

Last year it was pointed out that the average time spent by a pupil at a New Zealand secondary school was slightly over two years and a half. Information in greater detail has been gathered since that date, and it is now possible to give a closer estimate of the average length of secondary-school life. The following table* shows, as nearly as can be estimated, the number of pupils who stayed one, two, three, four, and five or more years.

Stayed one year	...	...	...	1,049 pupils or 27·3 per cent.
Stayed two years	...	...	...	1,066 " 27·7 "
Stayed three years	...	...	...	864 " 22·5 "
Stayed four years	...	...	...	248 " 6·4 "
Stayed five or more years	...	...	...	619 " 16·1 "

Hence the average time spent by a pupil in a secondary school is 2·56 years, or slightly under two years and seven months. This is greater than the average duration of a pupil's stay in New York or Chicago (about two years), but less than the corresponding period in England, Scotland, Switzerland, and other European countries. One of the provisions, for instance, of the Secondary Schools Regulations of England is as follows :—

Article 2.—A school will not be recognized as a secondary school unless (i) an adequate proportion of the scholars remain at least four years in the school, and (ii) an adequate proportion of the scholars remain in the school up to and beyond the age of sixteen. In determining what is an adequate proportion of scholars for either of these purposes, the Board may (where circumstances justify it) take into account scholars who have left the school and are pursuing their studies in some other secondary school approved for this purpose.

While the average length of a pupil's course in a New Zealand secondary school may, for a young country, be considered fair, there can be no doubt that, in the interests of the pupils themselves and of the community at large, a longer stay is in every way desirable. There are three causes which have contributed to shorten the average length of the secondary-school course :—

(1.) As has already been mentioned in another part of this report, † children are kept so long in the preparatory classes of the public schools that they have reached an unduly high average age before they have attained to the standard required for admission to a secondary school.

(2.) The Matriculation Examination of the University of New Zealand, although primarily intended as an entrance examination to one of the affiliated colleges, has come to be regarded as a leaving examination; in the past the standard of this examination has been such that pupils have been able without difficulty to cover the work required in three years, and in some cases even two. The standard of the examination for 1911 and subsequent examinations, however, has been raised to that standard which a secondary-school pupil should reasonably cover in a four-years course, and it is probable that this alteration will have some effect in prolonging the length of the secondary-school course.

(3.) Economic reasons are to some extent at the root of the evil; closely related, indeed forming part of, this cause is the absence in the community of a thorough and hearty belief in the advantages of secondary education. Except in the comparatively few cases where it is the intention of the parent to send the pupil on to the University, the parent is naturally inclined to begrudge the years spent by his child in learning mathematics and foreign languages, and to consider that he is better qualifying himself for the business of life if he is placed immediately after leaving school in some employment, and perhaps sent to evening classes at a technical school. In the past there has no doubt been some ground for this belief, but the present movement towards making the work of the secondary schools more vocational in character will tend to overcome an objection which has hitherto been well founded. It is not the province of a secondary school merely to qualify a pupil for the work he will be called upon to perform in after-life any more than it is its province to give him a purely theoretical education, such as has been the tendency in the past; but there seems to be no reason to fear that a thorough mental training could

* Christ's College Grammar School is excluded.

† Page 11.