we be prepared to have our minds open for new ideas, but that we must also be ready for the expenditure of a considerable amount of thought and steady hard work in order to secure the highest benefits to be derived from an enlightened policy without dislocating, so to speak, the machinery by which that policy is to be brought about. But few principals of schools have the opportunity of visiting Europe and America (it would be a good thing if every one of them could do so periodically); consequently, the chief information in regard to new ideas has to be gained from books and periodicals dealing with educational matters. In this connection, regret may be expressed that so many on the staffs of our secondary schools have received little or no training as teachers before being called upon to teach in the schools. It is hoped that through the establishment of colonial training colleges this defect may disappear at no distant date.

It is not to be inferred from what has been said above that our system of secondary education should be a slavish imitation of that in vogue in England, or Scotland, or Germany, or in any other part of the world. In fact, I venture to assert that many of the defects (or what appear to me to be defects) still observable have sprung from following too closely the methods of older countries bequeathed to us by our fathers.

The average time spent by a boy or girl at a secondary school in New Zealand does not, probably, exceed two and a half years, and the majority who enter such schools do not stay more than two years. Under these circumstances it appears to be a mistake to attempt to teach them two foreign languages; in most schools, however, Latin and French are both included in the curriculum of a large proportion of the pupils, who in their short school life can acquire but the merest smattering of either language. It is, in fact, a most wasteful process: it is not so much that the work is altogether useless as that with the same expenditure of time and trouble much more valuable work could be done. I therefore suggest, for the thoughtful consideration of those who direct our secondary schools, that it would be far more profitable to try to teach five-sixths of the pupils therein one foreign language only, and to endeavour to bring that language to a *paying* point, than to teach two languages in a necessarily altogether incomplete manner. The paying point of any subject is reached, I take it, when that subject exercises a permanent and well-marked influence upon the thought or intellectual powers of the pupil; and, albeit it is rather difficult to measure anything apparently so vague as the influence of special studies upon mental development, yet I should define the paying point of a language, from the teacher's point of view, as that at which the pupil becomes capable, within the limits of the vocabulary he has acquired, of using it as a language—viz., for speaking, reading, or writing, or for more than one of these purposes.

The proposition I have enunciated seems clear enough to my mind; but it is equally clear to me that, if we are to teach one foreign language only, that language should be a modern one. As a mental discipline a modern language is quite as valuable, in my opinion, as a dead language. I do not expect—yet, at all events—to carry all secondary school teachers with me in this conclusion; but I feel that in stating it I am in very good company, for within the last year or two there have been unmistakable utterances to the same effect of several whose names are well known. I need mention only three: Dr. Weldon, formerly Senior Classic and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, afterwards Headmaster of Harrow, and now Bishop of Calcutta; Sir R. C. Jebb, Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and M.P. for the University; and Lord Rosebery. I will quote a few sentences from an address given by the first of these to the members of the Modern Language Association:—

... I am one of those who have, upon the whole, been unable to realise the important distinction which is made between the classical and the modern languages as educational instruments. ... I have tried to teach French and German at various times, and the one result of my teaching has been to convince me that the statement which I made to you, that there is no inherent difference between ancient and modern languages, is a true one. ... I hope that the time is not far distant when the universities of this land will afford to modern languages something like the same welcome and the same encouragement that they afford at present to the ancient classical languages. After all, the schools which I may claim in some slight measure to represent are, in a sense, the handmaids of the university; and I believe I can assure you—I do not dare to say in the name of all public-school masters, because all public-school masters never agree upon anything, but a considerable number of the most thoughtful of public-school masters—that, whenever the universities shall open their gates freely and fully to students of modern languages, and put them on an equality with the students of the ancient languages, we whose occupation is to teach the young will be ready and even eager for the change.—(*Journal of Education*, January, 1899.)