

of opinion that these variations are largely due to the relative number of younger and of older teachers working in a district. Where the younger teachers, and especially the younger men, predominate, the efficiency is distinctly higher. These are the men who are raising education in country districts, and in acknowledging their good service I cannot help feeling that the great weight in connection with professional advancement, now attached to mere length of service, and even to length of tenure of a particular position, must be sadly disheartening to them. The teachers most deserving of advancement are, in my belief, those who have done and are still doing the most efficient service. A teacher who does not reach the best he can do within ten or twelve years of his taking up the work is not very likely to prove a great success later.

In general, reading is fluent and accurate, and in the majority of our schools I consider it is on the whole well taught. Mr. Garrard thinks it is "too expressionless and mechanical," and he adds, "The continual lowering of the voice at the commas is a serious fault." Reading of the latter type has been quite exceptional in my own experience, and no other Inspector refers to it. Mr. Burnside notes "defective phrasing" as the chief blot in the otherwise meritorious teaching of the subject. Mr. Crowe finds "the old fault of indistinct utterance too prevalent" in his district. Both Mr. Purdie and Mr. Stewart record steady improvement, which they attribute largely to the use by teachers and Inspectors of passages previously unseen as tests and exercises. The latter characterizes the reading in several of the larger schools as "excellent," and this praise can be justly bestowed on a number of the larger schools examined by others of the Inspectors. The beneficial effects of a wider course of reading are generally recognised. In many of the smaller schools the primer classes do not read widely enough. In all these, two sets of "Primers" and three sets of "Infant Readers" should be overtaken. This will involve little trouble if the books are taken up in the real order of difficulty. No more sets of the Queen Primer Reading Sheets are to be issued; the Crown Primer Sheets will be used instead. Additional cheap reading-books, mostly fairy-tale and story books, costing a penny or twopence each, can now be made available for supplementary reading, if the head teachers and the local School Committee advise me that they desire their use to be authorised. I do not think that the average teacher takes sufficient pains to make reading lessons interesting; this aim should never be lost sight of. Reading lessons again and again must be fatal to interest; it is infinitely better to take up fresh matter; this nowadays is not difficult, and can be easily done by all who desire it. Silent reading is little used. "Its value as an educational factor," Mr. Purdie writes, "is not yet sufficiently recognised by our teachers." "Simultaneous reading," he adds, "is still of too frequent occurrence."

The comprehension of the language and of the subject-matter of the reading lessons continues to improve. The Inspectors bestow, and will continue to bestow, special attention on this. Mr. Purdie, as I gladly notice, says that "its value as an educational instrument is becoming more fully recognised by teachers year by year." I entirely agree with him when he goes on to say that fine oral reading is not the main object of teaching to read: a clear understanding of the matter and thought, and a vivid realisation of the pictures brought before the mind's eye, are infinitely more important than the reading itself. Evidence that such an understanding and realisation have been secured is the best guarantee we can have that reading is ministering to a sound, stimulating, and broad mental training. Their absence is highly suggestive of mere memory effort and parrot-like repetition, the outcome of simultaneous drill and a deadening mechanical routine.

The Inspectors agree in considering recitation indifferently taught. Passages difficult of understanding are too often chosen. Frequently the repetition suggests that the stanzas have been committed to memory without sufficient preliminary teaching and study of form and meaning. Few of our pupils know what "metre" and "rhyme" mean, though they learn dozens of poems of various structure. Many teachers should be ashamed of the way this part of their work is handled.

Spelling and dictation are in general well taught, but often at an excessive cost of time and labour. It is in the child's every-day vocabulary that mistakes are most common. Why this should be is not easy to understand. In the larger schools, where more time is available, word-building exercises give considerable help in the teaching, and link it to composition. In the smaller ones it is more difficult to turn it to helpful account. Here the cheap text-books, prepared as aids to teachers, might with advantage be more generally used. In the Standard VI class the tests set are in general quite satisfactorily dealt with.

As to writing, Mr. Garrard considers our pupils exceptionally proficient in this subject; Mr. Purdie expresses a similar opinion; all the Inspectors allow that the teaching is quite satisfactory.

Most of the Inspectors express disappointment with the progress that is being made in composition and sentence-structure (including such elements of grammar as are now taught). Mr. Purdie alone speaks of it as being "well done" in the bulk of the schools of his district. As in past years it is especially in the Standard IV and V classes that serious defects are noticeable. In Standard VI much of the backward training of previous years is made good. Mr. Garrard finds the pupils "painfully slow in doing their exercises, while their finished product more often than not consists of a few short scrappy sentences." Mr. Stewart also finds composition "a very weak subject," and he says that "most teachers are unable to draw up a satisfactory plan of work in it." Mr. Burnside's estimate is less unfavourable, the chief defect having been "a general looseness of style, and not a want of matter or lack of intelligence."

In many schools, as I think, too much time is being given up to sentence-structure and work of that type. This instruction deals with the form in which statements (generally given to the pupils) are to be cast; in spirit it is purely formal and critical; it does not foster thought or reflection or place the pupil in the creative attitude. Its rôle, though not without importance, is not a primary one, and it should not claim more at most than a third of the total time given to composition. Moreover, sentence-structure is in general slowly and not economically dealt with. The statements to be considered and rearranged are often written on the blackboard in the course of the lesson.