

little effort apparently is made to secure by suitable means the permanent lodgment in the pupils' minds of the salient portions of the chapters read. While we are prepared to regard somewhat indulgently a pupil's ignorance of the capital town in a country with which this Dominion has but the slightest commercial relations, or of the position of a remote and insignificant island, we are surely justified in requiring that a Sixth Standard pupil, after four years' study, should possess a good knowledge of the commercial and political geography of New Zealand, Australia, and the British Empire generally, and a fair knowledge of the geography of the more important foreign countries.

Moreover, even in many cases where the facts of political and commercial geography are fairly well known, teachers fail to appreciate the object of Course B, which is to show, as far as it is possible for the minds of the children to see it, the connection between natural conditions on the earth's surface and the civilisation of man—i.e., between physical geography on the one hand, and political and commercial geography on the other. The human interest of the various topics is not sufficiently dwelt on, and the teaching is apt to be too remote from the experience of the pupils and the facts of their every-day life. From a pupil who glibly enough furnishes a full list of the exports and imports of New Zealand it may be difficult to elicit a conjecture as to the probable nature, origin, and destination of the freights on the inward and outward trains that pass his school daily.

In our last annual report we had something to say respecting the schemes of work submitted to us on examination-day by teachers. The remarks we then felt constrained to make are again applicable, though probably to a smaller number of cases. But in no subjects are the schemes of work so generally unsatisfactory as are those purporting to detail the courses of study in geography, and in none is greater diversity shown, both in regard to mode of treatment of the subject and scope of work professed. While we are the last to insist that geography should receive uniform treatment in all the schools of the district, and while we fully recognise that, in the case of certain teachers the minimum of instruction required and the maximum of instruction given are convertible terms, nevertheless the conviction is being forced on us that, so long at least as geography is a compulsory subject for the proficiency certificate, the requirements, especially in respect of political and commercial geography, should be more strictly defined than they are at present.

While we have felt it to be our duty to speak somewhat strongly on this matter, we do not wish the Board to infer that the teaching of geography is unsatisfactory in all or even in a majority of the schools under its control. We are gratified to be able to say that there are many teachers in this district who make full use of the opportunities afforded by the teaching of this subject for training their pupils in scientific method, and there are others who are realising more or less rapidly the possibilities of the subject. In the case of these we doubt not that their skill in using the subject as an educative instrument will increase *pari passu* with their experience.

There are several of the newer subjects in the syllabus in regard to which much patience and forbearance have necessarily to be exercised. Nature study may be taken as illustrative. The treatment of this subject in our schools is rarely quite satisfactory. One potent reason for this is found in the fact that many of our teachers still fail to appreciate fully the true aim of this division of school-work, which is to give the pupil the observing eye and the reflective mind. Although the formal object-lessons of old have been in almost all our schools superseded by more or less definite courses of lessons, arranged in series with more or less skill, and showing more or less correlation with the other subjects of the syllabus, and although there is now more of nature and less of text-book in the treatment of this subject than formerly, many teachers are still prone to indulge in aimless, discursive talk about natural objects instead of developing the pupils' powers of observation—to give knowledge to the child instead of guiding him to find it for himself—in short, the work is done *for* the pupil, not *by* him. The excellent plan of giving lessons out-of-doors, where the children are face to face with facts, is, as we noted in the case of geography, too rarely followed. Nevertheless, although, speaking generally, the handling of the subject leaves much to be desired, it has by no means been entirely ineffective: the general tendency of the instruction has been to give the children an intelligent interest in their immediate surroundings and to make knowledge of the familiar the basis of the knowledge of the unseen.

But another factor undoubtedly goes far to explain why so many of our teachers have fallen short of complete success in dealing with the subject of nature study in their schools: the great majority of them have had no opportunity of qualifying themselves to teach it thoroughly. Nor can there be much improvement in this respect till every teacher has gone through a practical course at the University in those subjects necessary as a basis for nature study. Indeed, not only in regard to such subjects, but in regard to all others possible, the trend of modern opinion is in favour of university training for teachers; without neglect, of course, of that practical training in school methods without which all other studies are useless. Besides adding to the teacher's breadth of view, and thus increasing his educational usefulness, a university training of greater or less extent would largely improve his status in the community, and entitle him to more serious consideration from the public than he at present receives. The abler and more foreseeing of our younger teachers are fully awake to the advantages we have enumerated, though in the ranks of the older teachers there are still some who look askance at all connection between the training college and the university. Far other is the attitude of the teachers of Scotland, who have unanimously declared themselves in favour of the training of teachers being conducted as largely as possible at the university; and of the teachers of England, who but lately remonstrated with the Board of Education for seeking to restrict to some extent the facilities for attendance at university classes which training-college students had up to that time enjoyed.

We fully recognise the great advantages teachers have derived from the establishment of Saturday classes in nature-study, botany, and geology. We must, nevertheless, point out that