

HIGH SCHOOL INSPECTION.

By a Head Master:

The changes which have lately taken place in this department of our educational work are turning special attention to the general question of inspection; and, if one may judge from prevalent opinion, it would seem that further change will be considered necessary before the question is settled.

The general principle involved in the appointment of high school inspectors appears to commend itself to all who give the subject any attention. It is generally admitted, moreover, that our schools have been greatly improved through this agency. As long as high schools continue to receive legislative aid, it follows, as a matter of course, that the government should have some guarantee that the grant is being worthily bestowed. But no sufficient guarantee has yet been found which excludes direct personal inspection. It would be unreasonable to ask for high schools an exemption which is not claimed for any other institution thus aided from public funds. Inspection, therefore, we shall have. The question is, how can we derive the greatest amount of good from these officers?

When we compare the present state of high schools with their condition prior to the appointment of regular inspectors, we cannot fail to be impressed with the improvement everywhere apparent. That much of this is directly attributable to the agency referred to, can hardly be questioned. The changes introduced, from the entrance examination to the completion of the course—while not without some objectionable features—are, on the whole, in the direction of progress and improvement. Our schools are working in a course more uniform and advanced, while a marked impetus has been given to the entire system. For much of this, I think, we are indebted to our high school inspectors.

The opinion is heard in some quarters, not that we could dispense with these inspectors, but that we must receive from them a greater share of attention, if any real benefit is to result from their visits. It is an indisputable fact that, from various causes, the inspection is sometimes a rather formal one—a flying visit of two hours in some cases doing duty for a year. With some schools this might possibly suffice; as a rule it is by no means satisfactory. We as teachers need a kind of assistance which can be obtained in no other way than by personal intercourse with the inspectors. If they are teachers of experience, their visits should not only give them an acquaintance with the school, but it should afford opportunity for some exemplification on their part of what may be regarded as the best methods of conducting classes. Until this is secured, the benefits of inspection will be comparatively limited.

Again, it is felt that in the department of physical science the work of the high schools is anything but satisfactory as a rule. To quote from the last report of Dr. McLellan—"A necessary condition (in case of collegiate institutes) should be that the sciences—chemistry, botany and physics—be taught experimentally. The teaching of chemistry now is, for the most part, exceedingly imperfect. The Department should be satisfied, not only that the necessary appliances exist, but that the subjects are thoroughly and practically taught." Mr. Marling says:—"Science-teaching could be made of real educational value as to both knowledge and discipline. The so-called 'science group,' as now constituted, is a sham, and injurious, in my opinion, except in a few cases, rather than beneficial. To those who pursue it with the idea that they are learning 'science.'"

If practical effect is to be given to these recommendations, it certainly follows that the practical work, thus very properly demanded of institutes at least, must be tested by a H. S. inspector; it cannot be dealt with at the intermediate. All this will require more time than our inspectors can now devote to it. If our present institutes continue, we shall have in each of the fourteen a science master qualified to conduct a class in practical work. We shall have, therefore, fourteen classes to be examined (at least once a year) in the actual work of the laboratory.

We must all admit the desirability of the course proposed; but it of necessity involves the appointment of a third inspector. If, with two, the ordinary work of inspection can barely be overtaken in the year, it would be impossible for them to take the additional work referred to.

It is no secret that general dissatisfaction prevails in reference to certain features and departments of our normal school. A greater degree of efficiency is imperatively demanded. I venture the opinion that much good would be accomplished if the limited time now given by the inspectors to these schools was somewhat extended.

The experiment of dispensing with a third inspector was made to gratify the advocates of retrenchment in the Legislature, rather than from a conviction that two inspectors could properly do the work.

Let the third inspector, therefore, be restored, and we may then hope for an inspection that will be more satisfactory to the Department and certainly more helpful to the schools. Time could be afforded, in that case, for a thorough revision and close inspection of our normal schools. Should the additional expense be thought an obstacle, let the normal school grant (in 1880 amounting to \$36,694) contribute a share in proportion to the attention they would require from the high school inspectors.

OUR SEWING CLASS.

BY MISS ALICE FREEMAN, TORONTO.

Buttons have a tiresome way of coming off just when you are in a hurry, have they not, boys? you often wonder why mother does not fasten them more securely.—Well, perhaps she forgets how strong her boy's fingers are, and how much jerking and pulling each button must endure in the course of a day.

Now would you not like to know how to sew them on for yourselves—it is not a difficult undertaking, and while the girls are busy with their hemming, you might spend a pleasant half hour learning something that will be always useful to you; for some day you may travel many miles away from home and not having mother or sister near, will find it very convenient to be able to sew on all your own buttons. You would like to try? then come with very clean hands to-morrow afternoon, and we will see what we can do.

In the meantime we purchased two yards of the strongest factory cotton, a spool of coarse white thread—needles to correspond, and two cards of common white bone buttons—then tearing the factory into two-inch strips, considered ourselves fully equipped.

The following afternoon there was an air of expectation about the little fellows, and an unusual degree of industry over other lessons, that none might be deprived of their promised amusement;—much comparing of hands and vigorous rubs of grimy knuckles; many audible whispers concerning the merits and demerits of thimbles.

In due time sewing hour arrived, and having supplied the girls with their hemming together with all the instructions required for some fifteen minutes, the boys were given first a needle and length of thread each, these they were required to thread and knot, before going further. Though much astonishment was expressed at the persistency with which the thread would wander around the eye of the needle instead of into it, this was accomplished satisfactorily—if the colour of the thread be not taken into account. Next they were supplied with a strip of cotton each, and shown how to turn down and tack, to prevent fraying: with some patience and infinite pains on the part of the boys—who would tack the material to their fingers, only discovering their mistake as they advanced;—this was also completed. Then came the real work of sewing on buttons. Certain it is that never were buttons so securely fastened before. Through and through the thread was passed, until the much-tried buttons refused to bear any more, and deliberately split in two. Earnestly the boys worked—placing their thumbs over the drillings of each button, to hold it in position, and hunting vigorously with the needle on the under side to find an aperture—sometimes it was found too suddenly; the effect was a quick removal of the thumb to the mouth, and a whispered but heartfelt exclamation. One boy used his slate frame as a stretcher, and fastening his strip of cotton firmly across it, triumphantly pronounced it "the boss way,"—and again, when the hands grew warm, the thread black, and the needle sticky, the top of the desk was used as a forcing machine, to press refractory needles into the already well-filled drillings, and great surprise expressed when the needle snapped in two.

But despite these drawbacks the work was accomplished,—if not with skill, at least with right good will; and no lady, versed in all the mysteries of dainty fancy stitches, could be as proud of her finest production, as we were of the results of our first experience in sewing on buttons.