

important subjects that are likely to come under consideration. And, first, with respect to what is now commonly called technical education, I am of opinion that the most important service the primary school can render is to give instruction—as far as possible in the form of object-lessons—in that primary knowledge of the laws of nature which in our schools goes under the name of “elementary science,” and to ground all pupils in elementary drawing, and especially in elementary geometrical drawing. I believe that the educative influence of practical geometry is of a very high order, and that its practical uses will have an ever-increasing value. It is strange that any serious critic of our syllabus should feel himself at liberty to suggest that it prescribes the study of demonstrations after the manner of Euclid. And, as to the ridicule that has been so freely cast upon the use of the words “isosceles” and “equilateral,” these words are no harder to remember than hippopotamus and rhinoceros, or Higginbotham and Alexander. There is nothing that children remember with greater ease than names when they are associated with objects that can be easily recognised.

I have the strongest possible sympathy with the proposal for a considerable increase in the number of reading-books. Modern school-readers are very small books, printed in large type, with much space devoted to illustrations, words selected for spelling, and so on. The allowance of one such book for a year's reading is absurdly small and inadequate. The ordinary treatment of the reading-lesson is too laborious and slow to afford much practice in reading, or to allow the pupil to experience any of the satisfaction that cultivated people find in reading for information or for recreation. New or difficult words are selected for definition or for spelling; the drift and scope of the passage are explained; the reading of a sentence is criticized, or it is corrected by the teacher's own reading, which has afterwards to be imitated; the passage is so short that when a few pupils have read a few sentences each the end is reached, and the others have to go over the ground a second or a third time after it has ceased to have any interest for them except as a reading exercise; and so on. I have no fault to find with this method if it is not exclusively employed, but I hold that taken by itself it neither affords sufficient practice nor tends to create or foster a love of reading. One or two lessons a week of this strict kind may be necessary for a time at a certain stage of progress, and an occasional lesson of the same type is useful even in advanced stages if the passage read is highly rhetorical and worthy of minute study as a piece of literary work. But for the other reading-lessons of the week I hold that it would be better to supply constantly fresh, interesting matter, to be read continuously with few interruptions by way of correction, and to be read as much for the pleasure of reading as for practice in reading. Four or five books instead of one would be required in the course of a year. One book might be of the customary type of our ordinary school-readers, and this might be used for the strict and orthodox reading-lesson. The others might be exchanged about once in three months, being passed on from school to school. Biography, descriptive geography, historical tales and records of brilliant episodes, natural history, fairy tales, New Zealand history, and for very young classes simple stories of cats and dogs or of children might be read quarter by quarter in rotation. The books, on my plan, would belong to the Education Board, which would arrange for the periodical exchange of parcels. The first cost in these days of cheap books would not be great. The books would last very much longer than those which belong to the pupils, and which are worn out not so much by use as by being rammed into pockets or satchels, or thrown under hedges during play-time, or saturated with rain and scorched by the sun. The demand for uniformity is based almost entirely on the question of cost, and would soon die out under the influence of an interesting and instructive variety cheaply secured. And our children would, as a rule, learn to read.

To turn to another subject.—I have long thought that if the central department had full control of the inspectorate it would be wise to leave the mechanical work of standard examinations in large schools in the hands of the headmasters, and to have each of these schools inspected by two Inspectors—a local Inspector, associated with an Inspector from another district. The Inspectors would still examine for standards in the smaller schools, but in a large school the two Inspectors would examine the classes, and ascertain whether the weaker pupils in each class were fairly up to the work on which they were engaged. A report based upon an investigation of this kind would, if it represented the judgment of only one Inspector, be more open to challenge than a report based upon individual examination; but the deliberate opinion of two Inspectors, and one of these a stranger, would be likely to command assent and confidence. Besides this, the close co-operation of two Inspectors belonging to different districts would tend to the formation of a common standard of examination. It is possible that in some modified form the plan I have thus sketched might be brought into operation by means of a mutual understanding among the Education Boards.

I must not trespass further on your attention. I have aimed at brevity, but I hope you have not found my meaning obscure. I place at your disposal my analysis of your written suggestions.

*Resolved*, on the motion of Dr. Anderson, seconded by Mr. Petrie, That the Conference go into committee of the whole to consider whether the public should be admitted, and to bring up a recommendation as to the order of business.

*Resolved*, on the motion of Mr. Bindon, seconded by Mr. Petrie, That Mr. Lee be appointed Chairman of Committees.

The Conference then went into committee of the whole.

The Conference resumed, and the following resolutions were reported from committee:—

1. That the public be not admitted to the meetings of the Conference.
2. That the resolutions of the Conference be communicated to the Press.
3. That the Minister of Education be invited to attend.
4. That the hours of meeting be determined from time to time by adjournment.
5. That Mr. Hill be appointed Secretary to the Conference.