

In all but the strongest schools there has been a falling-away from accuracy in various degrees. Several reasons accounting for this suggest themselves. The reading-books are harder than those to which the children have hitherto been accustomed. The attendance during the year was, on the whole, unsteady. But there is another and more potent reason. This is to be found in the provision of the syllabus whereby a pupil may be promoted to a higher class even if he is weak in spelling, provided that his weakness does not fall below the degree of strength required in the standard below that in which he is placed. It is not difficult to see what this provision leads to in some cases: it simply puts a premium upon a "let-it-slide" policy. The horse may stumble at the first hurdle; but, never mind, he has another chance at a hurdle smaller by an indefinite extent. We do not say this represents the attitude of many of the teachers, but in the light of our experience we have no doubt whatever of its application in some cases. With regard to the difficulty presented by the books, we may say that we have always advised teachers not to attempt too much, but to make sure that what is done is well done—*i.e.*, that it is educative and thorough. To make instruction in spelling educative some attempt must be made to teach even the shreds of principles applicable, and some attempt to carry on systematic word-building; to make instruction thorough there should be constant use of the blackboard—for a knowledge of spelling does come by observation—frequent revision, and the keeping of a record of errors made, not a slavish entry of each error as it occurs, but the logical method of eliminating and recording the errors common to a class.

The general tenor of the remarks just made regarding spelling applies very largely to writing also. In this connection we recall a statement made in our last year's report, to the effect that what is bad writing in one class would be considered bad writing in the class below. There should accordingly be no trusting to the chance that a pupil's work will at least be equal to something with which it is totally incomparable. Our requirements in this subject are few but sufficiently comprehensive; the pupil's work should be uniform and legible. We may add that in this district the result of the battle of the methods has been a compromise, the style of handwriting now taught in nearly all our schools combining the physical advantages of the upright method with the characteristic grace and flow of the sloping.

Coming to the last of the English group of subjects, we note that in the majority of the schools much time and care are bestowed on the teaching of composition, with the result that we often find pupils able to express themselves in writing clearly, rapidly, and fully. There is, however, in some cases a tendency to seek absolute accuracy at the expense of varied and flowing thought. Children receive imperative instructions to say only one thing at a time—in its place an unimpeachable maxim. But it is hardly necessary to remind teachers that the art of composition lies not in the putting together of things like so many sticks in a row. It lies in a varied, thoughtful, and melodious combination of ideas, and the sooner the children cast aside the single statement shackle the better for the cause of composition. In this subject the outstanding difficulty, in country schools especially, is the lack of ideas. We have on many occasions invited the upper classes of schools to choose their own subject and proceed to talk about it. Failing this, the pupils were invited to make as many statements as possible about the subject; but no amount of questioning of the most persuasive kind could awaken any responsive chord in their minds. In such cases the teachers are largely to blame. They know the pupil's poverty of language and ideas, and yet by no determined effort make good the defects. But the making good of defects is just their duty and their privilege, and they should not shirk the one nor esteem lightly the other because of ugly difficulties besetting the path of progress. The remedies, we would remind the teachers, are oral composition from the first day a child enters school, by which we mean that the child should give a complete answer to every question asked in connection with the English subjects. Then there are the conversational lessons at the blackboard, the driving home of the few principles involved; and last, but by no means least, independent effort on the part of the pupil.

In arithmetic we regret to have to chronicle an unfortunate falling-off in the various forms of mental work. The great difficulty here, especially in single-handed schools, is to find sufficient time. We recognise the difficulty, but we must also recognise the fact that, generally speaking, what can be done in one school can be done in another. Mental arithmetic is absolutely indispensable in the primary school. It is indispensable in the teaching of new principles, in mind-training, and in bread-winning. For these reasons we cannot blink the fact that it has in too many cases been overlooked, and we feel that it will be incumbent upon us hereafter to call pointed attention to cases of neglect. With respect to the teaching of arithmetic generally, we may say that on the whole it continues to be good, though we are every now and then impressed with the idea that in some schools there appears to be no adequate return for the time spent on it. Inexperienced teachers cannot be too often reminded that the true way to success here is to make absolutely sure of the ground-work. Till the pupils are perfect in tables, and quick and accurate at the simple rules, there can be no progress in the more advanced parts of the subject. It is creditable to our infant-mistresses that, as a rule, they do this part of their work so well. Of all school subjects arithmetic can be most readily turned to practical account; but the neglect to do this is, we fear, responsible for the helplessness of many pupils when they reach the more intricate stages. In a fair number of schools arithmetic is taught in such a way as to become a valuable training in method and abstract reasoning, and where it is thus taught as a science pupils will find little difficulty with the art. Teachers for the most part have their eye rather upon the art than upon the science. Nor is this altogether matter for surprise, seeing that so many of our pupils must be doing for themselves before they are well into their teens.

Referring to the class-subjects, we are glad to say that new and better methods are gaining ground in the treatment of the subject of geography. This subject, which to the young mind is perhaps the most delightful of all school studies, is at length being raised out of the region of cram. There is, however, still much to be desired in the treatment of physical and mathe-