

1895.

NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION : SCHOOL FOR DEAF-MUTES.

[In Continuation of E.-4, 1894.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency

No. 1

EXTRACT FROM EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

The attendance at the Summer School rose from 39 to 45 during the year. The net cost, £3,147 7s. 10d., exceeded that of 1893 by about £135. Contributions received from parents amounted to £105 4s. 7d. The gross expenditure was £3,252 12s. 5d. Salaries of professional staff, £1,076 0s. 4d., and of domestic staff, £475 13s. 10d., rent, £470, housekeeping, £879 10s. 5d., travelling, £119 15s. 1d., school material (including means of technical instruction), £18 10s. 1d., repairs, £98 8s. 10d., sundries, £114 13s. 10d.

No. 2.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR.

SIR,—

School for Deaf-mutes, Sumner, 25th May, 1895.

I have the honour to submit herewith for your consideration my report of the School for Deaf-mutes for the year 1894.

During the first six months of the year the number of pupils in the school was forty-five, and in August this number was increased by one, through the admittance of an adult young lady who lost her hearing a few years since, and who is with us, therefore, for the special purpose of practising lip-reading only.

Twenty of this total of forty-six pupils are girls, and twenty-six boys. Compared with the number in attendance during the previous year, this shows an increase of five pupils.

As between the two Islands, the numerical balance of inmates is still in favour of the South Island, for official records show that of the various provincial districts Otago contributed ten pupils, Canterbury fourteen, Westland three, Wellington twelve, Hawke's Bay one, and Auckland six.

A glance at these names and figures reveals the fact that some of the provinces of the colony are but barely represented on the school's register, and that others are conspicuous by their absence. Lest readers wonder why this is so, or why some parts of New Zealand have so far been apparently exempt from the affliction of deafness, or appear free from disorders bringing deafness in their train, it is right to remember that, owing to the population of New Zealand being still a sparse and scattered one, it is evident that there must be numerous settlers in back countries and outlying districts who are as yet unaware of the institution's existence, and, again, that there must also be a large class of colonists in and around the centres of population who are either ignorant of the school's work, or whose conception of its humane objects, and the State's liberal

provisions with regard to it, is erroneous, and probably hazy. In order to dispel such vagueness, and to enlighten those immediately interested, it cannot be made known too widely to and by all officials, to and by all persons charitably disposed, and to all relatives and friends of deaf-mute children, that no indigent deaf-mutes in New Zealand need be kept from the benefits of instruction because of their friends' inability to contribute. Happily the Government of this colony provides for every deaf-mute, either wholly or partially, out of the Consolidated Fund and the only conditions essentially necessary to insure admission into the school are a healthy body and a sound mind. If any act of the New Zealand Government will redound to its honour, I believe it will be this beneficent, liberal, and gracious legislation with regard to the education and training of the deaf-and-dumb. On the other hand, if parliamentary authorities perform their duties towards the deaf so nobly, it is incumbent upon parents and guardians not to neglect or underrate these privileges and advantages by withholding their afflicted children from the school. Neither ought they to cruelly punish them, through ignorance, by removing them from the influence of technical teaching and special training at too early an age, frequently after a few years' elementary tuition. Parents of deaf-mutes should ponder over the terrible fact and the unfortunate truth that they themselves have but little idea of their own children's inner being and inner wants. They should bear in mind that a lifelong experience amongst deaf-mutes is only another term for thoroughly grasping the lamentable facts—that an untaught or slightly taught deaf-mute is a human being whose affliction is almost wholly hidden—that he is poor in spirit, lacking in ideas, slow in observation, weak in mental activity, bare of thought—that he is silent, because he lives in silence—well-nigh mentally blind, because his soul is entombed—and that he is deprived of that valuable part of mental life called inward speech or silent language, because nature decreed to block up the very sources of its production.

Though the average final result of the year's school work may be called satisfactory, it would have been more so but for the outbreak of whooping-cough, and the prevalence of severe colds amongst the pupils in the institution, which naturally interfered, in a few cases, with the regular course of attendance, and which seems to have left one boy in too weak a state to return to his lessons after the Christmas vacation.

