

Zealand. In England, too, there has been much searching of heart; in the pages of the various educational journals there have been numerous discussions on the subject, and the question of forbidding homework entirely has even been recently discussed in the House of Commons. To abolish all home-preparation in secondary schools would be extremely unwise; there is undoubted value to the pupil in his carrying out independent work involving individual effort; powers of organization and initiative are developed and habits of concentration and self-reliance fostered. In subjects such as English and history time must be found out of school-hours for additional reading and the desire for wider reading stimulated by these means. There are too many pupils who are quite content to sit back and passively absorb all that the teachers do for them; for these some form of home-preparation is highly desirable.

There is, however, the other side; excessive homework is a very real evil and exercises a blighting effect upon scores of young people at a very critical stage of their development. Girls are apt to suffer more than boys. "The female," it has been pointed out, "is more literal, more conscientious in her application to an appointed task, and, in the realm of study, normally finds the task more difficult than the male." Whilst the evil is, perhaps, not so rife here as it appears to be in England, where it is stated that cases are not unknown of boys and girls committing suicide through overstudy, it must be admitted that some of our secondary schools do offend in requiring too much homework, especially from their Fifth and Sixth Form pupils. In many cases the mathematics teachers are the chief sinners, far too much routine work in arithmetic and algebra examples being set by some of them. Class work is often hindered, it may be added, by the time taken up in explaining and working out the problems done in the previous night's homework. The writing-up of science notebooks has also been made unnecessarily elaborate and burdensome in a few schools, though there has been an improvement in this respect in late years. The chief source of abuse in several schools is the failure to restrict the number of subjects in which preparation is demanded on any one night.

It is interesting to note that parents in the main are not opposed to homework being set, provided that it is reasonable in amount. In a recent investigation conducted by the Principal of one of our large boys' schools it was found that 78·5 per cent. of the parents were definitely in favour of homework. Similar results have been obtained in investigations in England. On the other hand, parents in various centres have pointed out that in some cases the work is unevenly distributed over the week, in others that there is no check on the over-zealous teacher, or that there is apparently little correlation between the teachers setting the preparations. Where the pupil is taught by five or six different specialists during each day the evils of excessive homework are prone to be intensified; the pupil who spends most of his day under one "general practitioner" is more likely to be in a happier position.

And the remedy? In some schools in England and in one or two private schools in New Zealand the difficulty has been overcome by lengthening the school-day and devoting the last two or three periods of it to preparation; in some cases no pupil is allowed to take books home on any pretext whatever. This solution has manifest disadvantages where, as in nearly all our New Zealand schools, many pupils travel long distances to school. Where there are school hostels a careful observation of the ability or otherwise of the resident pupils to cope with the preparation set each night will readily detect deficiencies or excesses in homework, and Principals are advised not to neglect this means of keeping a check on the amounts set.

The views of the Secondary Inspectors on the whole question have been explained to various Principals from time to time, but they may, perhaps, bear summarizing and repetition once again. Every pupil should be provided with a homework time-table, on which are set out for each night the subjects and the approximate time allowance for each; a copy of this time-table should be posted conspicuously in the Form's classroom—better still if it be written prominently and permanently on the wall blackboard; the number of subjects per night should be limited to three, possibly to two in Third Forms (this, incidentally, would tend to eliminate the most undesirable practice of carrying heavy loads of books to and from school); the aggregate time required each night should not exceed one or one and a quarter hours for Third Forms, one and a half hours for Fourth Forms, and two hours for senior pupils; no "voluntary" homework should be expected in addition to the amounts set according to the schedule; and there should be no additional amount set for Saturday or the week-end, except possibly the reading of some English literature. I feel confident that if these suggestions are followed there will be no complaints from perturbed parents, and, at the same time, sufficient preparation work will be accomplished to enable pupils to maintain a reasonable rate of progress during their school course.

PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS.

Probably a half of our departmental secondary schools have availed themselves of the assistance of parents' associations. In some countries these bodies have become even more firmly established than in New Zealand, and have developed their functions more extensively than ours have. In Canada and in the United States of America, for example, they are organized into federations or congresses, which exert a considerable influence on educational thought and progress. In France nearly every school has a parents' association; they are