

suppose it is quite certain that all of us are very anxious to stop the influx into the towns from the country which is going on—not so much in New Zealand, but there is a great deal of it here—and anything in the way of teaching in the country schools in connection with nature or with country life must have a deterrent effect on this influx. If you make the children love the country you may depend upon it they will not be particularly anxious to go to the towns, and if we could only make them see “books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything,” I think the inclination to go to the towns would not be so great. Of course, there are great attractions in the towns for young people, but if we can only teach them to love the country we shall, I think, bring them to see that the country is a better place than the town. Now, how can we do this teaching in the country? First of all, we must encourage the teachers. The teachers now and then probably have a Committee which is not altogether in concert with them; they have an Inspector coming round every six months or once a year, or whatever the period is, and this is a very anxious time. The whole of their year’s work perhaps is reviewed, and very likely for good reasons (a bad season, wet weather, bad roads, an epidemic) it is not satisfactory. There is absolutely no encouragement given to the country teachers at all. They never see anybody out there in the back districts. Nobody goes to see them, and nobody gives them encouragement; and even if they take up gardening, or nature-study, or anything of that kind, they get no better pay or encouragement. Every one knows that a teacher’s natural inclination is to go to the place where he can get higher pay and more credit to himself. A teacher naturally looks to be at the head of his profession, and all the “plums” of the profession are in the towns. The average attendance is so much cut into the country that very often a teacher’s salary is cut down, and very naturally all the teachers want to get into the towns where there are higher salaries paid. How are you going to encourage these teachers in the country who are prepared to devote themselves to teaching there? It has been said that we in the country are a dull-witted people. I do not think we are; but, anyhow, if we do not have education we shall certainly become a dull-witted people, and we want education for people in the country just as much as we do for people in the towns. How are we going to get this? I think we ought to offer a distinct prize or bonus, or some encouragement of that kind to each teacher who takes up these subjects. How much that amount should be I am not prepared to say; but if a man like Mr. Davis, the master of the Mauriceville School, occupies his time in teaching the children gardening and such subjects pertaining to country life, he certainly ought to get some bonus, and we ought to give him some encouragement, in order to induce others to follow his example. The syllabus at the Mauriceville West School consists of this: For the first year, “Parts of plants and their functions; fertilisation of flowers and formation of seed; storage of food in seeds, roots, &c.; germination.” Then it goes on to soils, how they are formed mechanically, and so on. The second year Mr. Davis takes chemistry. I suppose we have all learned a little about chemistry. The smattering that I got when I was a youngster has been of great advantage to me in farming, because I have been able to understand the constituents of manures. In the second year he teaches “The properties of carbon, sulphur, phosphorus, silica, chlorine, potassium, sodium, calcium,” and so on. The forms in which they occur in nature and their uses to plant-life.” Then manures: “Objects of manuring. Farmyard manure and its management to prevent loss of value,” and so on. Then pests: “Insects, useful and injurious. Life-history of a few typical insects. Parasitic fungi. Use of insecticides and fungicides.” Then comes the practical work—this that I have mentioned is only the work indoors. (I may say that it is the Scandinavian settlement that has led us in this direction. The people there collected a sum of money amongst themselves, and gave Mr. Davis enough to build a laboratory in which he teaches the children in these subjects. They have not gone to the Government and asked them for money for building the laboratory, but have built it themselves. And these people came from Norway and Sweden.) The practical work for the first year is the dissection of plants, and so on. Then there are certain experiments made in this garden. The ground is divided into a great number of plots, and each of these plots is experimented on in connection with manures. These are examined, and Mr. Davis points out to the children the result of the application of the manures, and gives demonstrations as to the advantages of them, and so on. If it is the case that we have such a man as Mr. Davis in the country and he is successful, would it not be possible for the Government to employ such a man as a peripatetic teacher, by way of an experiment? We do not need to go out of the colony for the purpose. If we have men here who are prepared to devote their lives to the work and who have special knowledge on the subject, would it not be a proper thing for us to encourage them and place them in the position of teaching others? I only speak of Mr. Davis because we have a public record of what he has done; and I make the suggestion that the Government should make some special provision in regard to this as an experiment. It is quite clear that the Education Boards cannot take in hand such work as this unless they have more money—unless they have specific funds for that particular work, because in some cases their wants are so great in relation to building that we are not quite sure these funds would be spent for that particular purpose. We know that in one case the money which the Board received as a grant was confiscated by the bank. I do not mean to imply that the Education Boards would do anything other than what they ought to do, but I want to see this money specifically set apart. In certain districts we have had cookery experts sent round, and the Education Boards have found that they could not afford that, and even drill-instructors in many cases are not sent round to the children to teach them the ordinary drill which they ought to be taught—in fact, the drill-instructors are not sent round at all now. The Education Boards cannot afford it in many cases, and it is obvious that if they cannot afford even to do that they cannot afford to have a peripatetic teacher in their employ if you do not provide the money. I would suggest that the experiment be made. It is a very small matter, and if such a great amount of good can be got from such an experiment it is well worth the trial, and if this is successful there are plenty of other people in the colony equally prepared, I am sure, to take up these subjects and make a specialty of them. We do