

Agricultural Training.—The problems in connection with agricultural education, which are in many respects similar to those of other types of technical and vocational training, have been brought into prominence recently through the inquiry conducted by the Board of Agriculture at the instance of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

The evidence showed that though over 30 per cent. of the boys leaving post-primary schools went farming, only about 10 per cent. took a course at school definitely arranged to provide some pre-vocational training in addition to a general education.

It was also shown that very few students attended the special farm training colleges for a full-time special course in farming, covering the scientific, commercial, and crafts sides of the profession.

There was a general agreement among farmers that the conditions under which actual farm-work could be learned at a farm training college such as Ruakura were in some respects so different from those which the student would have to face in earning his living by farm-work that it would be better not to spend much time at such an institution in getting hand-skill in the various operations, but to concentrate on the learning of methods and on applying the scientific principles on which the practice of farming is based, leaving the boy to acquire skill and speed in the business and crafts of farming under ordinary farm conditions after he has left the farm training college.

It was suggested that in this way the course at the farm training college could be made much shorter and more intensive so that a much larger proportion of the boys leaving school to go farming could receive preliminary training of a highly specialized character in a much more concentrated form than could be given in the ordinary course in agricultural science and art at a post-primary school.

There is much to be said for this view, provided always that the general education of the boy has included, in addition to English, history, civics, mathematics, &c., such studies in natural science, physics and chemistry, elementary agricultural science, and handwork as would form a reasonable basis on which to build a good working knowledge of the practical application of scientific results to the solution of problems which, as a farmer, he would be likely to meet.

Such a training could well be provided by the establishment of junior high schools in connection with district high schools in the smaller country centres, in which there could be continuity of work in manual training and agricultural science as well as in the more general subjects from the age of about twelve years till the boy was ready to top off at a farm training college with a short intensive vocational course in agriculture.

In most post-primary schools, however, preparation for the Matriculation Examination determines to a very large extent the range and content of the subjects of the curriculum, and it is clear that a suitable course for boys wishing to become farmers could only be generally taken by the boys if it formed a more suitable preparation for the Matriculation Examination than other courses which might be arranged.

In the present conditions of the Matriculation Examination this is not possible, and this may be largely the reason why the agricultural courses in the high schools attract no more than about 10 per cent. of the boys, although, as above stated, about 30 per cent. go farming after leaving the secondary school.

On the other hand, the agricultural classes in technical high schools in the large towns are not popular, though the Matriculation Examination is not made the special object of the courses.

In this case, however, the reasons for the comparative neglect of the courses may well be found in the difficulty which most town boys foresee in getting on to the land, and the fact that there are at present no regular means of securing further training for farm life after leaving school, beyond those available at Lincoln College or at Ruakura, both of which involve a fairly long residence and some monetary expenditure.

It is thought that a suitable school training, followed, as indicated above, by a short intensive course at a farm training college, might prove much more popular and quite effective if arrangements could be made for the further training of the boys as wage-earners on private farms, and by short off-season courses at farm training colleges or elsewhere, with a view to their setting up ultimately as farmers on their own account.

The solution in this, as in many other problems of technical education, is bound up with and dependent on the practical solution of general economic problems of the industry.

Amalgamation of High and Technical Schools.—Legislative provision was made in the year 1924 for the amalgamation, by Order in Council, of secondary and technical schools in any centre under one Board of Governors where the present governing bodies were favourable to such amalgamation.

The object of amalgamation is to reduce cost of administration, promote closer co-operation in all forms of secondary and technical education and so avoid overlapping and possible waste of effort, besides directly encouraging a clearer recognition of the essential unity of the whole system of education and the mutual dependence of its several parts.

Arrangements have been completed for unified control in Masterton, and in New Plymouth the principle has been accepted, while in Whangarei and Oamaru arrangements are practically completed. It is expected that in most cases outside the four main centres amalgamation will ultimately be found to be necessary, especially where junior high schools are established in connection with high schools or technical schools.

The general adoption of the principle of amalgamation will render necessary a revision of the systems for the classification of teachers in the secondary and technical branches respectively, with a view to framing a single system suitable for both types of school.

The matter has been under consideration by the Department during the past year, but certain difficulties still remain to be overcome before a system adapted to all the varying conditions of service in the two branches can be evolved.

I have, &c.,

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