

Inspectors has been much the same as Mr. Dickinson's, and disastrous failure in the arithmetic of Standards V. and VI. has been as pronounced in other districts as in his. The cause of this failure is clearly the increased difficulty of the questions. Teachers seem to me to be fully justified in expecting reasonable uniformity in the standards of attainments required in this subject year by year. If the standard is suddenly raised without warning of any kind we cannot blame them for not at once rising to its demands. In my judgment many of the examination-tests in the arithmetic of Standards V. and VI. were unreasonably difficult, and the failure to answer them satisfactorily does not of itself prove any decline in the efficiency of the teaching. There is, however, one class of sum set for the Standard V. class which I think our scholars should have answered better than they did. I refer to questions relating to bankrupt estates, and requiring for their solution a knowledge only of the compound rules and simple proportion, together with a small dose of mental acuteness. Questions of this kind abound in the school text-books, and all the somewhat technical terms used in this connection should have been understood. Many examples of this type were given during the year: "A bankrupt's estate pays 12s. 6d. in the £1; what does a creditor lose on a debt of £350?" This I consider a perfectly fair, indeed, an easy question for Standard V. pupils; but it proved a mere trap for the great majority of our scholars, who took the 12s. 6d. to be the sum lost on each pound of the whole debt. The common failure to do questions of this kind clearly indicates very mechanical teaching. In many schools, as is seen at inspection visits, there is a notable want of smartness in arithmetical work, four or five easy examples being all that is overtaken in an hour. In good schools twice as much as this is often done in the same time. More practice in doing sums at the blackboard is now given, the pupils stating the working in detail and giving all explanations; but there are too many cases in which it is still more or less neglected. Readiness in changing small sums of money from one denomination to another is a very common desideratum in Standards III. and IV. This defect can be supplied only by a sufficient amount of rapid oral questioning. Correction of answers frequently encroaches seriously on the time for teaching, and in the eyes of some it almost exhausts the teacher's duty in connection with arithmetic. These faults are most noticeable in the classes below Standard IV., and especially in the larger schools. From Standard IV. upwards blackboard teaching is more practiced, and the instruction is more intelligent. I believe, however, that the teaching is seldom sufficiently impressed by clear and varied questioning on the examples when the working has been completed. In dealing with problems one or two very simple cases involving the same principle are very generally considered first. This is as it should be, if simple illustration is really needed. But care is seldom taken to make sure that the principle as a principle is really understood, and can be clearly and concisely stated by average pupils before consideration of the simple examples is left. Our main object in resorting to easy illustrations is to lay bare a principle in its greatest simplicity; but the lesson is most incomplete unless the principle is generalised—*i.e.*, can be stated by most of the pupils in terms that admit of its easy application to similar cases. Neglect of this is, I fear, a common and a grave defect in our handling of arithmetic. I am ashamed to report that finger-counting is still far from unknown in the Third and Fourth Standards, and even in the Fifth. Means of curing this evil can be easily found if teachers would only take the trouble to apply them. Mental arithmetic varies greatly from school to school, and is on the whole but moderately done. The upper classes frequently do better than the lower; in the former I have not rarely met with good work.

There has been satisfactory improvement in the teaching of grammar, more especially in the lower classes. Mr. Goodwin writes, "The teaching of grammar has certainly improved, but a good deal remains to be done." And Mr. Dickinson says, "Grammar is being better taught, more attention being given to sentence-structure than to minutiae of parsing." A sound understanding of this subject is most necessary even for the most elementary teaching of it, and prevalent defects of treatment are in great measure due to the limited acquaintance with its principles that many teachers have gained. In several of the larger schools the subject has been well taught in the higher classes. I hope that most teachers will make acquaintance with Mr. West's "Elements of English Grammar," the book recommended for study to pupil-teachers. A careful study of this lucid and logical work should do much to improve the teaching of this subject.

Little improvement is to be noticed this year in the teaching of composition. In order to secure greater uniformity in estimating the value of exercises in this subject I thought it advisable to issue pretty definite instructions to the Inspectors, and, as a result, the standard applied in one or two of the districts has been slightly raised. The purport of these instructions I hope to be able to communicate to teachers at an early date. It is worth noticing that many of the failures recorded in this subject were due to pupils being unable to divide the matter of their exercises properly into sentences. To teach this it would be helpful to write on the blackboard a paragraph containing several sentences with the stops and capital letters omitted, and to train the pupils to divide it into sentences and insert the capitals. Pupils' exercises showing this fault in a marked degree might with advantage be treated in the same way.

Much of the weakness in teaching composition is traceable to bad methods and to want of method—faults that are largely due to the omission of this topic from current text-books on school method. Mr. Gladman, for example, has not a word to say on the subject. Teachers will find many useful suggestions in a little book entitled "English Composition and how to teach it," by R. S. Wood (MacDougal's Education Company, Limited, London), and in Messrs. Nelson's composition books for all the standards, published last year.

Except in the Second and Third Standards the knowledge of geography has hardly improved during the year. It is a heavy subject, not easy to invest with interest, and in some respects too vaguely defined. It would be a great gain if the Minister would issue a complete syllabus, as is done in Victoria, and sell it for the cost of printing. The teaching, I think, might easily be made more thorough and intelligent than it is in most schools. In some cases a good deal is taught that clearly lies outside the syllabus. The "Southern Cross" geographies, now favoured by a number