

petition, now less than one-tenth are given by competition. The position has altered very much. The nine-tenths are given on qualifying examinations. I think that is a great improvement. We want to give every one that is worth it the next higher step. The sorting process of course goes on with the senior free places. It is not to the interest of the State or of the individual that every boy or girl who has had two years of secondary education should be kept at school away from work for another two or three years. It is not necessary or desirable. Naturally the number of persons qualified for free places will be smaller as you go up the ladder. Some people have felt great heart-burnings because the number of those qualifying for senior free places is very much smaller than the number qualifying for junior free places, but you, gentlemen, understand it must necessarily be smaller. That is one of the points upon which the cry of overstrain has been raised. If in a mistaken conscientious desire to do his duty a schoolmaster tries to prepare a candidate who is not fit for a senior free place to gain one, I do not think you could put that down—any resulting overstrain—altogether to the system. That sort of thing will happen whether the examination is competitive or qualifying. There will always be a number of pupils who will try to get through examinations nature has not fitted them for. There will always be parents who will wish their children to do so, and conscientious teachers who will desire to do what they perhaps wrongly think to be the best for their pupils. We want to get the co-operation of teachers to send forward those only that are really fit for the next stage. We want the secondary-school teachers of the colony as well as the primary ones to help us, and all those engaged in education to make a proper selection. The ideal selection is that made by the teacher, provided the school is under proper inspection, but we cannot use that method at present. You know very well what would happen in a good many cases if the teacher had to nominate. One teacher told me he would often have to nominate one who was unfit owing to outside influence or to other circumstances that he really could not overlook, and therefore we are not prepared yet, I think, in this colony for what may be an ideal system of nomination—by the school, selection by the teacher. What we want to do as far as possible is to carry out the present movement to substitute the qualifying examination for the competitive. I think we shall get better selection too if we do that, if we get the teachers to act more and more with the Inspectors in assisting in selection.

In regard to district high schools, I have already touched upon their purpose and their place. You will excuse me for being almost bluntly candid when I say that one of their weak points is the character of the programme of work many of them take up. In the country schools the programme, to my mind, is not sufficiently in accord with the actual life around. I say this with confidence, because in nearly every case where I have been accompanied by the district Inspectors they have agreed with me in my opinion. Why should not those schools in every case be places where, besides the nature-study, we should have something that is a distinct beginning of the agricultural instruction we all so much need. I do not believe the intellectual training of the pupil would suffer at all. A good course, practical and theoretical, of agricultural instruction should be taken up in every one of our district high schools, and I would also say the same of a good many of the secondary schools of the colony. What would be lost by taking up in a practical and intelligent manner agricultural subjects and dropping certain other subjects like, say, electricity and magnetism—good enough in themselves, no doubt—but subjects which seem out of place in the programme of the schools referred to? I go to a dairying district and find there is no science taught leading up to dairying at all, and I find instead electricity and magnetism and typewriting.—(Laughter.)—Well, gentlemen, we want to do more and more what I am sure we shall have your co-operation in doing—attempt to make the programmes of our district high schools more and more in accord with the needs of the children, with regard to their present surroundings and their future life. Some people have thought you are debarring them from following any occupation but that of their fathers. Not so. If you intelligently train them in accordance with their surroundings, if you teach them the science of what is nearest to their mental environment, then you give them the best mental training to suit them for any path in life.—(Hear, hear.)—I am very glad to see that in some of the district high schools at least they have gone somewhat further, they have made a good beginning in agricultural subjects—a promising beginning. I need not name the districts concerned, because there are several in which that has happened, and I am very glad to say the Boards have chosen special experts to assist the teachers and Inspectors, and all those organizing the various forms of agricultural instruction, in their work. That is a step forward. I think some of the secondary schools might take up work of that sort too. I have hinted it to some of them, and I do not think we shall suffer at all if they do so.

Agricultural instruction generally I shall not refer to. It is a very large subject, and what we have to see to is that we make it possible for pupils to take up this agricultural work after they leave the primary and secondary schools. They may do while at school such work in their science and in their nature-study as will help them considerably afterwards.

Now, I have to apologize for making so many discursive remarks, but it seemed to be my duty to call attention to some of the weak points in our education system. So many people have been telling us what a fine system we now have—what a complete system—that I have sometimes felt afraid we might think we were approaching perfection. I do not think we have come very near it just yet. We have made a good many improvements, but I think it just as well we should review some of the points that will need very urgent attention. I hope we shall still go on improving. After all I need not remind you, gentlemen, that the *personnel* of the people who are engaged in the teaching of the children of the country is the most important thing, and we should endeavour to get teachers of the highest personal character and the highest personal ability. With all the fears and misgivings that from time to time overwhelm me and make me feel like Elijah in the wilderness, I am consoled by this reflection that, taking things altogether, we have really a good body of teachers in the teaching profession, and it is their *personnel* that matters more than anything else, whatever we do or whatever our methods may be. It is the impress of one mind and character upon another that matters, and, whatever we can do, I know we shall never forget that to secure that is the highest aim of all organization, method, and regulations.