

In January of the present year, before the Modern Languages Association, Sir Richard Jebb declared his opinion that "the advocates of modern languages could boldly affirm that they were worthy to be studied as instruments of the highest intellectual culture."

Again, "The School World" of January, 1901, contains the following paragraph among its items of interest:—

Lord Rosebery's notable address to the students of Glasgow University should aid very materially in placing modern languages in a position of equality with the classics. The Modern Languages Association has been hammering away at this subject with a persistency worthy of the importunate widow, but with very little of her success. It is, however, an incalculable gain when a Lord Rector declares from a university platform, with the almost unanimous approval of the whole Press of the country, "That there is required, on the part of the educational authorities, an admission that a man may be an educated and a cultured gentleman, although he has not seriously studied Latin and Greek, and that France and Germany possess invaluable literatures, with the advantage that they are in languages which are living and not dead."

The advantage of a modern language over an ancient language in our New Zealand secondary schools is all the greater by reason of a fact already referred to—namely, that of the shortness of the time spent by most boys or girls in secondary work, inasmuch as a modern language is by its very nature nearer in vocabulary and thought to the mother-tongue, and the pupil has therefore all the more chance of making actual use of it in some way, or, as I have already expressed it, of bringing it to the paying point.

Far be it from me to undervalue the mental discipline and culture of which Latin and Greek have been, and are still, often made the vehicles. In the past the classics were the best taught subjects in the secondary school course; the best teachers concentrated their efforts upon the improvement of the methods used in teaching them, with the natural result that boys, and sometimes girls, received thereby a real education. But with the improvement of methods of teaching generally in all subjects, the question of ancient or modern languages comes up afresh for solution. Further, what I have said as to the expediency of teaching Latin does not apply to the same extent in the case of those who stay longer at the secondary schools and afterwards go to the university with the intention of studying languages thereat.

In several schools the new or "natural" method of teaching languages is being gradually adopted in one or other of its forms; and the change seems generally to have been attended with success. In most schools, however, the language-teaching consists to a very large extent of the dry bones of grammar, and of detached sentences based on grammar rules: the consequence is that the total amount of time spent on grammar (English, Latin, and French) is abnormally large, and the results are by no means commensurate therewith. I fear that I fail altogether to see any virtue in mere gerund-grinding; and the fallacy that pupils acquire a knowledge or appreciation of the literature of the languages they learn needs only to be mentioned in order to become manifest. If grammar occupied a less prominent place in the teaching of language, and if it were taught step by step from the reading lesson or conversation lesson, there would be more chance for the pupil to derive from his language lesson—it may be to a large extent unconsciously—the real benefit it can in a short time confer by the influence upon his thought of the constant variation of the mode of expression of ideas. As a matter of fact, whatever method of teaching languages be adopted, a period of two or three years does not give an opportunity of learning the literatures through the medium of the languages themselves. The only means of supplying a serious gap in our present system, and of giving our boys and girls some knowledge of the world's literature outside of English literature, is by means of good translations—a method already partly employed in one or two schools to great advantage. A redeeming feature I am glad to note is that in most schools English is well taught, and in several is treated in an excellent manner.

I have written so much in regard to language-teaching that my remarks on other subjects of the secondary school course must necessarily be brief. I would suggest a more general adoption of more concrete methods in the teaching of mathematics, especially of geometry, and, if we are still to be condemned to use Euclid, then by all means let us have a far freer use of that esteemed classic than is customary; let every important proposition be applied not only to the solution of riders, but to the purposes of practical measurement. Neither should it be possible for any one who has learnt geometry to leave school in ignorance of the fundamental properties of the circle, of similar figures, or of solids, merely because these subjects happen to be treated of in portions of Euclid not read in his form. It would be unfair to overlook the fact that, either directly or indirectly, many teachers constantly endeavour to supply the omissions entailed by too rigid an adherence to the methods in vogue.

There are some schools in which science is really well taught; but I should hardly be warranted in making that statement in regard to the majority of the science classes in the secondary schools of the colony. I wish to refrain from stating too dogmatically or in too sweeping a manner my own opinion; but I distrust almost instinctively any so-called teaching of science that does not consist in a very large degree of experiments performed by pupils individually with their own hands, or of measurements made by them, or of observations actually made with their own eyes of the facts or phenomena of nature. Scientific information got from a book or from a teacher may have its uses, but it does not give direct scientific training, or the particular kind of mental culture that really scientific work confers upon the faithful student.

The introduction of manual work in some form or other, not as a separate subject, but in such a way as to have a true relation to or co-ordination with the other subjects of the curriculum, has had a markedly beneficial effect in the schools in which it has been introduced; and I am convinced its influence is only just beginning.

My remarks upon the defects to be observed in much of the teaching now seen in the schools must not be taken as a sign that I underrate the mental value and (what is of vast importance) the moral value of the earnest efforts put forth from day to day by teachers; nevertheless, it would be idle to omit to point out that the whole of our secondary education would be far more