

There is no doubt at all that the temptation to aim at securing easily measureable results is very difficult to resist. It matters not what the type of school may be, those who are interested naturally demand "results," and it is right that it should be so. But let us be sure that the "results" are worth measuring, and that we do not (because of the difficulty of measurement) ignore altogether results that are of the deepest significance and of the most vital importance to the welfare of the nation. We can readily measure a child's ability to read, to speak, and write the mother tongue accurately if not elegantly, and it is right we should do so: the hard-won knowledge of the past must remain a closed book to those who cannot read with fluency and understanding. No one can object to an intelligent method of measuring a child's knowledge of number, spatial measurement, the operation of natural law in his environment, the lives and doings of people in other districts and other countries. But to suppose that the acquisition of such knowledge is the only thing or the best thing our schools should aim at is to misconceive altogether the service the schools can and should do for the people. No school has completed its task unless the boys and girls who leave its doors are stronger and more refined in character than when they entered. The layman will doubt the possibility of assessing the value of any school or any teacher in this respect, but the experienced educationist finds no difficulty in differentiating between schools and teachers on this very basis, elusive and insubstantial though it may appear. Nor need there be any opposition between the acquisition of knowledge and the building-up of character. As a matter of fact, the one aim reacts on the other. The very search for truth, whether it be in the written description, or in the drawing of a familiar object, or in the securing of an accurate answer to a scientific or mathematical problem, must have a reactive effect on the character of the child who prosecutes the search with earnestness of purpose. The balanced beauty and accuracy of an ornamental design, the emotional reaction of the mind to harmony of colour, to beauty of form, to the charm of music, play no small part in the development and refinement of character.

The theme might be pursued further. It might be shown how widely different is the effect of teaching a child to become adept in arithmetical operations that have no real meaning to him and the effect of basing his arithmetic on the handling and measurement of actual objects and on a clear and practical realization of the meaning of the operations presently to be presented to him in the so-called "problem" form. The difference in effect must be obvious to every one who troubles to give any thought to the matter; yet, as far as I have observed, formality prevails in the methods of teaching, and there is little attempt to make arithmetic realistic. And there is no doubt at all that the more practical and real arithmetical processes are to the child the less likely he is to be inaccurate in his work; he becomes a better judge of the reasonableness of his results.

The importance of the teaching of English (I use the term in its widest sense) in the primary schools cannot be overestimated. A notable improvement has undoubtedly been made in recent years both in the syllabus of instruction and in the method of teaching the subject; nevertheless we have no greater reason to be satisfied with the present position than educationists in other parts of the Empire. The school curriculum (not the official syllabus) is still too greatly influenced by the demands of the secondary schools, which in turn yield to the demands of the University. As a consequence the teaching of formal grammar occupies far more time in the primary school than the subject is worth. In a city school I have heard Standard V pupils correctly analyse a passage quite difficult enough for a secondary-school class. As a rule the Inspectors report that grammar within the limits of the primary syllabus is well known, while the broader and more useful branches of English are less successfully taught. Rarely is recitation reported as "good," while oral composition in many schools receives little attention. Written composition, as judged by the pupils' essays, has greatly improved in quality during the last decade, but we have not the same satisfaction with other branches of composition—the free composition of science notes or the written reproduction of lessons in history. In all probability the search for a method of improving the teaching of English will read us to a new syllabus and an entirely new text-book.

For a number of years past the teaching of history has been on a very unsatisfactory footing, and we have fully proved the futility of placing any dependence on "incidental" teaching. During the period referred to history was occasionally read, but oral lessons were for the most part discontinued. And even though we have reverted to oral methods of instruction one hears very few well-given lessons. To be successful in this subject the teacher must cultivate the art of telling a story as vividly as possible. No lesson requires more careful preparation, for facts must be marshalled and arranged in correct relation one to another, and the whole story must be told in simple language, so that the pupils' attention is not diverted from the story itself to the language in which it is told. Further, the reproduction of the history lesson gives the teacher an excellent opportunity to train his pupils in continuous oral reproduction. As a rule the commonest form of reproduction consists of scrappy answers to finely divided questions. Recapitulation of this kind is generally valueless, and the information the pupil gains is as meagre and disjointed as the answers to the teacher's questions. The "story-hour" and story-reproduction of the preparatory department, along with the oral reproduction of reading-lessons in the standard classes, should surely lead to something better than one usually hears at the close of a history lesson.

I note that Inspectors still continue to advert in their annual reports to the unsatisfactory teaching of this subject. The weakness is attributed to various causes:—

*Wanganui*.—"There appears to be lack of thorough preparation by the teachers, and a failure on their part to realize the value and importance of history in the school course. The schemes presented too often show want of continuity, and fail to provide for impressing upon the children elementary ideas of the growth and development of the nation and its institutions."