

unequal. In a few schools the task of writing a dozen lines on a simple subject, generally taken from the every-day experience of the pupil, seems almost insuperable. In other places lengthy and well-expressed letters are written with great facility. On the whole, this part of the work is creditably done, and is certainly much better than it was two years ago. Geography, both physical and political, is now successfully taught almost everywhere, map-drawing from memory being in some cases admirably done. Many of the older scholars can also give a rational explanation of the causes of the commoner natural phenomena, such as tides, wind, and rain.

**HISTORY.**—History has lately received even more than its fair share of attention, if I may judge from the full and accurate papers written by many of the more advanced pupils. I feel, indeed, so sure that more time than can be well spared from subjects of greater importance is now being devoted to preparing scholars for the examinations in history and political geography, that I purpose largely curtailing my next year's papers on these subjects. By making the geography and history papers shorter and easier, an examiner may set free the teachers for giving additional instruction in such all-important matters as arithmetic, penmanship, and composition. The sweeping away of a mass of mere memory work, much of which will be too surely and speedily forgotten by most of the children, will also be no small boon to those who are harassed by long night lessons.

**STANDARDS.**—I hold that the standards, especially as interpreted by the regulations, leave an Inspector perfectly at liberty to make, from time to time, such modifications as I have indicated, and that they prescribe rather the maximum than the minimum that he may exact. It is obvious, for example, that the geography of the Third Standard, in which "a knowledge of the chief mountains and rivers of the world" is included, among other things, must, if applied to children of ten years old, be construed with some latitude. The fact is that the standards, after several years' wear, have come to be treated much like a coat which, though ill-fitting at first, by dint of letting-out in one direction and curtailing in another on the part of the wearer, has been made to adjust itself tolerably well to his person, and has developed into quite a comfortable garment. I have this year devised practical remedies for the two most serious evils pointed out in my last report—the presenting of children for the First Standard at too early an age, and the bringing forward for standards scholars who had not attended "with reasonable regularity."

About six months before my examinations began I issued a circular to all the head-teachers in the district, giving them notice that, with the view of preventing, as far as possible, the presenting of very young children for the First Standard, I should construe the requirements at that stage very strictly, and should exact the utmost that was sanctioned by the regulations. The change, though involving much extra work at the outset, was cordially welcomed by the teachers—who were, indeed, the real gainers—and has been followed by the happiest results. A mass of little children, some of whom could barely manage to get through the former comparatively easy work of the First Standard, are now excluded, while those who have passed are well fitted, both by age and attainments, to grapple with the Second Standard. Some few exceptionally clever and well taught little ones of seven years old have contrived to get through the ordeal; but it is suggestive that those schools which persisted in bringing forward very young scholars failed most signally—in one instance seven out of eight proving unequal to the prescribed task. I have also ventured to define the term "reasonable regularity" by fixing it at not less than 260 half-day attendances (or twenty-six school weeks) since the previous examination. To give effect to this change, head-teachers were requested to enter on a separate list, at the foot of each examination schedule, the names of all scholars who had fallen short of the prescribed minimum. The failure to pass of any such regular attendant has not been recorded. It appears to me that these two safeguards for the teacher as to age and attendance are quite sufficient to warrant me in expecting, and, indeed, insisting, that in future every scholar who has passed the First Standard, and has made 260 half-day attendances since the previous examination, shall be presented for a higher standard. I can conceive of no possible reasons but tender years or irregularity of attendance which can now justify a teacher in withholding a single scholar who has passed the First Standard. Until then, considerable discretionary power must necessarily be left to the teacher. I am aware that in every school—I might almost say in every large class in every school—there is a certain residuum of dunces, whom no amount or species of training will fit for successive yearly steps in standard work. But the number of these is, after all, very small, and the few who break down at a second year's trial will probably be withdrawn from school by their parents, who will recognize the incapacity of their hapless offspring for further progress. The plain rule—that every scholar shall, year by year, be presented for a higher standard, under the conditions as to age and attendance which are now secured—will relieve many teachers of doubts as to their duty in this matter which now trouble them. It will also prevent the less scrupulous from snatching a temporary advantage over their neighbours, and will give an Inspector a better measure of the work really done at a school than he has under the present half-permissive system.

**HOME LESSONS.**—I have protested so often, and so strongly, against the ever-growing practice of inflicting long night lessons on our school children that I feel a certain reluctance in recurring to this subject, which is, however, far too serious to be passed over in silence. If one may believe the angry and often repeated complaints of parents, some of our most zealous and successful teachers are the worst offenders in this respect. But so firmly am I convinced that their successes are won in spite of, and not because of, the excessive evening tasks which they still impose, that I call upon them to give one year's fair trial to the plan that I recommend—not for the first time. Let no home task of any kind be set to any child under nine years old. After that age, and up to thirteen, let the tasks be such as will not exceed from half an hour's to an hour's steady work each evening, according to the age of the pupil. An hour and a quarter's work ought to suffice for the most advanced of our scholars. If a child cannot, year by year, keep pace with the requirements of the standards (as construed in this district) with such an amount of extra work, superadded to the five hours of unremitting labour that he has to undergo every day in any well-conducted school, then the fault lies in his own incapacity. The brain of such a scholar will not be strengthened, but actually weakened, by the additional strain put upon it. To me, a little school-girl, returning home laden with a pile of books to be pored over when she ought to be in bed, is a sorry sight. The notion that wisdom, or even book-learning—a very different