

came first in this district. As regards dairy-work, herd-testing has been continued, and a great deal of attention has been given to improving the condition of the pastures. The residents have turned up in force to lectures, have given land and manures, and carried out near the schools experiments suggested by me with the object of providing more and better pasture for the herds. As our South Taranaki soils are of peculiar type, many mistakes have been and are being made in the application of fertilizers. Top-dressing is now a necessity in this district, but frequently money is thrown away, and sometimes the pastures are in poorer condition after treatment than before. All this makes for greater interest in the school district experiments. During the year the School Committees arranged meetings, and I addressed settlers at Tokaora, Mokoia, Manutahi, Meremere, Ohangai, Rawhitiroa, Auroa, Mata, and Ngutuwera. In the majority of these districts experiments in top-dressing were instituted by the Committees, so that it is plain that our school-work in agriculture is being appreciated by the settlers. Garden notebooks: These are of mixed quality; a few are very well kept. To improve these, competitions are being arranged for next year. Garden tools, with one or two exceptions, are, as usual, well looked after. Orchard-trees have been planted in several schools, and lessons have been given in pruning and spraying these. Nature-study proper—*i.e.*, studies tending to make nature-lovers or naturalists of our boys and girls—is not receiving the attention it deserves. We are not turning out naturalists; we are not turning out lads able to make themselves at home in the bush, on the mountains, or by the seaside. The teachers on the whole are afraid of trusting the children or themselves in this subject. Their desire is to give information, whereas it should be to encourage observations in every field. At present work is often restricted to weather-records and a few related matters. This is well done, but is not nature-study properly so called. What is required is an absorbing love of natural phenomena of all kinds. Such love is inherent in practically all children, but requires cultivation. Our young teachers, and especially those dealing with infant classes, should have a wider training in the natural sciences. It is in the infant-room and lower standards that the spirit of the nature-lover can be thoroughly aroused. Judging by the weakness shown by the trainees, the subject seems to be neglected at the training colleges, possibly because these are situated in towns. Next year I hope to be able to spend some time in the lower standards of the country schools, giving all available time to this subject.

The rural work in the district high schools has shown great improvement. At last a satisfactory method of dealing with the practical work has been evolved. The lads from Eltham, Patea, and Hawera were concentrated at Hawera Technical School for a fortnight's continuous work, once in August and again early in December. In August the time-table was arranged thus: Poultry-keeping, 9 to 10; manures and top-dressing, 11 to 12; veterinary science, 10 to 11, 3 to 4, 7 to 8; orchard-work, 1 to 3. Special attention was directed to practical work in veterinary science, to the treatment of pastures, and especially to orchard-work. Townspeople gave the use of their orchards; the boys took charge of them and pruned and sprayed them thoroughly. It is at first surprising to notice the thorough grasp of this work obtained by the lads. Several of them are now able to take charge of the orchards, and satisfactorily carry through all the ordinary operations. The December course consisted of—Shearing and wool-sorting, 9 to 12; orchard-work (summer), 1 to 2.30; dairy-work, 2.30 to 4, 7 to 8. For shearing we had the use of two properly equipped sheds, one farmer even allowing the lads to shear 250 of his stud Romney ewes. In the second week the lads were able to tackle all phases of shearing operations—dagging, shearing, skirting and rolling fleeces, classing, baling, and branding; consequently, as soon as the course was completed, a gang was formed, and the lads were able to make good pocket-money. One noticeable feature was the eagerness of the lads for work. On several occasions they voluntarily started at 7 a.m., leaving off at 6 p.m. Of course, there was plenty of variety in the work taken, so no strain was felt. On the last day of the course, competitions were held in shearing, wool-sorting, and milk-testing, and farmers and others donated prizes, and attended to see the lads at work. There is no doubt that we have struck the right way of taking practical work: instruction must be continuous.

The course for next year will embrace the following:—Winter: Pruning and spraying fruit-trees; top-dressing pastures. Spring: Veterinary science and dairy-work; sowing crops. Summer: Shearing operations; summer work in orchards; weeding crops, &c. Autumn: At Mounahaki State Farm—Close cultivation and dairy-farming; work of the farm generally.

Next summer I hope to put in part of the Christmas vacation by taking the lads for a thorough course in haymaking and the making of ensilage. The work is very important in Taranaki, where hay is so necessary for use in conjunction with the feeding of root crops. Curiously enough, although the pay is good, farmers at present have great difficulty in securing sufficient labour to get the crop safely in, so several have stated that they will be delighted to allow the lads to do this work, for which, of course, payment will be made them.

Given the necessary equipment our lads will next year be able to take on work as follows: Top-dressing of pastures; orchard-work—pruning and spraying throughout the year; herd-testing, also testing town supply for added water; manuring and sowing of root crops; weeding and thinning same; shearing and incidental work; haymaking. I have had already various offers of work for 1913: the only trouble will be getting in the necessary time. Given day technical classes, such work could be continued throughout the year.

Owing to the drop in the rates of capitation, 1912 was a bad year for this district. We lost instructor after instructor. Local Directors got disheartened, and so our organization fell to pieces. Until the old rates of capitation (up to 4½d. per hour) are restored no progress can be expected in a district like ours. The reasons for this are plain: (1.) Although a closely settled district, at least in the northern end, each centre is equipped with a district high school, and these account for nearly all the proficiency-holders. Hawera is the only one of the larger centres