

6. *Practical Work in Geography and Science.*—The proper teaching of these subjects is still a “dark continent” to a good many teachers, and we fear that the readiness with which text-books are put into the hands of the pupils, and the slavishness with which the lines laid down there are followed, will leave us very little better off than we were before in the matter of method. Contact with the facts first, inference from these second, and the book third and last, should be the recognised order. It is the method prescribed for these subjects in the syllabus rather than the matter which marks the point of departure from what we were formerly accustomed to; and the onus is laid upon every teacher of seeing that his treatment of them does not degenerate into the mere gleaning of information from the text-book. It is “mastery over facts” through looking at them and understanding them that is our aim; power to interpret the forces and phenomena of nature and of life, power to think, power to look out into the world and to see. Text-book work will never give this result, and though information about things is of some value, it can never become a substitute for first-hand knowledge gained by observation, search, and discovery.

7. *Unification of the Various Subjects of the School Course.*—Those subjects which present points of contact must be brought together, schemed together, and dovetailed into one another. Thus the reading-lessons, by judicious selection, may be made to cover over the courses in geography and the whole course in history, these being in some of their aspects highly suitable for treatment through the medium of the reading-lessons. One scheme of lessons could be formulated to include all the necessary practical work in geography, science, and the “measurement” part of arithmetic. And so what seems a hopeless and embarrassing multiplicity of separate subjects may be skilfully reduced and applied under two or three headings. “Correlation” is the word we use to express this unity we have been speaking of, and “correlation” is the watchword of the teacher who would most efficiently direct his work. Nature and knowledge are one, the human mind is one, and though for purposes of discussion we separate our various branches of knowledge, we must never allow such separation to prevent us running together for purposes of instruction and demonstration such subjects as in the nature of things are closely allied.

Such are some of the principles we have endeavoured to carry with us into the schools. We fully appreciate the difficulties teachers have experienced in adjusting themselves to the new order of things. There was something so definite about the old, and there is something so indefinite about the new. It requires something approaching courage to step out and realise our freedom. The matter of adjustment is just as difficult for Inspectors as it is for teachers, but we are surely at one in welcoming a change which gives so much freedom, so much scope for initiative and enthusiasm.

SIGNS OF PROGRESS.—The progressive spirit has been abroad in our district in matters outside the course of instruction. To the credit of the Board a lead has been taken in several reforms which are destined to have far-reaching influence throughout the whole colony. Some of these reforms were foreshadowed in last year’s report, and we are grateful for the fact that the suggestions vaguely hinted at have been taken up in earnest. First among the reforms we place the adoption of the single desk in lieu of the dual. This step, which for many reasons could be taken only after very serious consideration, carries with it several very important results from the teacher’s point of view, and it is valuable from his point of view because it enables him to do fuller and more adequate justice to his scholars. It secures the absolute independence of each pupil; it recognises his claim for separate and independent treatment; it makes discipline easy; it insists on an adequate amount of air and floor space for each child. These and other advantages are surely adequate gains for the increased expenditure which the new method of seating will involve. Next there is the matter of consolidating rural schools so as to render instruction in them more efficient. Although this has been fully discussed, for good and sufficient reasons no scheme of consolidation has yet come into operation. We will have to possess ourselves in patience yet awhile. It will be some time before the public mind becomes sufficiently formed on the subject to render a scheme effective. Several parts of our district lend themselves well to the working-out of the system. Among these may be mentioned Rongotea, Marton, Rangiwhia, Manaia, and Kaponga; and we trust that when the suitable opportunity comes, and the displacement of the smaller school becomes practicable and necessary, there will be no hesitation in adopting the conveyance system, which in similar circumstances in other lands has proved an unqualified success. The small school is a necessity in new districts where roads are bad and settlement sparse; but in older districts, where roads are good and settlement closer, a system of consolidation should prevail, and no school should be found within eight or ten miles of a neighbouring school. The Board has done valuable service in giving the matter prominence, and we trust it will be brought under public notice at every possible opportunity. Another matter in which the Board has given a lead to the colony is that of providing out of its funds two travelling scholarships, one for men and one for women, to be competed for annually by the teachers of the district. The scholarships are of the value of £20, and carry also the privilege of a month’s leave of absence. The first awards were made this year, and fell to Mr. W. Adams, headmaster of the Patea School, and Miss Finlayson, mistress of the Rongotea School. Both these teachers have arranged for their leave of absence. Miss Finlayson goes to see the schools in the southern districts, while Mr. Adams goes to Australia to visit Victoria and South Australia. The scholarships are awarded by the Inspectors, partly for a specially prepared thesis on an educational subject, and partly for efficiency in school-work. A scholarship will on no account be awarded, however excellent the thesis submitted, unless the actual work of the school bears marks of thoughtfulness, progress, and thoroughness. The appointment of a special instructor in nature-study is another step in the right direction. In a rural district it is of the first importance that the teaching should give special and direct prominence to a subject which bears so directly upon the life work of so many people. In appointing a man who has had a large and varied experience as a teacher, and also an intimate scientific knowledge of plant and insect life, the Board has acted wisely, and we anticipate for Mr. J. Grant a useful career in this new department. His will be to a large extent the work of the pioneer, and we will watch with more than ordinary interest the developments that result from his efforts.