

With respect to the introduction of light woodwork as an advanced form of handwork that may be practised in the ordinary classroom with the aid of some special equipment of a simple kind, it is not proposed to come to a decision until the experimental work now being carried out under some of the Education Boards has been continued sufficiently to make available such particulars as are necessary for the formation of a definite opinion as to its educational value and the possibility of conducting the work thoroughly as well as economically.

No alteration has been made in the distribution of the twenty-three agricultural instructors engaged by the various Education Boards for the purpose of assisting teachers in conducting the instruction in advanced nature-study, elementary agriculture, dairy and general science. These specialists continue to give excellent service. They devote particular attention to the senior divisions of ordinary primary schools and to the secondary departments of district high schools, but in a number of districts they also assist the teachers of classes in the lower divisions. In addition, they give expert advice in connection with major or minor operations directed towards the improvement of the environment, and in some districts are called upon to co-operate with farmers' unions and officers of the Department of Agriculture in the management of boys' and girls' clubs engaged in such operations as the raising of root crops and the rearing of calves in a competitive way. The development of this club movement is so great that the questions will soon arise as to what amount of assistance and direction should be required of the instructors of the two departments respectively, and as to whether an officer should be appointed to supervise the work throughout the Dominion.

NEEDLEWORK IN THE SCHOOLS.

During the year 1929 Miss M. Dyer, M.A., Inspector of Home Science, was absent from the Dominion on leave, and Miss E. M. Burns, organizing instructress in needlework in the Hawke's Bay District, was temporarily employed, chiefly as Inspector of Dressmaking and Needlework, in the public primary and post-primary schools of the Dominion. The following remarks extracted from her report to the Director deal with conditions of work in dressmaking, plain-sewing, and other branches of needlework-teaching in the Dominion:—

"The quality of the work, the amount accomplished in a year, and the teachers' attitude towards sewing vary very considerably in different districts and in the different schools. The charge has frequently been made that the standard of needlework-teaching has fallen during the last twenty years, and in the case of many schools it must be admitted that much of the work is extremely poor. This deterioration in quality is undoubtedly due to neglect of the subject over a number of years. The standard has thus gradually fallen, and it will continue to fall unless greater attention is paid to sewing in the primary schools, in the post-primary schools, and in the teachers' training colleges.

"A review of the needlework-teaching as carried out in the primary schools twenty or thirty years ago, when the quality of the work reached a higher standard of technical excellence, is valuable as showing what causes have led to the change in the standard of teaching. Samples of needlework executed by the mothers and aunts of the present generation of pupils show that the stitchery, the hemming, seaming, button-holing, darning, &c., reach a standard of beautiful fine sewing such as is seldom seen to-day. Under the system in vogue at that time the children worked the final stitchery only, the cutting and setting being done by the teacher in charge out of school hours. Thus it was necessary that the teacher should spend long evenings in preparing the pupils' work, as well as in looking over their sewing and in correcting faults. The type of needlework taught was influenced by the type of garments worn by the women and children at that time, the cutting and sewing of these garments demanding a much greater knowledge of difficult sewing and construction than is needed to make those worn at the present time. The pupil-teachers in those days served a three or four years' pupil-teachership, and during that period they received instruction in needlework of the above-mentioned type from senior teachers who were usually expert needlewomen. The pupils who were trained under this system did not, in general, enjoy needlework, as there was not enough freedom, since the children were not at liberty to express themselves by developing their own ideas in the construction and design of the articles on which they laboured.

"The sacrifice of a rigid insistence on technical precision in fine stitchery is not too great a price to pay for freedom to develop educational needlecraft, and to arouse and maintain an active interest in the work on the part of the child. Sewing is now to be taken rather as a part of the general training of the pupils in measuring, designing, and the use of colour than as an exercise in fine stitchery. From their first lesson the children are encouraged to make articles which they need in school or in play or for use in the home. The construction of such articles brings in the measuring and the cutting of the material as well as the actual stitching. In the early stages all the stitches used make and decorate the article at the same time, the work being carried out in coarse material with the use of bright coloured wools and thick cottons. That this method appeals to the children and the teachers, and that the children not only learn to sew and to construct articles, but also sew out of school hours for pleasure, has been proved by practical experience.

"It was hoped that the hints given in the new syllabus for primary schools would be a sufficient guide to teachers, but it is found that many need more help than can be contained in any general scheme. They need to see the actual articles made, and the methods used in their construction need to be explained. The teachers as a whole find it difficult to acquire a good foundation in this subject, while there are no visiting specialists on whom they can call for assistance.

"It is important that the teaching of needlework in the primary schools should be strengthened not only on account of the individual and personal needs of most of the pupils, but because of its importance to those who are to become teachers.