The advantage of sending deaf children to school at an early age, and of allowing them to remain under instruction for a sufficient term of years, is clearly demonstrated this year by the superior standard of knowledge attained by the three youngest of the five pupils who finally left the school at the beginning of the Christmas holidays. Not only are their prospects in life considerably brightened by their advanced education, but their whole inner mental condition is much improved by a higher moral tone.

With regret I report that a sixth pupil, a bright boy of fourteen, was kept at home against my wish. As the whole of his school term has thereby been limited to a period of three years and nine months, it may be imagined that the permanent good produced cannot have a very high value set upon it by an expert. The case serves to illustrate how easily the combined efforts of the State and the school may be defeated by such unwise acts on the part of a parent.

Turning from the oldest to the youngest scholars, the school-year of 1894 is characterized as having contributed the finest and most even batch of newcomers since the opening of the school. Bright in intellect and lively in temperament are all the seven. In age, also, they differ little, so going through the elementary course of oral, writing, and memory exercises, including the learning of words and easy sentences, seemed more like running a race to them and to us than the usually slow routine of enunciating and repeating these elementary exercises over and over again day after day and week after week.

A fair share of attention has been given to the hearing orphan boy mentioned in last year's report. As the case progresses it loses nothing of its remarkable aspect. There is an improved ability to enunciate combinations of sounds and syllables and to pronounce words, but, strange to say these results have only been obtained by force of pure technical treatment. From the increased power to imitate such syllables and words on hearing them pronounced, one would naturally conclude—and experience with others similarly though less severely afflicted has proved it—that this boy would now of his own accord, imitate and repeat most ordinary words and acquire some slight flow of language. But, instead of readily and fluently pronouncing such words as "singer," "change," "scratch," "necklace," and numerous others more or less difficult, and instead of forming complete sentences, even simple ones, he continues to evince the greatest difficulty in acquiring ordinary children's language. As he cannot add, even two simple numbers such as 3 and 4, and of course not multiply, subtract, or divide, it follows he cannot form correct ideas of the clock, time, space, distance, and other matters based upon the understanding of the measurement and the comparison of these things. Yet, in spite of all these deficiencies and shortcomings, I have no hesitation in repeating my previous assertion that the boy is not an imbecile.

The arrangements made for initiating some of the elder boys in the use of tools has borne good fruit. By way of an examination, I gave them the job of making and putting up a new gate. With the exception of allowing a master to be present at the taking of measurements, so as to avoid any waste of material, my instructions to let them accomplish the task by themselves, and without the slightest direction, were strictly adhered to. Within a few days the work was completed to my entire satisfaction and to the credit of the boys.

Gratifying to the Director and to the oldest teachers were the visits paid to the institution during the year by several of the old pupils. Conversation with them proved beyond doubt that a clear advance in intellectual development had taken place since they left. In the case of all those who had been under instruction with us for a full term of years this was especially noticeable. It was demonstrated by their ready use of an extended vocabulary, and, in the instance of two exceptionally bright youths, from their better acquaintance with the ordinary concerns of life.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Education.

G. VAN ASCH.

No. 3.

MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT.

SIR,—

Christchurch, May, 1895.

I have the honour to submit the following report on the Deaf-and-dumb Asylum at Sumner:—

The pupils number forty-six—twenty-four boys and twenty-two girls.

With the exception of whooping-cough, some trifling ailments for which they were brought to my house, and one boy breaking his leg, for which he was treated at the Christchurch Hospital, they have enjoyed good health.

The institution is now full. Two of the younger girls now sleep in the main building.

I have also to point out that the accommodation for the servants is very limited. Two servants sleep in one small bed. Being sisters, they do not object or complain, but it is very undesirable that it should be permitted.* I would therefore respectfully urge the Government to take into consideration the necessity for making some arrangement to increase the accommodation for pupils and servants.

The pupils are progressing satisfactorily in their education.

The master and matron are indefatigable in their efforts to amuse and make the pupils happy and comfortable, and seem to have the cordial assistance of the other officials.

I remain, &c.,

H. H. PRINS, M.R.C.S., Eng.,

Medical Officer

The Minister of Education, Wellington.

* This has been rectified.—SEC. EDUC.

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