

B. TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.

Details of the work of the various technical and art schools and classes for the year 1906 will be found in the reports of the controlling authorities thereof attached to this report. The number of approved classes for instruction in technological, science, art, and commercial subjects, and in subjects of general education, and the average attendance at each, are given in Table A on pages 3, 4, and 5.

There are now over thirty schools equipped in a more or less complete manner in which technical instruction is being carried on under the regulations for manual and technical instruction. In addition, technical and continuation classes were held at about fifty places in such buildings as were available for the purpose. In not a few cases these country classes are extensions of those held in connection with the technical schools in the larger centres, and are conducted on similar lines, many of them by instructors on the staffs of the parent schools or by itinerant instructors. Each year sees an extension of this system, which is to be commended for many reasons.

As has been the case in recent years, there has been during 1906 a very considerable and general demand for facilities in the way of special buildings for technical instruction. A review of the year's operations shows that a good deal has been accomplished, especially in country districts, in the direction of providing accommodation for classes. During the year grants have been made to controlling authorities for the erection of buildings or for additions to existing buildings at New Plymouth, Wanganui, Marton, Eltham, Levin, Dannevirke, Waipawa, Napier, Hastings, Wakefield, and Christchurch.

The contribution of £10,000 recently made by the Auckland Savings-bank in aid of the funds of the Auckland Technical College should, with the Government subsidy thereon, enable the Auckland Education Board, which is the controlling authority of the classes at the College, to provide much-needed permanent accommodation therefor. In this connection it may be mentioned that there was during the year a very satisfactory increase in the voluntary contributions in aid of technical education, the amount paid by the Government in the way of pound-for-pound subsidies to controlling authorities being £3,225, or nearly two and a half times as much as in 1905. This implies an increase in the local interest taken in technical education, and is to be regarded as a very hopeful sign. Controlling authorities have also been enabled by means of Government grants to provide or to make necessary additions to equipment and apparatus for classes. A good deal, however, yet remains to be done in this direction before the schools in the larger centres, at all events, can be said to be fully equipped for the important work for which they are designed. At the same time, it will probably be generally agreed that the position to-day is not altogether unsatisfactory. Progress must, if mistakes are to be avoided, necessarily be gradual. As was pointed out in last year's report, the erection and equipment at considerable cost of buildings for technical classes will not of itself call an effective system of technical education into being: earnest students must be forthcoming, and the hands of those in charge of our schools must be strengthened by the help and sympathy of local bodies, employers of labour, and others, if the system, now in its infancy, is to take and keep its proper place in the scheme of education in New Zealand.

The number of approved classes working under the regulations for manual and technical instruction during the year was 1,173, an increase of 269. This increase may be said to be due on the one hand to increased facilities for technical education, and on the other to the provision that now exists for free instruction in connection with technical classes. Classes were held at nearly eighty different places, while over 1,600 persons held free places at technical schools. The difficulty referred to in previous reports of inducing students to take up definite courses of work still exists, but to a less extent than formerly, owing largely to the continued efforts of those in charge of our technical schools and classes, who are, it may be pointed out, receiving a good deal of assistance in this matter in certain of the larger centres by reason of the improved attitude of an increasing number of employers towards technical education. The regulations governing free places have probably been of some assistance also, for the reason that persons who avail themselves of these regulations are obliged to enter on a definite course of instruction.

Many of the schools now provide fairly complete courses having a direct bearing on many of the more important arts, trades, and industries. We regret, however, to report that the facilities offered are not being in many cases sufficiently taken advantage of by those who would most benefit by them. The causes of this, or some of them, were referred to at some length in last year's report, and need not be again discussed here. It may perhaps be some consolation to know that these and other problems connected with technical education are still far from being completely solved in countries older than our own.

Most classes for technical instruction are for obvious reasons held in the evening. In certain centres, however, day classes are now in operation in addition to evening classes. These day classes are composed in most instances of holders of free places. The courses of instruction taken up by the latter are set forth in Table D on page 8. A glance at the table shows that a course of commercial instruction appears to satisfy the requirements of a very large number of free pupils—about 65 per cent. as a matter of fact. Apart from other considerations, this can hardly be regarded as entirely satisfactory from the point of view of the intention of the regulations governing free places. These regulations were certainly not framed with a view to the establishment of what are to all intents and purposes day commercial schools as distinguished from day technical schools. No doubt commercial instruction should be provided for in any scheme of technical education having pretensions to completeness: whether it is desirable that in a colony like New Zealand it should occupy the position that it at present appears to do is another matter. It is to be sincerely hoped that the returns for the current year will give evidence of a more equitable state of affairs than the table already referred to indicates. The causes for the general demand that appears to exist both in town and country for some form or other of commercial instruction are not far to seek. It is not proposed, however, to discuss them here. Some of them, which perhaps time alone will remove, were referred to in last year's report. For others, and not the least potent