

No. 2.

REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS OF MANUAL AND TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.

SIR,—

We have the honour to submit the following report on manual and technical instruction in the Dominion for the year ending 31st December, 1911.

A. MANUAL INSTRUCTION.

Recognized classes were held at about sixty-six per cent. of the public schools during the year. In the lower classes the most popular branches are paper-work, brush drawing, modelling, and black-board drawing. The number of schools in which handwork is regarded as a method rather than as a subject of instruction continues to increase. The marked improvement in the literature dealing with handwork, together with the systematic instruction given in the training colleges, have no doubt contributed very materially to this change of view, and it may be expected that, as a result of the increased facilities for the study and practice of the concrete method that the training colleges provide, a continued improvement in the teaching of handwork may be looked for.

Speaking generally, the most marked improvements in methods of teaching are to be found in classes for the more specialized forms of manual instruction such as woodwork, elementary physical measurements, elementary agriculture, cookery, laundry-work, and dressmaking.

It has been deemed necessary to call attention repeatedly to the general lack of instruction in the elementary principles underlying cookery. It is therefore gratifying to be able to report that the courses provided at the various cookery centres now include some instruction in principles, and that many of the instructors are endeavouring to increase and widen their knowledge with the view of making the course in cookery more educative than has been the case in the past. It is worthy of note that in certain districts a lively interest is taken in the cookery classes by parents and others. The number of cookery classes in operation during the year was 342, as against 308 in 1910.

Fairly full courses of domestic instruction are now provided in some districts, the girls receiving instruction in laundry-work and dressmaking in addition to cookery. As a preparation for and an introduction to home-life and its duties the value of such courses to the community cannot be over-estimated. Sufficient theoretical instruction is given to enable pupils to take up the work in an intelligent manner, and to add an element of interest and dignity to what is too often regarded as menial drudgery.

It would appear that certain hints thrown out in last year's report regarding methods of instruction in woodwork have not been altogether without result. Very earnest attempts have been made in some centres to improve the methods of instruction in both the drawing and the practical work at the bench. A more extensive use is being made of models, and pupils' notebooks show that freehand sketching preparatory to drawing with instruments is not altogether neglected. It is necessary again to draw attention to the need of more suitable timbers for preparatory exercises than are commonly in use. Little improvement in the work of first-year pupils can be looked for until some better timber is substituted for rimu and white-pine. It is recognized that the question of expense has to be considered, but if, as previously suggested, steps were taken to import in bulk a timber such as American basswood, it would probably be found that the cost would not greatly exceed that charged for inferior local timbers. The number of woodwork classes in operation during the year was 321, as compared with 281 last year.

The number of public schools in which instruction in what is termed "elementary agriculture" is given continues to increase. In 1910 recognized classes were carried on in connection with 666 schools, while in 1911 the number was 832. The course of instruction which is carried out partly in the classroom and partly in the school garden is not intended as a preparation for the practical work of farming, though the utilitarian aspect is not altogether neglected. The object in view is rather the creation of an intelligent interest in rural life, and it is hoped that the work done in the school garden may play a part, if only a small one, in checking the ever-increasing tendency on the part of young people to drift townwards. Special courses of rural instruction occupying not less than twenty hours a week throughout the year are being taken up in an increasing number of district high schools. The significant subjects of these courses which are confined to the secondary departments are for the most part taken by specially qualified visiting instructors who also supervise classes for elementary agriculture in the primary schools. It is to be hoped that it will be found possible in the near future for the regular staff in charge of the secondary departments of the district high schools to undertake this work. At present, however, the supply of trained teachers having the necessary qualifications is quite inadequate.

Agriculture, some one has said, affords a primary educational course for the development of the race. Thus, the principal object of the rural course should be to bring about a closer correlation between life and school by utilizing environment for educational and cultural purposes. At the same time the special bias given to the course of study will naturally supply elements of interest to pupils having a predilection for outdoor pursuits, and may on this account lead such ultimately to take up farming as a profession and put them in the way of attacking its problems in a scientific way. In either case the course should have the effect of inducing more of our young people to become producers instead of distributors.

Speaking generally, it may be said of these rural courses that a solid foundation of elementary knowledge is being laid over which a superstructure of specialized knowledge may be built. It is a matter for regret that the available facilities for obtaining this knowledge are at present insufficient.