

# Education in New Zealand.

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## II.

**G**RAMMAR, "the philosophy of language and a collection of laws and rules to which we come by long observation and comparison of facts," is introduced in the third Standard. It is the opinion of Herbert Spenser, and of all subsequent authorities on education, that the study of grammar should be reserved for the higher standards. Grammar is useful, not for any practical advantages it confers, but as an intellectual exercise. Before grammar can be taught with any success the pupil must have a large, varied and miscellaneous vocabulary, and his power of observation and judgment must be well developed. If grammar is to be of any use, it must be taught on the inductive method: that is, the grammatical rule must be evolved by comparison of similar examples, and emphasised by constantly recurring proofs in the reading lessons, and it must be applied by exercises suited to the capacities of the pupils.

The teaching of grammar is not essential to the expression of thoughts in sentences. I cannot do better than quote Mr. Herbert Spenser on this point. He says: "The custom of prefacing the art of speaking any tongue by drilling in the parts of speech and their functions, is about as reasonable as prefacing the art of walking by a course of lessons on the bones, muscles and nerves of the legs." If the teacher insists upon the pupils, even in the lowest classes, giving answers in sentences and not in single words, they will imperceptibly arrange their thoughts into sentences without burdening their minds with definitions of noun and verb, "subject and predicate." Children in the third Standard learn the definitions by rote, and apply them with fair success; but their minds

are not sufficiently developed to gain a clear conception of the definitions, nor does the knowledge of the grammatical terms enable them to express themselves more accurately.

I would suggest that grammar be omitted from Standards III. and IV., and not introduced till Standard V. is reached, when the minds of the pupils will be sufficiently developed to profit by the study of this abstract science.

In Standards V. and VI., grammatical analysis is taught with great success, and the mental training this exercise affords is distinctly beneficial. But no provision is made for synthesis, an equally important and more practical exercise—the exercise of building smaller sentences up into periods. Analysis is a destructive exercise, and should be accompanied by synthesis, which is a constructive exercise. Good and varied practice in synthetical exercises renders analysis much more intelligible, and produces a more varied style of composition. The compositions written by the average sixth Standard boy are poor in quality and monotonous in style: most sentences are constructed on the same model, with but little attempt at variation; this defect can be overcome by introducing synthetical exercises to accompany analytical exercises in Standards V. and VI. Simple synthetical exercises are prescribed for Standard IV., but they are not effectively taught, and are as a general rule quite passed over.

In treating of grammar I have pointed out how necessary it is that children, from the lowest standards, should be taught to give answers in complete sentences; they thus incidentally, as it were, learn the correct use of the mother tongue, and acquire the habit of arranging their thoughts in complete