

present, a proportion sensibly less than usual, the numbers for 1902 and 1901 respectively being 18,430 and 18,351. For certificates of proficiency in the Sixth Standard the candidates numbered 1,462, and of this number 1,401 were successful. Above the Sixth Standard the number so far remains practically constant, the district-high-school movement notwithstanding. In another year the influence will be more apparent.

In the course of examination or inspection our attention has frequently been drawn to the prevalence of youthful ailments materially affecting the attendance, and repeatedly allowances have had to be made on this account in our school reports. A year rarely passes without the appearance in some part of the district of some one form of illness, but in the year just passed our schools have had to encounter quite a series of troubles of the kind, exceptional in variety and duration, beginning with measles and scarlatina and ending with mumps. This has, of course, to a certain extent affected the quality of the work submitted to our notice; otherwise there is little change to note. Our teachers have quietly pursued the even tenor of their way, following much the same lines as in former years, and, in view of the expected appearance of a new syllabus, making few or no departures in methods or subjects of special attention.

*Training of Teachers and School-equipment.*—A recent report, issued from the Government press of New South Wales, and compiled by two gentlemen of high educational status commissioned to inquire into the public-school systems of Europe and America, contains a vast amount of information on educational topics. The Commissioners in the light of their inquiries make some trenchant criticisms on the local system—particularly the system of training teachers—on which we in New Zealand, quite as much as the Department of Public Instruction for whose guidance the report is prepared, would do well to ponder. In our experience of the conditions of school-control obtaining in New Zealand it may not appear prudent to follow the Commissioners in all their conclusions, but the observations made are none the less valuable to all who seek a measure of reform in the various applications of school-administration.

The first and greatest reform to be made is in the equipment of teachers for the high office they are called upon to fill. Of the provision hitherto made in New Zealand for this all-important purpose we have reason to be frankly ashamed. The purpose is all important, for, whatever the material organization provided, whatever subjects be attempted, or whatever the general educational aim, everything depends on the personality of the teacher—his character, capacity, and professional acquirements and abilities. In view of this obvious truth it can scarcely be credited by any one outside the four corners of the colony that up to the present no general scheme of training has ever been attempted. To this day one half of the country has to depend solely for the equipment of its teachers on the miserably inadequate preparation afforded by a pupil-teacher course, and in the other half the last twelve or thirteen years have seen only some makeshift arrangements at Christchurch and Dunedin, maintained for the greater part of the time by a curtailment of salaries already all too small, and serving but to obscure existing deficiencies.

That steps are now being taken to provide a more efficient preparation we are rejoiced to see; but when we contemplate the omissions of the past on so vital a question, and reflect further on the still more glaring anomaly of the haphazard methods of appointment and promotion, which, despite some attempts at reform, are still unhappily characteristic of this and other portions of the colony, we are lost in amazement that the *personnel* of the service, the estimate in which it is deservedly held, and the work accomplished stand so high as they do. Is it too much to assume that the imperfections of our training arrangements have found a compensation in that very system of individual examination which is now giving way to one more happily conceived in the interests of education? We have no wish to bring the system back; on the contrary, we bid it good-bye with considerable relief; but our respect goes with it into the oblivion of things that have been. It has proved a hard taskmaster to teachers (supervising head teachers alone excepted), to pupils, and (an aspect of the matter to which no sufficient expression has ever been given) to Inspectors alike. It has, as must always have been patent to any but the most superficial observers, failed to encourage the best teachers in the use of the best methods and has cramped their individuality, though rarely, we believe, has intelligent work done under the system gone unrecognised. It has made of Inspectors mere examining drudges, when their best energies should have been directed to their own proper functions of general supervision, counsel, assistance, and general concerns of efficiency. It has not in all cases proved a healthy stimulus to the individual pupil whose status it has determined; but that it has proved a stimulus of a very potent kind to both teacher and pupil no one can affect to deny, and without doubt the very thorough inquiry it has entailed into the work of the principal subjects of the school course has made many a teacher what he is—has given definite aims to efforts which under less stringent conditions would have been uselessly wasted in vain striving amid a hopeless muddle of vague aspirations. It has proved a potent factor, too, we are convinced, in the formation of character in teacher and pupil by setting a high value on honest work thoroughly performed, and has thus contributed not a little to promote the true object of education as distinguished from mere instruction.

The parent, again, has strongly felt its influence. In substituting interest for possible apathy it has proved a training for him as well as for others, though it must be admitted that in many cases the interest created is scarcely of the type that most deserves encouragement and may become embarrassing. The mind of the average parent or school-committeeman rises with difficulty above mere personal considerations. His interest is centred in his own children and the children of his immediate neighbours, and it will take him some years yet to understand that an inquiry into the position which they, each and all of them, occupy in their respective classes lies outside the circle of an Inspector's duties in his visits to a school. That the interest aroused is real is, however, the chief thing to consider, and it will be well indeed if the higher and better conception of the respective duties of teacher and Inspector, which the regulations, as now further amended, take steps to embody, will succeed in maintaining an interest equally strong.