

letters. As the subject is in many cases unsatisfactory and backward, and as many children now leave school wholly untrained in the handwriting universally employed in private and commercial correspondence, I would strongly impress on teachers a recommendation or two likely to lead to improvement. First and chiefly, I think that no child should begin writing with large text. It is manifest that the mechanical difficulty of getting round the large letters must greatly retard progress, and discourage the beginner. A much more cogent reason than this, however, lies in the important and sound principle, that a child who is likely to leave school early (and the great majority of children do so) should be trained from the first to the hand that will be used in after-life. We have only to compare the numbers presented during the last nine months in Standards IV., V., and VI.,—748, 331, 109, respectively—to see how many children may leave school permanently at an early stage in their progress towards a fair education. Of the children thus removed from school at a very early stage, I believe that most have not had two years' practice in writing small-hand, although they may have had four or five years' instruction in the subject. Now, I conceive that school arrangements and methods should be adapted to secure for such children the utmost economy of the time available for their education; and I believe most firmly that two or three years' practice in writing a large text-hand is not an economical preparation for the speedy acquisition of a small current-hand, and that it should, where economy is an object, give place to practice in small-hand from the first. This recommendation virtually means that Collins's and Phillips's books should be discontinued, and that some system such as Vere Foster's should be substituted. I hope that the change will be slowly brought about, that the holders of stocks of the books now generally used may not suffer loss or inconvenience. It is with reluctance that I propose any change in the commonly-used school books, but in this case the consequences of running in the old groove would be so serious in the case of many children that I deem the change more than warranted. In the second place, I conceive that superintendence of writing exercises is by no means fully turned to account. If all serious deviations from the model were marked with a coloured pencil, and typical faults observed in looking over any of the books were explained and corrected on the black-board for the instruction of all, much better work would undoubtedly be secured. Lastly, in forming such letters as "m," the legs of the letter should from the first be joined from the foot or bottom, and the whole letter, and where practicable several letters in succession, should be written without raising the pen from the paper. One of the worst features about large-text seems to be that it encourages the practice of lifting the pen from the paper far more frequently than should be done in small current-hand, where in fact the less interruption there is to the continuity of the writing the sooner will a ready style be formed.

Exercise-books were not shown in as many schools as might be expected. The work contained in them was excellent in the larger schools, and generally fair everywhere. I am of opinion that the neat writing of short exercises in books should be begun much earlier than is now the rule. Were large-text banished to the end of the writing course, instead of being placed at the threshold, a fair somewhat large-sized "small-hand" could easily be written by the time pupils are ready for examination in Standard III., and I should like to see exercise-books shown along with copy-books in the examination for that and all higher standards. If written exercises should be begun at this stage, the exercises should in every case be short, and wholly written in school, the penmanship being considered the chief point in judging of the work.

ARITHMETIC.

I have not remarked much general improvement in the teaching of this cardinal subject, though not a few individual schools have made very creditable progress in it. Inaccuracy in working, and particularly insufficient familiarity with mental addition and subtraction, were the most common causes of failure. Notation, somehow, makes little improvement, notwithstanding the stress that has been laid on it in all our examinations. There are very few schools in which the Second Standard class can write down correctly a sum of four figures in addition, or the Third Standard class one of six; while, in many, half the pupils go wrong. These cases fill one with astonishment, especially when the assurance is given that the subject has been most carefully explained and diligently practised. If this assurance is worth anything at all, it is evident that the teaching must be very inefficient, owing probably to want of clearness or want of impressiveness. In a matter that is so easily tested, wholesale failure may well fill one with wonder. In Standards V. and VI., there is still frequent cause to complain of the tangled and unintelligible way in which questions in vulgar fractions are worked out; but improvement seems in many schools hopeless, so indifferent are the teachers to lucidity and transparency of arrangement. I would recommend to such a study of algebraical fractions. Mental arithmetic has not received the attention it deserves, either in the teaching of the schools or in my examinations of them. I hope next year to be able to test it more frequently and more worthily. In Standards V. and VI., the arithmetic papers were always answered on paper, and the cyphering and arrangement of the answers were, with the exceptions already mentioned, generally very satisfactory.

GRAMMAR.

In the larger schools, and specially in their higher classes, grammar continues to be carefully and satisfactorily taught; but, on the whole, I have been much less satisfied with the work in this subject than formerly. In the lower standards the answers have given proof of a prevalent want of that intelligence and power of reasoning which is required even for distinguishing the parts of speech. Two causes are mainly responsible for this state of things; one being the early age at which the study of the subject is at present begun, and the other the rarity of skilful instruction in it. In Standards IV. and V., every question that passed beyond the limits of routine parsing was badly answered. The inflections asked for were inaccurately given, and very often the meaning of the question "Write the complete inflection," or "the complete declension of *man* and *he*," was a perfect mystery. Most answers to the above contained the parsing of the words proposed; others gave the nominative, singular and plural, while a few gave the complete inflection rightly or wrongly written out. It is