

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS.

Right Hon. Minister of Education.

I HAVE the honour to present my report upon the secondary schools and upon certain other matters connected with secondary education.

Since the period to which the last report (E.—12, 1902) refers, all the secondary schools except two have been inspected; but I regret that constant pressure of work has prevented in most cases the carrying-out of the intention to forward to the governing bodies and the principals of the schools copies of the reports thereon.

I am glad to say that I see signs of progress in nearly all, perhaps in all, of the secondary schools. Much more attention is being devoted to methods of teaching than formerly, and although in some cases the interest in new methods has not passed the stage of inquiry and thought, yet even that is of value as influencing the character of the instruction that is given; in fact, anything that gives life and energy to the lessons must increase their educational effect. In many of the schools earnest efforts are being made by the staff to bring the teaching into accordance with modern ideas and modern requirements. This is seen in the improvement of the language-teaching, more stress being laid on an actual knowledge of the languages taught, whether it be by a careful treatment of the translation lessons, as those who have been trained themselves in the old ways seem often to prefer, or by conversation lessons leading up to reading and composition in the foreign language, followed later by translation, according to the new or natural system, as it is called. I think, indeed, that before long, whichever be the method adopted by the language-teachers in the colony, the old or the new, all of them will come to realise more fully the great educational value of a large amount of oral work in every language taught.

I would again express my opinion that it is, comparatively speaking, a waste of time, or, more precisely perhaps, that it is not making the best use of the time for which the average boy or girl remains at a secondary school, to attempt to teach two foreign languages to the great majority of the pupils in the secondary schools. One language acquired up to the point at which it can be used in speech, in reading, and in writing, or even in translation alone, is worth ten times as much educationally—that is, as an intellectual training—as any number of languages of which there is acquired merely a smattering of accidence and syntax, a certain facility in translating stock detached sentences, and the knowledge of a small portion of some author. I state this strongly, it may be dogmatically, in spite of the fact that I am well aware that teachers whose literary scholarship is far higher than anything I can lay claim to, and whose opinions therefore I am bound to treat with a due amount of professional courtesy, still cling to the old ways and old ideas. Trained myself probably in the same way as they, I feel that I have been convinced by the force of facts that the real training afforded by a language consists in its use as a vehicle for the expression of human thought, and not in mere grammar drill; indeed, that to attempt to teach the grammar of a language—that is, the science and the philosophy of it—before teaching the language itself is a veritable putting of the cart before the horse. In short, for the average boy or girl attending a New Zealand secondary school, with a stay thereat of two or three years, there cannot properly be spared time for more than one language; and, although I do not expect all to agree with me (indeed, it is of rare occurrence to find doctors—that is, teachers—all agreed), yet I do unhesitatingly affirm that, if one language only is to be taught, it must in general, nay, almost inevitably, be a modern language. I do not for one moment believe that classical learning in the old sense—that is, Latin and Greek learning—will suffer in any essential particular from the fact that all those who take it up do so with the intention of pursuing it as a serious study, and that others who have no such intention give up Latin and Greek altogether. Neither do I admit that the literature of England, France, and Germany is in any sense inferior to that of two ancient nations, however enlightened they may have been in their time. The modern literature has at all events this advantage for the average boy: that in thought and feeling it appeals to his interest and attention, and can really affect his sympathy and train his taste and intelligence, and not remain a mere lesson and nothing else, like the Latin or Greek that a boy learns at school. Of course, much still depends upon the personality of the teacher: it is because the best teachers have in the past given their attention to Latin and Greek that these languages have been the means of discipline for many minds; but there is no reason why equal skill should not be employed in the teaching of modern languages—indeed, this is to a large extent already being done. If such be the case, the reason for a differential treatment of ancient and modern languages by the universities largely disappears.

The following extract from the *School World* of May, 1903, is to the point in this connection:—

A meeting of the Modern Languages Association was held in Glasgow on the 15th April, when Professor Kirkpatrick, LL.D., of Edinburgh University, in his presidential address, referred to the conflict between the advocates of the study of classical and of modern languages, and contended that the University Commissioners, by assigning double marks to classical subjects as against modern subjects in the bursary competition, had intensified the controversy. It was maintained that the classical languages were more efficient instruments of education than the modern, but this contention was largely based on the fallacy that, because more time and attention were devoted in most countries to classics than to modern languages, the former were therefore more educative than the latter. He urged classical supporters to study carefully the Frankfort system, under which it was found more natural and rational to begin linguistic study with a modern than with an ancient language.

The following motion was afterwards agreed to:—

That absolute equality of status be accorded to ancient and to modern languages, both in school and university; that, wherever possible, the Frankfort principle of basing classical study on a thorough training in one modern language be brought into practice, and that that principle, so successful in Germany, and so beneficial both to classical study and to general education, be strongly recommended to the notice of the Scottish Education Department and of the public generally.