

MANUAL INSTRUCTION.

(See also Appendix C.)

The progress of all forms of handwork appears to provide substantial evidence that it is no longer regarded by teachers as a form of recreative amusement, but, having passed the experimental stages, is now generally acknowledged as an essential factor in education. The form it takes in the schools is conditioned by the preferences and aptitudes of the teachers, and the available supply of material; but whether it be modelling, paper and cardwork, or such subjects as wood and metal work for boys, or domestic subjects for girls, it is generally recognized that it contributes to the creation of serviceable mental habits and the stimulation of alertness and resourcefulness. Another phase of manual instruction appears to be forcing its way into recognition. A celebrated physician has expressed the fear that the British nation is losing the use of its hands, largely owing to economic and commercial conditions. Whether his conclusions are based on sufficient evidence need not concern us, but the fact remains that for many years the old-time intelligent and skilful hand-worker who took pride in his work has almost ceased to be; and while on the one hand there is a continual demand for the services of the skilled mechanic, on the other the extension of machinery into almost every phase of human activity points to the possibility of the elimination of the craftsman from the industrial world. The question arises, would this prove an economical and social advantage to the State? If not, then the trend of thought toward the utilization of manual training as a preparation for vocational training is worthy of serious attention; and if by some such means the discovery of aptitudes can be hastened, and the children directed toward a mental and manual training that will best fit them for efficient and purposeful living, school life and its potentialities become increasingly important.

The provision of material for handwork is becoming an increasingly difficult problem, so much so that at some woodwork centres it has been found almost impossible to secure a supply of suitable timber, and it would appear that the question of a more satisfactory and economical method of securing and distributing material will have to be faced, or the work will be seriously hampered.

The correlation of hand-work with other subjects of the syllabus has steadily developed in the last few years, so that at the present time the regulations referring to the time to be given weekly to hand-work may be fully complied with without, in many cases, allotting specific periods in the time-table to such work. It is considered that the greatest educational benefit is secured when the hand-work is intimately connected in this way with the other subjects of the course, and that the formal treatment of separate hand-work subjects during specific periods in the time-table should not be an unduly prominent feature of the training.

The number of schools in which some form of handwork was taken in 1918 stood at 2,135; for the year under review facilities were provided and capitation paid in respect of 2,166 schools, an increase of 31; and as 1,562 schools provide instruction in some other branches of manual training, it may be said that few children of school-age in the Dominion are unable to share in the advantages of hand-and-eye training. Special subjects of manual training are taught at 114 suitably equipped centres, and are confined to wood and metal work for boys, and cookery, laundry-work, and needlecraft for girls; and as for the most part all the subjects are taught with a fair degree of skill, the interest of the pupils is sustained with most satisfactory results. In this connection it may not be out of place to remark that at most of the woodwork centres the development of originality and resourcefulness is not neglected. The limitation of supplies has often led to the utilization of material hitherto regarded as waste, and the selection of a series of exercises, including the construction of useful articles full of interest to the boys, in preference to exercises which on completion have little value except as firewood. The experience gained will, it is hoped, lead to the elimination of the formal model or group of models which is repeated year after year with machine-like precision, and which, instead of quickening initiative and sustaining interest, tends to suppress them, and reduces the educational value of the work to an absolute minimum. Instruction in woodwork or metal-work is provided in connection with 506 schools.

Facilities for the instruction of girls in domestic subjects have been provided at 527 schools, an increase of twenty-seven on the number for the previous year, and the increasing demands for cookery-rooms and suitable equipment to enable