

There has been a considerable improvement in the organization of the schools, in discipline, and in instruction during the last year. The use of the American desks, each holding two pupils, and the method of arranging them adopted, have been of great assistance to teachers in preserving discipline. The discipline of the schools has been somewhat injuriously affected in two ways. It has been put forward by the Press that in no case can a teacher inflict corporal punishment without making himself liable to legal penalties. This mischievous fiction has done much harm. Instances, I regret to say, have occurred of School Committees being guilty of the grave error of encouraging the insubordination of pupils towards their teachers. The evil of this proceeding is not confined to the schools under the charge of these Committees; it extends to the whole colony. All instances of serious insubordination, whether in pupils or assistant teachers—and almost every act of insubordination is a serious one—should be reported by the head teacher to the Board as well as to the School Committee. The Board will, I think, find it necessary, in the interest of the entire country, to apply to all symptoms of insubordination very stringent measures. Isolated acts of too great severity on the part of teachers are easily dealt with: they bring no danger to the State. The growth of a turbulent law-defying generation is a very real danger.

I have mentioned that the instruction given in the schools has improved. Teachers are beginning to see more clearly that all instruction should have training mainly for its object. This has for some time been impressed on teachers in this district, and special attention is drawn to it in the instructions issued by the Board. But many teachers have been, and some are still, slow to learn that mere hearing of lessons is not true teaching. Reading is more intelligently taught. It now appears to be generally understood that learning reading without an intelligent apprehension of what is read is certain to produce pernicious effects on the character of the child. Again, teachers now see that, in transcribing from books, not even the smallest error should be passed over—mainly for the purpose of producing habits of accuracy. The habits of investigation, thoroughness, and carefulness, produced by an enlightened teaching of these and other subjects, will show themselves in after-life—it may be in the household work of the girl, or in the field work of the boy. If habits of slurring over work and carelessness are allowed to be acquired in school, these two will show themselves, when the girl or boy grows up, in the slovenly household or neglected farm. I am glad to be able to say that a great improvement in composition is very generally shown. It is really wonderful that this acquirement, the most practically useful of all, should have been for so many generations virtually ignored by teachers and their advisers. It is still hard to get it intelligently taught. The methods of teaching are dealt with in the Board's instructions. A teacher of singing has been appointed for the schools in and near Auckland, and another for the Thames schools. They teach on the Tonic Sol-fa system. The results, so far, are satisfactory. Drawing and sewing are more generally taught than hitherto. A knowledge of the laws of health is becoming more generally diffused. I trust that the effort made here for some years to teach this subject will be found to bear fruit in time to come. Wherever one goes abundant evidence is found of what ignorance on the subject prevails. We find houses built close to the ground, no adequate provision for drainage and ventilation, the windows of the bedroom and sitting-room not hung, and looking away from the sun, or, if they should face the sun, his light is carefully excluded by blinds, as well as in some instances by trees growing close by. "Where the sun does not enter the doctor must." The effect of ignoring sanitary laws is seen in the great amount of "little health" which prevails. The beneficial effects of trees on the climate of a country are not enough understood. I regret to say that it has been found difficult in some instances to make teachers attend properly to the ventilation of their schools. I look on this administering of slow poison to their pupils as little less than criminal.

I have been for some time forcibly impressed with the necessity which exists for providing some system of gymnastics for girls. A very large number are growing up with narrow chests and round shoulders, and with a general want of development in the frame. The chests and other upper parts of the body of boys even are not sufficiently developed. Almost all the games which they play tend to develop the lower extremities alone. They have no such games as hand-ball or racquets: it is very much to be wished that they had. But I consider the case of girls, the future mothers of a people, as even more important than that of boys. I trust that, before long, a simple gymnastic apparatus for both sexes will be provided for every school. Where space and means allow, lawn-tennis, that most excellent game, should be introduced. I think it would be well to appoint a teacher of gymnastics here, as is done elsewhere. I would here commend to the attention of teachers and parents the question, "Why should girls be weaker and less healthful than boys?" There is something—are there not many things?—radically wrong in the usual methods of bringing up girls.

More than one Inspector of Schools in New Zealand has found it necessary to animadvert on the unnecessary amount of statistics now required from teachers. The completion of these superfluous returns takes up the teacher's time, tries his temper, and tends to unfit him to teach. It is not an unusual delusion that to accumulate school statistics is to educate a people. In England this has grown to such an extent as to attract the attention of Parliament. Penny banks, too, are another device for laying violent hands on the teacher's scant leisure, and for further trying his patience. I quite agree with Mr. Petrie, when he says that the business of a teacher is to teach. As little as possible else should be exacted from him. To penny savings banks, it appears to me, graver objections exist than that of their taking up the teachers' time. They will tend to generate habits of hoarding, which are very different from habits of thrift. They will tend to produce a love of money for itself alone, and, as I believe, a feeling that it must be got, no matter how. A little consideration will make it plain that, in the majority of instances, children cannot procure money except by begging it from their parents or friends, or by still worse means.

Standards have not yet been adopted in this district. Measures are being taken to introduce them during the current year. I think it right to say that I have grave doubts whether the effects on education of the introduction of standards will be beneficial. I fear that they will encourage cramming and a mechanical style of teaching, and, as a consequence, discourage training and education in the higher sense of the word. However, what the law requires must be faithfully given effect to.