

Two features in the composition of our teaching-staff, unsatisfactory in themselves and sufficiently ominous as signs of the times, have to be noted—viz., (1) the large number of uncertificated teachers at present in the service of the Board, and (2) the undue predominance of female teachers. The latter feature is by no means confined to New Zealand. It is specially prominent in the United States, where 92 per cent. of the teachers are females, and in Germany, where the unique phenomenon has lately been witnessed of the female teachers driving the male teachers from the urban schools to the rural. The better social status and influence of the women, and the absorption of the more intelligent young men in commercial pursuits owing to increased industrial activity in Germany, are said to account for this curious change. In our own district there are faint indications of improvement in the matter of the proportion of men to women employed. Lately there has been a slight increase in the number of male applicants for pupil-teacherships. In regard to the dearth of certificated teachers, we note with pleasure that a fair proportion of our best pupil-teachers, on the completion of their course, have proceeded to the training colleges to complete their professional studies. From the training colleges we trust to have, in the course of a few years, a small but ever-increasing supply of thoroughly trained teachers to replace the uncertificated teachers now in temporary charge of many of our small schools. Under these circumstances it may be a question for the Board to consider whether uncertificated teachers holding good positions in the Board's service should be permitted to retain these positions indefinitely without some effort on their part to pass the prescribed examination.

A few brief notes on the various subjects of instruction follow:—

READING.—Many of the pupils, especially in the higher standards, read with little interest or intelligence. The monotonous use of the falling inflection is fairly prevalent.

SPELLING.—The introduction of word-building has improved the spelling of the lower standards. A similar result would follow if more systematic attention were given to the subject in the higher standards.

WRITING.—The writing in our schools is satisfactory. In spite of the remarks in last year's report, too much time is still devoted in some schools to formal lessons in writing in Standard VI. In a good many of these schools the writing is inferior. The inference is obvious—faulty supervision.

COMPOSITION.—Errors of common speech should be corrected from the very first—even an infant has no right to use such expressions as “you was,” “he aint.” The essays of Standard VI frequently show weakness in paragraphing, in vocabulary, and in complex sentence-building. They are, in short, Standard III compositions expanded.

ARITHMETIC.—The work in this subject was, as a rule, fairly well done. In a good many instances, however, common weights and measures had apparently no connection with realities. The Inspector's height was variously estimated at from 4 in. to 4 yd., and his weight at from 1 st. to 5 cwt.

DRAWING.—Though the results in this subject were generally creditable, considering the time devoted to it, too little work, as a rule, had been done in memory, design, and scale-drawing, and too much in drawing from copies. The use of the ruler in freehand drawing was inexplicably frequent. Ruled squares are unnecessary beyond Standard I.

GEOGRAPHY.—A reference has been made above to the teaching of physical geography. A considerable number of teachers are still making a bad use of text-books in this subject. The Geographical Readers should be so used that candidates for proficiency certificates will have a fair knowledge of the geography in Course B.

NATURE STUDY.—Meteorological observations are taken with considerable care in most schools; the proper deductions from them are in a good many cases neglected. In a considerable number of schools a scanty programme of morphological botany takes the place of nature study.

HANDWORK.—Some very good specimens, especially of brushwork, were shown; but there is still a good deal of room for improvement. The idea seems to be spreading that hand and eye work teaches itself; and thus is a convenient method of employing children who cannot conveniently be supervised.

PHYSICAL INSTRUCTION.—Whenever possible this subject should receive open-air treatment; otherwise the benefits to be derived from it are lessened. The exercises involving the use of the larger muscles should have special attention; aimless waving of the arms in the air should be avoided. The primary position should be carefully maintained; the exercises should be performed thoroughly with attention to details; and the aim should be to develop harmoniously the physical powers of the children, not to provide a pleasing spectacle to the onlooker.

SINGING.—Luther held that an unmusical teacher was “of no account”; we fear that there are not a few teachers in Southland “of no account.” We have already referred to the injurious effect of simultaneous oral repetition on the vocal organs of young children; if thought necessary, it should be practised as softly as possible so as not to spoil the quality of the voice in singing. For the same reason, no loud or, rather, coarse singing should be tolerated. Musical theory without practice is utterly useless; surely a little sight-reading might be attempted in most of our schools.

Our report is advisedly critical; we wish therefore to reiterate our statement that substantial progress in education has been made during the past year in the district of Southland; and to add that in the majority of cases where less satisfactory results have been attained, want of knowledge or of skill has been mainly responsible

We have, &c.
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The Chairman, Education Board, Invercargill.

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