

My own opinion is that teachers themselves should be prepared to give the instruction; and if they were prepared by being brought to a centre, say, weekly—and such opportunities are now being given by the Department—to prepare special subjects, you would at once diffuse the specialised knowledge among the children in a way that it is impossible to do where you simply have a peripatetic teacher who could only go to half a dozen schools or so a week. If you brought the teachers into a centre for instruction, they would, of course, spread the information far better, and naturally in a more economical manner. It is the question of economy equally with the question of efficiency that you have to decide.

134. With regard to what Mr. Wilson suggests should be taught in the primary schools, could that be done without any disarrangement of the syllabus?—I think it inadvisable to take any specialised work in our schools in the way of agriculture. My own view is that we have so many means of preparing the children in a scientific manner, anticipatory to their entering upon agricultural pursuits, and of giving them that information which would be of far more value to them subsequently, that it would be better to leave the specialised work either to the Seventh Standard, or further on still; but agricultural training should not be in the ordinary routine of the school syllabus.

135. That, of course, does not refer to nature-study?—No. We have many means of preparing the children in nature-study. We have, for example, to obtain a local knowledge of the plants, the animals, the insects, the soils of a district, and then we want a knowledge of ordinary natural phenomena. If the children were prepared in these things, such as I think they should be, and were trained to observe the various aspects of the country, I say that would be the true stepping-stone to scientific training afterwards, because you are training the children by means of the perceptive faculties, and that is where our education is so defective to-day.

136. *Mr. Fowlds.*] Is that education being given now?—Not in that way. I doubt, for example—and I am sorry to say it—if you take the teachers of New Zealand, whether 5 per cent. of them would know, shall I say—5 per cent. of the native plants, 5 per cent. of the native grasses, and 5 per cent. of the birds indigenous to New Zealand. I doubt whether a score of them know what constitutes the native flora as distinct from the imported flora.

137. *The Chairman.*] That is all provided for in the syllabus?—But we have no means of training in it. What we want to do in connection with our syllabus is to insist that every teacher shall have a knowledge of the things that are around him, instead of simply having book-knowledge. The teachers teach botany from books instead of from nature. That is where all our weakness is to-day. If you take the ordinary teacher in our country schools—I am speaking from experience—that teacher will be teaching from the book, and whatever the book says, whether right or wrong, is accepted. All our early school training ought to be by means of concretes in the first instance, and a teacher should have an elementary knowledge of the things that are around him, so as to give that information first, and then base his teaching subsequently upon that information.

138. Would it be advisable, do you think, to adopt the suggestion made by Mr. Wilson—viz., that while not going in for absolute specialisation, such things as the chemistry of manures and the other matters that he referred to should be taught in the primary schools in the country districts?—You mean to say elementary lessons in chemistry practically applied?

139. In agricultural subjects?—It is allowable now. It is possible now to do that, and a grant by the Government is available for it. It is allowable under the Manual and Technical Instruction Act.

140. *Mr. Hall.*] It is not compulsory?—No; but I think it is advisable not to make a thing compulsory in education. You can foster it. This tends to the adaptation of a subject to a district—that is, taking up a subject that is suitable to that district in anticipation of the future needs of the children.

141. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Wilson is anxious that in the country schools, while there should be no absolute specialisation, yet something should be done with regard to the children in the way of applying the principles of science, that they may be taught to the objects which may engage them in after-years?—Some time ago in my report I drew special attention to this, that the services of the Agricultural Department should be given to our schools with a view to benefiting the children who enter a milk-factory. Children who carry milk to the factory should have a lesson there in the art of buttermaking and cheesemaking. When the children are available, why cannot they take a lesson from a practical man? They could receive that special instruction as a part of a morning's lesson, and instead of being late for school the lesson could count as a part of the morning's instruction. I see no reason why such practical instruction should not be given.

142. That is only one branch. What was put by Mr. Wilson was that the teacher himself should direct the child's education more especially to those objects which may be of use in after-life?—I say that the teacher himself should be capable of doing that, and you should train him in order that he may be able to apply the information that he possesses to the training of the children in the country. The teacher should be adapted to his environment.

143. Can that be done in the country schools under our present system without disarrangement?—Yes, certainly. You can adapt the training, but not carry on the specialisation of it. I say the specialisation should not go into the schools, but the generalisation should. If you say that the children in the country should have a knowledge of elementary botany, elementary geology, and aspects of elementary agriculture—all these things can be dovetailed as the child passes through the various standards, so that he will have a general knowledge, and it can all be based on concretes by means of nature-study if that child is properly trained.

144. Should the work of the expert be directed towards the education of the children or the education of the teachers?—The education of the teachers, and the teachers should take the knowledge into the school, because the expert would possibly be no teacher—that is, have no aptitude for teaching children.