

No. 2.

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS.

Right Hon. the Minister of Education.

It will, I think, be evident from the special reports of the Inspectors of Technical Instruction that technical education has continued during the past year to make good progress in the colony, at all events as far as the wants of students residing in the towns are concerned. A beginning has also been made towards providing technical education in the country districts, where it would take the form of training in the scientific principles that underlie agriculture, dairying, and similar pursuits; but it is to be regretted that so far that beginning is very small. It is true that a most important step has been taken during the year by the emphasis that is laid in the new public-school syllabus upon nature-study as the means of training the children in the primary schools in the observation of facts around them, especially of the elementary facts of plant-life; this in the hands of intelligent teachers will form a most useful preparation for future work. It is interesting to note the successful establishment in many schools of school-gardens, which in other countries have played such an important part in elementary agricultural education, and which occupy in regard to lessons in elementary agriculture the same place that the laboratory does in elementary physics or chemistry, or that the workshop does to the lessons in woodwork. But, after all, this work is only a preparation for the later stages of what may more properly be called technical agricultural education. The next step is the establishment of classes for the sons and daughters of farmers, and for others who have left the day school and are following or are likely to follow country pursuits. There seems to be an impression that the Education Department should establish such classes; but that is not the method contemplated by the Act: it is to local controlling authorities that the Act gives the function of establishing and controlling them. In this connection I venture to repeat what I said last year on the same question: "I am not sure, indeed, that if it had been otherwise—that is, if the Act had removed the power of initiative and control from the local authorities and had conferred it upon a central authority—anything whatever would have been gained; and I am quite sure that much of the benefit that follows from spontaneous growth and from healthy local control would be lost. If local authorities—by which I mean not only School Committees and Education Boards, but also agricultural and pastoral associations, County Councils, and Road Boards (which are all recognised under the Act)—would realise the immense benefits that would result from the general establishment of continuation classes and elementary agricultural, technical, or commercial classes in their respective districts, and would set to work in real earnest to establish such classes where they do not exist, they would find the first steps very much easier than they anticipated, and, although it does not follow that success would be assured everywhere, failure (which would probably be temporary only) would be more honourable than the present inaction. One of the most useful things, for instance, that an agricultural association could do in conjunction, say, with an Education Board would be to establish in its district classes conducted by a well-qualified agricultural instructor for training young farmers and teachers in the elements of some branch or branches of agriculture suited to the district. The Department would do what it has always done when requested in such cases, send one of its Inspectors to explain what initial steps should be taken, and generally to advise the local authorities as to the work of the classes." It is hoped that the attempts that are being made this year to initiate agricultural training-classes at Hawera and Stratford may be as successful as they deserve to be.

There are one or two notes of warning that should, perhaps, be uttered:—

Firstly, the number of continuation classes is still very small compared with the number of technical classes; it should not be forgotten that it is next to impossible to secure sound technical education unless there is a good basis of general education, for which the continuation classes are intended to provide.

Secondly, there is at present a tendency for students at technical schools to take detached subjects. The directors and controlling authorities of the classes will doubtless see the expediency of encouraging students to take up connected courses of study and practical work, by which alone the full benefit of technical instruction can be obtained. The importance of the proper co-ordination of instruction in the principles underlying each branch of technical work with individual practice in the laboratory and the workshop is, generally speaking, being more and more recognised. One is sorry, therefore, to see that there are many persons in the colony who are so led astray by specious advertisements of certain "Correspondence classes" as apparently to imagine that it is possible to obtain an engineering training from books alone, without a well-arranged course of laboratory and workshop practice under skilled instructors. Certificates obtained under such circumstances can have no real value; and those who have hoped (no doubt earnestly—that is the sad part of it) thus to gain real skill and knowledge in their profession are unfortunately doomed, sooner or later, to that disappointment that awaits every man who trusts in a sham. There is for us no royal road to technical or any other form of practical or scientific knowledge but the laborious path of steady, painstaking experiment and observation with our own hands and our own eyes.

G. HOGBEN,
Inspector-General of Schools.