

Let me now advert to those clauses of the Act which bear on the course of study to be pursued in the Public and High Schools.

As regards the Public School programme, the chief thing to be noticed, is the introduction into it of a new scientific element. By the thirteenth clause of the Act, the Council of Public Instruction is required to make provision "for teaching in the Public Schools the elements of Natural History, of Agricultural Chemistry, of Mechanics, and of Agriculture." It must not be thought that it is intended, by the introduction of these branches of study into the Public Schools, that less attention than formerly is to be given to our old and valued friends, the three R's. Reading, writing and arithmetic must ever continue to be the main strands in the cord of elementary knowledge—the sides of the triangular base of the pyramid of education. If there were the least danger that the admission of science into the Public Schools would lead to the neglect of reading, writing and arithmetic, I for one would say,—keep science at the outside of the door. I trust, however, that it may be found possible, without detriment to the just claims of the R's, to do something in the way of bringing the children in our Public Schools to an acquaintance with the elements of science. This is eminently the age of science. The most wonderful discoveries are being daily made; while at the same time a scientific literature, at once popular and exact, is bringing the results of philosophical research within the reach of the general public. In these circumstances, a School system, which should fail to furnish the elementary education, that would give every child in the Province the means of fitting himself to look with intelligence, when he grows up, on the great scientific movement going on around him, and to take part, if qualified, in the work of original scientific investigation, would be seriously defective. The only question, it seems to me, which can here be raised, is whether the teaching of the elements of science should be confined to the High Schools, or made part of the work of the Public Schools also? The Legislature has taken the latter view. I observe that it is fortified in this by the opinion of the British Royal Commission on education; for, in reporting on the most suitable course of study for a class of schools similar to our Public Schools, the Commissioners recommend the introduction of elementary scientific subjects. It may also be remarked that a large number of boys and girls will probably complete their education in the Public Schools; so that, if they do not obtain an acquaintance with the elements of science in these institutions, they will get it nowhere else. Some persons, when they see the programme of study which the Council of Public Instruction has drawn up for the Public Schools, may very possibly scoff at the extremely elementary character of the lessons to be given in Natural History and Agricultural Chemistry, and Mechanics, and may say: What is the use of learning anything where so little is learned? But, if the little be only well taught, it will be invaluable. It will create a taste for more. It will be an instrument for the acquisition of more. It will introduce into the mind new conceptions—seed-thoughts, which may germinate, and bring forth, in due time, who can tell what fruits?