

their pupils to deviate in many ways from the model. Most, however, superintend the writing lesson with satisfactory care, though many hurry their scholars through the series too quickly, and allow them to practise the small writing of the higher numbers long before they have learned to form the letters neatly and accurately. This is a mistake of which there is frequent reason to complain. Teachers lay the blame on the parents; but I believe that is a mere subterfuge, and that they could easily prevent the evil if they were anxious to do so. Nothing like the same care is taken with the writing in the exercise-books, which is rarely satisfactory, and is very often in a totally different style to that taught in the copy-books. It is quite common to find in them letters formed without loops which always have loops in the copy-books. To allow children who are learning to write such latitude as this cannot but greatly retard their progress. It is, I conceive, imperative for a teacher to see that the hand he uses as a model is imitated and followed in all the writing his pupils do; not in the copy-book only, but also in all exercise-books, and other exercises written on paper. This is surely a most important matter; yet it is by no means generally attended to in the public schools of Otago. In like manner a great deal of careless scribbling and figuring on slates is to be met with in almost every school; and at examination times it is not uncommon to hear the classes admonished to do their slate-work as neatly as they can, and not in the usual way. In uttering such an admonition a teacher condemns himself from his own lips. The indifference of many about the neatness and style of the every-day written work of the school is almost beyond belief. They forget that habits are the resultant of all our actions and doings in some particular direction, and that the habit of writing carefully, as scholars do for the most part at the formal writing lesson, is very apt to be counteracted by the habit of writing and figuring carelessly, day by day and hour by hour, on slates and in exercise-books. On the average the transcription in the Second Standard is far more carefully written than the dictation on slates of several of the higher ones. The best exercise-books are almost invariably those written in school. Those written at home are, as a rule, so inferior that I have often to recommend the total discontinuance of such exercises as part of the home work. There is no surer sign of good management and efficient work than the general character of the scholars' writing and cyphering, and I could almost reckon on my fingers the schools in my district in which they are thoroughly satisfactory.

Little improvement is to be observed in the teaching of composition. In not a few schools it is merely practised, and not taught at all. During the past year a short exercise in this subject was required of every child from Standard III. upwards. No extravagant expectations of excellent work were entertained, for the art of writing is not easily taught, and the correction of exercises in it takes up a great deal of time. The matter of the composition exercises was generally ample and suitable, but in Standards III. and IV. it was seldom properly divided into sentences. In Standard IV. a letter had to be written, but it was rarely that the children knew how to formally open and close it—a thing that could be very readily taught. In the two highest standards very fair exercises were received. In the lower standards skilful or even suitable systematic teaching should soon lead to higher proficiency in this subject. To those who desire assistance and advice as to the teaching of composition I would recommend the excellent and suggestive elementary book on the subject lately published by Mr. J. B. Park, of the William Street School, Dunedin, and Dr. Abbott's well-known little work entitled "How to Write Clearly."

The last two or three years have witnessed very considerable improvement in the teaching of geography, but there is still ample scope for further progress in the same direction. In many schools I have been greatly dissatisfied with the geography lessons in the Second Standard. The work, which is really easy and simple if intelligently taught, is too often done in a thoroughly mechanical way; and though the definitions can be repeated the children have no true comprehension of what they denote, and know little or nothing of what a map is. Some, I have found, could define an island, but could not tell whether it was land or water. Few knew whether and why the north end of New Zealand was warmer than the south, or whether and why the sun rose earlier in New Zealand than in Australia. Hardly any were able to point out a place at the equator directly south of the point where the first meridian cuts the Arctic Circle. In one school some twenty children could not point out a single island on the map of the world. Teaching that leaves such results as the above must be hopelessly devoid of intelligence, and cannot possibly contribute to that training and discipline of the powers of the mind which is the sole aim of the vast educational machinery of the colony. As in former years, a very great proportion of the pupils examined for Standard IV. failed in this subject, a circumstance that says little for the skill and thoroughness of the teaching. From what I have seen of the lessons in geography, I believe that in most schools there is too little actual teaching of it, and far too much hearing of book-work committed to memory, or supposed to be so, by the pupils. Were the time evenly divided between actual teaching of the subject, and examining on and recapitulating past work, much greater proficiency might readily be attained. Nowhere else are teachers more prone to confound teaching and examining, and to substitute the one for the other, with results that may be disagreeable to them, but should certainly not be surprising. In the two highest standards too much time is devoted to the barren drawing of outline maps. The teaching is also narrow in its scope, giving insufficient prominence to the resources of the various countries, their great physical features, and other kindred matters. A wider and more comprehensive treatment at this stage would greatly increase both its interest and value as information.

History continues to be the worst-taught subject in the whole course of instruction. Some teachers have an indifferent acquaintance with the subject themselves, and cannot for that reason teach it successfully. A great many seem to aim at getting the scholars to commit to memory the *ipsissima verba* of the text-book, and their success in accomplishing this feat is often astonishing. But no one can call such work teaching, and no pupil can derive much benefit from going through this worthless process of cram—for such in most cases it is, and nothing else. The failures in history in Standard III. have been very numerous; but this is not to be wondered at, for the lessons are vaguely defined, extend over the whole range of English history, and are often beyond the grasp of the majority of the children. In Standard IV., also, the failures were very abundant, and the answers, when correct, were generally couched in the words of the text-book. At this stage somewhat more intelligent work