

state of our schools may be gained by a study of Tables II. and III., in one of which is shown the average quality of the answering in each subject, and in the other the quality of the answering in each subject by each standard. Viewed in the light of those tables the schools are seen to be meeting the requirements of a difficult syllabus with a very considerable degree of success; in no subject do they signally fail, and in several they do well; and those results are, I believe, gained with but little of the high pressure one hears so much about. In my own inspections, at any rate, I have seen nothing to warrant this cry of high pressure and overwork, and, if such exist in any part of the district unknown to me, it is, I have no doubt, due to injudicious management, and not to any inherent defect in the system of education. Of course every child has to do a fair amount of earnest work, but every one is the better for that. Those of the Board's teachers with whom I have come into contact are for the most part zealous in the discharge of their duties, and much respected by the people amongst whom they live. Many of them conduct their schools with intelligence and success, and almost all manifest a desire to profit by suggestions. So far as most of the schools inspected and examined by me are concerned, I believe that I may say that the colony is getting a very fair return for the expenses incurred in connection with their maintenance.

READING.—The reading is generally correct, reasonably fluent, not infrequently indistinct, and, except in a few schools, deficient in style and expression. The most serious defect in connection with this subject is the general ignorance of the import of the language and the facts of the reading-books; and this remark applies quite as fully to the poetry specially prepared for the examination as to the prose read during the year. This defect is, I think, in the main due to two causes—want of time to the teacher, and absence of preparation by pupils. Where, as in most cases, the teacher has to teach more than one standard, he cannot, without neglecting other subjects, devote sufficient time to reading to work out and impress upon his pupils' minds the meaning of the language and the relation of the facts and ideas of the lessons; and, as there is no time set apart for the study of these by the pupils themselves, the children get through their books a time or two without acquiring much but the power readily to reproduce the sounds of words and a more or less distinct notion of the meaning of very common words and expressions. Of course this result is unsatisfactory, but it is by no means peculiar to the Board's schools. The reports of inspectors show that it is common to the elementary schools of almost all English-speaking communities; and it is bound to persist in a greater or less degree until we amend our methods, and cease attempting to do for our pupils what, with a little training, they can much better for themselves.

To insure more attention to the study of language, we have made the pass in reading conditional upon a fairly accurate explanation of one out of two, or two out of four, words selected from the lessons read during the year. To this condition most of the failures in this subject were due; and I fear that, unless a portion of time (say thirty minutes) is set apart daily for the study of language by the children themselves, the result gained in reading will never be of a very satisfactory character. In my opinion the pupils of the Fourth and higher standards should be trained to use a dictionary, and be required to work out in the forenoon the meanings of the unknown words that occur in the lesson to be read in the afternoon. Not only would this plan economize the teachers' time and energy, setting them free to carry on the work of the junior standards, but it would introduce into elementary schools a mental exercise that has been too long largely excluded from them—the exercise of selecting from several meanings of a word the meaning that makes sense when taken with the meaning of the other words of the passage under consideration. The selecting and the combining the meanings of previously unknown words constitute the chief value, as a mental discipline, of learning a foreign language, and ought certainly to find a place in the study of English in the higher classes of elementary schools, the more so that in the majority of those schools the teacher is absolutely precluded, by the multiplicity of classes and of subjects, from working into the minds of his pupils the import of the language of their reading-books. But, when all has been done by the pupils that is possible to be done by them, there still remains a large and important share for the teacher to do—a share deserving much more attention than it usually gets. I refer to the teacher's preparation of the lesson to be read. Every classified teacher is, I presume, familiar with the meaning of the language of the reading-books, but there are few men indeed that can deal effectively with the facts, the allusions, and the ideas of a lesson, without considerable preparation. No school exercise is more difficult, and probably none is worse performed, than this. Where a man has to watch and supervise five or six classes, the conditions are very unfavourable to concentration of thought, and hence it not uncommonly happens that a question is changed several times before the teacher is satisfied that the proper one has been asked. Why should time and energy be wasted in this way, when, by suitable preparation, the proper form of the question might be determined upon beforehand? The defect here noticed is a very serious as well as a very common one, and no effort should be spared to remedy it. Were teachers to interleave their own reading-books, and, after studying the lesson, to write down opposite each paragraph the questions that would bring out its salient features, much would be done towards providing a suitable remedy. With respect to the form those questions should assume, I would refer to Joyce "On Reading," and Tate "On Questioning;" and with respect to the kind of answers that should be received I would like to quote the following passage from Mr. Fitch's excellent "Lectures on Teaching." Mr. Fitch has just been condemning that vicious though very common style of questioning in which the whole of what has to be said is said by the teacher, and the scholar is simply called on to answer Yes or No; and continues,—

And, in a less degree, I would have you distrust all answers which consist of single words. You explain by a diagram or otherwise to little children what the line is that passes through the centre, and you say that it is called the diameter. Some teachers would follow up this explanation by saying, "What do you call this line?" "A diameter." "What is it?" "A diameter." Now, the mere echo of the word may readily be given you in this way if you repeat the question a dozen times, and given by children who do not know what it means. The word diameter is part of a sentence: "The line which passes through the centre of a circle or sphere is called a diameter." And, unless the children have appropriated this whole sentence, they have learned nothing. . . . Let us remember that every answer we get to an ordinary question is the fragment of a sentence; but it is only the sentence, and not the single word, which conveys any meaning; and that the questioner who understands his art turns his question round until he gets from his scholars successively the other parts of the sentence, and finally the whole. *Indeed, one of the best tests of a good question is the relation between the number of words employed by the teacher and the pupil respectively. If the teacher does all the talking,*