

meant to do for calculation the personal element cannot be eliminated from examinations. Whoever may be selected as examiners, and wheresoever they may be sent, their notions of what constitutes good reading, good spelling, and good writing will go with them. And so long as men remain what they are the result of any examination must always largely depend upon the skill, the tact, and, above all, the temper of the individual examiner, "regulate" him as you may.

A brief survey of those matters as to which something that is at least generally, if not universally, true may be affirmed, will fitly precede my usual estimate of the condition of each establishment.

The discipline and behaviour of the children in the great majority of our schools now leave but little to desire. Orders are carried out, and work is carried on, readily, cheerfully, and in silence, without a trace of undue severity, so far as I have been able to discover. Much of this is doubtless due to the increased attention paid of late years to both school and military drill, which, it appears to me, rank far above all other methods of fostering those habits of prompt obedience in which colonial children were at one time so notoriously lacking. This indirect good effect of drill would, of itself, fully justify the attention now paid to it, especially in our larger schools. In addition to this, however, it may be safely affirmed that a boy who has gone through the course of setting-up drill now adopted in our town schools will have acquired an upright, manly carriage that will probably abide with him until old age. It is something to train up a generation who, in the main, will not grow up clowns.

The art of reading is at last regaining that position of paramount importance to which it is entitled, but which was until lately usurped by arithmetic. A much higher degree of proficiency is now exacted and attained in this subject than was formerly reached. There are still, however, schools where there is much room for improvement. In the endeavour to get distinctness, a stilted and unnatural style, approaching to declamation has been adopted, both in reading and recitation. "A" is still pronounced, in many instances, as "eh," "the" as "thee," and the examiner has more than once been warned off from certain portions of the class-book, on the ground that the children had not yet "gone through them," which probably meant that they had not committed the forbidden passages to memory. An alternative reading-book, insisted on in England, may be looked for in vain in many of our schools. Should this omission not be supplied at my next visit, the soundness of carefully-prepared work will be ascertained by my taking as a test an extract from a newspaper, or some other "unseen passage." That the risk of some of the work produced on examination day being a sham is not imaginary may be shown by two striking instances. In each of these a numerous class that read with apparent ease a passage at the beginning of their book stumbled miserably over a few sentences taken from the hitherto-untouched portion of the same work.

Although the handwriting, on the whole, has certainly improved of late, what has been achieved in this direction falls far short of what I still look for. In not more than half of our schools, at the outside, can the penmanship be termed good; in a fourth of them it is distinctly unsatisfactory. I see no reason why nine out of ten of those who have completed their schooling at fourteen or fifteen years old should not carry away with them a bold, current style of handwriting; but in very many instances these proportions are actually reversed, a tithe only complying with my test. It is, however, a promising sign that it is among the younger scholars that the improvement is most marked. In the matter of holding the pen properly, and of sitting in the right position when writing, to which I have so often referred, I have almost abandoned the hope of effecting any wide or lasting improvement. Where teachers cannot be brought either to see the importance of any reform or to take the necessary pains to bring it about, an Inspector fights as vainly as the gods were said to do against stupidity.

Arithmetic is fairly well taught in most of our schools—admirably taught in not a few. To exact more arithmetic than is already being given would probably have the mischievous effect of curtailing the time now devoted to other equally important subjects. I have noticed a tendency to limit the work at the earlier stages to the bare requirements of the regulations, which are absurdly easy. Unless this tendency be carefully watched, too much work will be thrown upon the last years of the school course. Mental arithmetic is hardly practised enough among the junior classes.

Although the practical worth of the study of the grammar of what has been termed "our grammarless tongue" is probably much overrated so far as regards the effect produced upon the speech or the writing of our children, yet the investigation of the relations of words to each other, and of their origin, undoubtedly affords a mental training of considerable value. The subject is so taught that my moderate demands in formal grammar are usually satisfied. The test applied in English this year—the reproduction in simple language of a short narrative previously read aloud by the class—has always been fairly well complied with, it being now pretty generally understood that the stilted English formerly in vogue will not be tolerated.

Geography and history (the former subject being generally as popular with the children as the latter is the reverse) are so taught that there is but little ground for complaint.

Although the passages given out as a test of spelling are invariably taken from the reading books in use, the mistakes made, especially in the upper classes, are far too numerous. Severer tests will be applied in future, and a substantial improvement in the spelling will be expected.

Science, or, to put it more simply, the knowledge of common things, takes, and deserves to take, a more prominent place in the school course. Their knowledge of drawing now enables the older scholars to produce neat and accurate diagrams of such things as the hydraulic press or the different kinds of levers, accompanied by a clear written description of these objects. Drawing from models, an art of no small practical value, is now generally and successfully taught.

The improvement that has been brought about, especially within the City of Nelson, in the art of singing—by which I mean singing by note—is the most striking feature in the work of the past year. At the present rate of progress, the ability to read correctly at sight a simple piece of music will in a year or two become as common as was the art of reading a simple narrative a few years ago.