

examinations and the pulling up of plants to see how they are growing is too wide of the mark to need comment. All teaching implies examination, since it involves a continual testing of knowledge in order that advance in any particular subject may with confidence be undertaken.

The Proficiency Examination is held for pupils of Form II (Standard VI) level—that is, for pupils on the average between thirteen and fourteen years of age, and of eight years' school experience. It is the only external examination to which the primary schools are subjected. This year 81·5 per cent. of the pupils in the public primary schools gained Certificates of Proficiency and 13·5 per cent. Certificates of Competency, 95 per cent. of Form II pupils thus completing a satisfactory primary course. Such percentages are of doubtful value, since the percentage will rise or fall according to strictness or otherwise of the teachers' tests for promotion from Form I to Form II.

An innovation was made last year, the Inspectors accepting the recommendations made by the head teachers up to in some districts 60 per cent. of the total roll number in Form II. The remainder were given a test common to the whole Dominion. To reach finality the results of this examination were compared with the internal examinations conducted by the head teachers. It is interesting to note that, of the total number recommended by head teachers, 9 per cent. failed to obtain the certificate, while 20 per cent. of those not so recommended succeeded in the examination. These results are so satisfactory that accrediting this year will be on a much more liberal scale, especially in those schools where teachers show that they have the initiative to take advantage of the privilege, accorded since the syllabus was introduced, of drawing their own syllabuses according to the needs of their schools.

The object of this non-competitive examination, which was instituted in 1904, is twofold—to determine if possible what pupils are sufficiently advanced to profit by post-primary education, and to afford the public some idea of the capacity of the young people seeking employment. Doubt is being cast upon the value of the examination for both of these objects. The gradual extension of the free-place system in our post-primary schools has made such a qualifying examination almost unnecessary in this respect. A more serious objection to this test, which in itself is not an unreasonable one, is that it makes teachers concentrate unduly upon its requirements and on these alone. Hence, in spite of the freedom which teachers have of drafting their own syllabuses in various subjects in the different standards, the curriculum assumes too uniform an aspect, and English and arithmetic—the two subjects examined—occupy an undue amount of school-time to the exclusion of much work of an artistic, cultural, and creative nature, which is not susceptible of adequate examination by any external test common to all schools. As the examination is common to the whole Dominion, the tests in English and arithmetic must be of a fairly constant pattern, and it is this pattern and this pattern alone by which the teaching is too often fashioned. Hence a very undesirable uniformity and lack of initiative develop.

This uniformity is, however, not a necessary corollary of the examination; but so strongly has the examination impressed itself upon the minds of the parents and the public that the great majority of teachers feel that their public reputations are assessed in direct ratio to the percentage of proficiency passes obtained in their schools. Hence few subjects receive the broad cultural treatment they deserve, and the further the pupil advances from the preparatory stage of his schooling the greater becomes the temptation to concentrate on those subjects, and the narrowest aspect of these, that will ultimately be tested in the Proficiency Examination.

This problem of examinations is engaging the attention of educationists everywhere. What is envisaged is some form of school record, based in part on internal examinations, which will serve as a reliable guide to parents and public and determine the form of education by which the young person is most likely to benefit, accompanied by a measure of inspection to ensure that the school does not fritter the pupil's time away by aimless wanderings from one topic to another or by concentrating unduly on matters because such happen to be hobbies of the teacher. To quote the eminent English educationist, Sir Michael Sadler: "Examinations are necessary: they are a stimulus, an audit, the only alternative to patronage. But they can be misapplied. Democracy rightly demands equality of opportunity. Competitive examinations seem to secure more equal opportunity of advancement . . . what then is the remedy for our discontent? Not abolition of examinations. . . . To close down examinations—*i.e.*, without adequate safeguards—would be to give the signal for educational Saturnalia."

SURPLUS TEACHERS.

The year began with a considerable surplus of teachers above the ordinary schedule staffing. Of these about 250 were required for ordinary relieving purposes. (The efficient working of our system necessitates a reserve of teachers in non-permanent positions who can always be drawn upon to fill temporary vacancies caused by retirements, sickness, or death.) A number were employed as additional assistants allowed for by regulations in different schools. It was decided to keep the remainder in continuous work in positions where conditions were relatively different. During the year over 450 were lost to the service, and as the readmission of the five-year-olds was approved at the end of the year a shortage of teachers is anticipated towards the end of 1936.