

the governing power of the verb. But I am glad to say the indolence implied in this omission is not common in the schools.

COMPOSITION.—Many teachers have set themselves this year to systematic instruction in the art of composition, and there is no doubt this will have to be done by all in future if the requirements of the syllabus are to be complied with. Composition is an art, and, of course, can be taught like any other art; but the method of doing it will require a good deal of study, and even of experiment, before satisfactory results will be obtained. The best course to be adopted is not yet so fully ascertained or so widely known as in the older subjects of instruction. Still, a large number of the essays written for me on examination-day this year have been excellent in more than one respect. They have been satisfactory to this extent: that the children have had something to say on the subject proposed, and have succeeded in saying it, so that often their productions have been chatty little communications which it was a pleasure to read. I need hardly say, however, that everything depends on the topic set them to write upon. Of course, it will often be necessary that this should be taken from the lessons of the day—the history lesson, or the object-lesson, or even the reading-lesson. But my experience is that these are not the themes on which children will be able to write most freely: something that has come within their own personal experience out of school sets them off much more readily, and makes their pens much more facile. Thus, on examination-day a request for an account of their pet animal from the children of Standard III., or a description of the Chinese in New Zealand from the higher classes, has generally produced lengthy and often clever compositions, developing the skill of the writer, and creditable to his intelligence, though not always to his scholarship. Unfortunately, the list of subjects equally suitable is very limited. One mine of topics, however, suitable for the higher classes seems to have been discovered in imaginary letters from eminent persons of the past, such as a despatch from the Duke of Wellington after the Battle of Waterloo, a line of thought that has been found by experiment to afford free exercise to many young students. But a good supply of suitable topics can only be obtained by careful observation and some fertility of resource on the part of the teacher, who, if his heart is in his work, will not grudge the thought necessary for the discovery of new veins of mental gold on which his scholars may operate.

The faults exhibited in the essays from several schools have led me to doubt whether the teacher has been in the habit of correcting the essays after they have been written—a laborious task, of course, but one absolutely necessary if children are ever to learn the art of composition. In most of our schools the children have accomplished the preliminary steps; they have acquired the power of saying something, but in very few schools, even in the senior classes, have they mastered the art of expressing themselves grammatically. The chief faults are two—(1) A want of concord between the verb and its nominative; and (2) the insertion of pronouns where sense or clearness requires that nouns should be written instead. These faults may easily be made manifest to children by a little blackboard teaching; but, even then, experienced teachers will agree with me that something more remains to be done. That for a child to know the theory of a sentence and the theory of correct writing is not enough, as he will not be likely to take the necessary pains to utilise his knowledge as long as he is aware that his essay will not be revised, and that he will not have to correct his faults. Science and art, knowledge and practice, are two widely different things; and it is the *habit* of correct expression that we have to produce. The nurse must guide the steps of the infant—to lecture to it on the theory of walking will not avail.

There are two difficulties from which a child suffers in his first attempts at composition—the want of ideas and the want of words. The first is undoubtedly his greater trouble, and should be met by encouraging him to discuss with others the subject on which he is expected to write. An excellent remedy for the second defect, the want of words, is the old-fashioned one of committing to memory choice passages from standard authors, as it is in this way that a child's vocabulary is most easily enlarged, a fact of which readers of biography are very well aware. With us probably the standard authors would have to be represented by the reading-book of the class.

GEOGRAPHY.—From composition to geography is no great step, as without a knowledge of geography even a Shakespeare ceases to be infallible, as, for instance, when he gives a seaboard to Bohemia. There is scarcely any subject in which the *manner* of teaching is such an important factor of the instruction given as geography; and, although the oral efforts of the teacher should undoubtedly be supplemented by the text-book, it is by oral teaching almost exclusively that geography should be taught. To a large extent I have reason to believe this has really been the case throughout the district during the past year, judging both by examination-papers and by what I have seen in the schools on my inspection visits. I am not sure, however, that the wall-map is utilised to the full extent that it should be, as experience shows that it is not enough for the teacher to indicate places on the map to the class—the scholars must themselves be called forward for the same purpose, and find the places for themselves. No doubt many will object that time will thus be lost which can ill be spared; but the reply is self-evident; it is the only way by which geography can be thoroughly taught. Time, however, would be greatly economized if all children could be persuaded to provide themselves with a school atlas, such as Collins's "New Shilling Atlas," not, of course, for use in class, but to enable them to verify at night as a home-lesson the places indicated by the teacher on the school map, so as to be themselves ready to demonstrate their knowledge publicly and quickly next day on the wall-map.

The chief fault to be found with the geography papers this year, but by no means in all schools, is the indefinite character of the answers given, showing again a want of thoroughness in the knowledge of the scholars, and sometimes, I fear, a mere parrot-like repetition of the words of the text-book. Thus I have often been told that the City of Cadiz is on the Isle of Leon; but to what country the city belongs, or where the Isle of Leon may be, I am left to guess. Into what utter rubbish the learning of a geography text-book may degenerate is shown by an examination-paper from the Gillespie's School, a school which in most other subjects did remarkably well this year.