

*Reading.*—The present Code, that of 1897, requires in Standard I. that the children shall read with proper pronunciation and emphasis previously unseen English sentences made up of easy words of one syllable. As a matter of fact the reading, as it is usually taken, consists of lessons from the Appendix to the Native School Primer, and is not unseen. Latterly, this has been supplemented by the use of the Infant Reader of Nelson's Royal Crown series.

In the higher standards the Native School Reader is used. Standard II. reads only Part I.; Standard III. reads the whole book; Standard IV. reads "Health for the Maori," and each standard takes as an additional reader the Royal Crown Reader of the next lower standard.

The quality of the reading leaves much to be desired, and I am of opinion that any alteration in the syllabus should provide for increased attention to this subject. So far as the requirements of Standard I. are concerned, one very often hears either a word-by-word recital of the lesson, devoid of any expression or meaning, or else a fluency so marked that it can spring only from knowledge of the lesson by heart. Indeed, I have heard children "reading" the Native School Primer so fluently that one could not recognise a word. Correct pronunciation under these conditions is impossible. This points to the necessity of (1) a wider field in reading and (2) a more effective method of teaching reading to the preparatory classes. I have endeavoured to help teachers where such help was needed or asked for in this work, and have invariably recommended the look-and-say method in combination with the phonic method, that is, the teaching of the powers of the consonants. Where special difficulties of articulation arise—*e.g.*, in the case of *th*—attention has also been directed to the positions of the lips, tongue, and teeth. Where this plan has been adopted, the success achieved has been very marked, both as regards clearness of enunciation and fluency of reading. But I have to express my disappointment at finding in not a few instances that my efforts to advise have been in vain, and there is a return to the "r-a-t, rat" method almost immediately. In two North Island schools I heard reading in Standard I. that was of excellent quality. In one of these schools the work was slightly better than in the other, and disproves the assertion often made that where children do not hear any English they are liable to pronounce badly; in the school to which I refer they pronounce much better than the average European does, yet never hear English except at school. They have been taught to pronounce—taught the powers of the consonants. I am fully aware of the great disadvantages under which most of the assistants—the teachers of the lowest classes—labour, but I am strongly of opinion that in going on the "r-a-t, rat" method they lose much valuable time, so far as teaching reading to Maori children is concerned.

I had the greatest pleasure during the inspection of the schools this year in listening to the lesson given by a Maori girl to the primer classes. It was very carefully given, had a definite aim—to teach the sounds *ch* and *sh*—and was entirely successful, the finished product being "My chicks are shut up in a box." Of course, it must be admitted that the children had been, so to speak, trained up in this way; my hope is that they will not depart from it. It is perhaps necessary to add that the lesson was entirely a lesson given on the blackboard. This provides the most effective method of teaching, and helps to arouse the interest so necessary for all infant-school work to a far greater extent than when the lessons are read from a book or a wall-sheet, which should be regarded as merely supplementary to blackboard work.

In Standard II. I should say that a wider scope should be aimed at, and two reading-books entirely covered in the year. The Native School Reader, Part I., contains many lessons that are too difficult, coming just after the work of the First Standard, and a rearrangement would, I think, be an advantage. With regard to "Health for the Maori," the text-book in Standard IV., one has to confess that, excellent as it is as a text-book on health, it is a difficult book for use as a reader, and if we are to use the reader primarily to develop the art of reading, and not so much for the purpose of imparting special knowledge, it is evident that an additional reader is necessary. Indeed, I think that the Continuous Reader, from the sustained interest which it awakens and the pleasant associations with the art of reading which it establishes in the minds of the children, would be the very best kind of book to use in the upper standards. It is worth recording in this connection that one of our Bay of Plenty schools chose, in recognition of the Committee's having supplied firewood during the year, books suitable for a library. The master has reported that the keenest delight is evinced by the children in their books, and a further supply has been asked for, and the example is spreading to other schools. The habit of reading thus formed should undoubtedly prove in time a civilising influence of no mean order.

In several schools the work in reading of the preparatory class, especially the lower, does not show sufficient progress; indeed, in some schools there has been no progress at all. The teachers candidly affirm that this boy or that boy can do nothing. Reference to the attendance will show that the boy in question has attended in cases from two to four hundred times. I think that teachers will recognise that it is not too much to expect some progress from a child of school age and of average natural abilities in this space of time. In the upper classes, if sufficient time cannot be found for individual reading, the work may be extended by allowing the most deserving and capable pupils to read silently. The library books above referred to would be found very useful in this way.

In regard to spelling, it follows from the fact that the alphabetic method is so largely used in the teaching of reading that the children can in many instances spell orally better than they can read. In their written work, however, they are by no means so good; the difficulties connected with such letters as "b" and "p," "d" and "t" can never be overcome until the children have been accustomed to recognise the English consonants from their sound. I have endeavoured to encourage special lessons on word-building and spelling as far as possible—lessons that shall stand apart altogether from reading lessons. Every dictation lesson should be preceded by thorough preparation. Too often the children are set to learn spelling by themselves, and the lesson is completed by their writing the words from dictation. Experience shows that Maori children can spell big words—the bigger the word the more they enjoy the work—but small words like "plenty," "pores," "towel," &c., cause them much trouble. Were a thorough foundation laid in the methods I have above indicated, I believe much of the difficulty would disappear from the lower classes, and never reappear in the higher ones.