

Reading and Spelling.—The reading throughout the district is very varied, but I am afraid I must say that, on the whole, it is badly taught. I invariably find that when much care has been bestowed upon the reading in the lower classes the senior pupils read well and intelligently. It was, however, no unusual experience to find pupils in Standards I. and II. able to read the text only when pointing with the fingers, and pupils in Standard IV. frequently unable to pronounce the words. The reading in Standard III. was generally the best received, that in Standard IV. the worst. Comprehension in the Fifth and Sixth Standards was bad, and the pupils often gave utterance to unmitigated nonsense, not only mangling and mispronouncing words, but also repeating words, regardless of sense, that were not in the text. Such an experience at the examination in reading was a very common and a very sad one. Mr. Thring, head-master of the Uppingham School, in speaking of boys calmly getting up and proceeding to construe undiluted nonsense, says, "This is generally treated as not knowing the lesson, and punished accordingly. But in essence it has nothing to do with not knowing the lesson. Not knowing the lesson is ignorance—idle ignorance, perhaps; but this unblushing outpour of nonsense is being a fool—a very different matter. . . . This folly, unblushing and common as it is, is not because the boys are fools, or shameless, but bears witness to their never having been taught that thought is the first thing, thought the second thing, thought the third thing to be learnt." Now, if this be true with regard to construing, how much more so is it true with regard to a boy reading his own language! In giving a reading-lesson to a lower class, supposing the passage to be understood, the teacher should first read aloud, the class meanwhile carefully listening, and following in their books. Secondly, the children should read with the teacher simultaneously a few words at a time, imitating his voice, pauses, and inflections. Thirdly, the children should read by themselves simultaneously, the teacher pointing out errors. Fourthly, the teacher should ask individual pupils to read, selecting them promiscuously, but putting on the worst readers oftenest. Fifthly, in the last five minutes the teacher should question the class rapidly upon the matter and text of the lesson, the children signifying their ability to answer by holding up their hands. Some of the most frequent errors in reading were indistinct articulation, with eliding of consonants and slurring of words; want of proper intonation, emphasis, and expression; dropping the voice at commas; and neglect of punctuation. It is surprising how few pupils pay any attention even to the paragraph. Not only should the punctuation marks be carefully regarded, but pupils should be trained to notice the rhetorical pause at the logical divisions of the sentence. The aspirate failing is very common in a number of schools. In the higher standards, although only one book is used, I was obliged at most schools to select the simplest passages, or the result was failure. In the infants' classes I always found that pupils read in the best manner in those schools where reading was taught mainly by the "look and say" and phonetic methods. Several sets of reading-cards have been supplied to the schools during the year.

Spelling in the two highest classes was fair, in the two lowest strangely varied, in Standard III. very often bad. In Standards I. and II. I gave orally from ten to fifteen words to every pupil, causing each to pronounce the word before spelling it; and here there was great evidence of rote-work, absurd combinations of letters being made when the word was unfamiliar. In the remaining standards a passage from a reader lower than that used by the class under examination was dictated by the teacher. I may here state that some teachers dictate in a very careless manner; and I would draw the attention of all to the fact that few pupils ever took the trouble to look over, and, if necessary, correct their dictation and other written papers. When reading is well taught, and transcription given, with a little time at the end of the lesson devoted to calling attention to difficult words, spelling should not give much trouble. But, in addition to this, pupils should be taught to syllabicate their words, and to note the sounds of letters and combinations of letters, as, for instance, the terminations "y" (ee), "ous," "ious," "tion," "sion," "ign," &c. I often found during a reading-lesson, even in the highest standards, that, when pupils could not read a word, they were unable to divide it into syllables, and, in fact, did not know what a syllable was.

Writing.—This subject has much improved during the year, the writing in several of the schools being now excellent. Nowhere was this improvement so noticeable as in the slate-writing of Standards I. and II.; and it was partly due to the slates being properly ruled, and partly to the fact that teachers are now aware that writing requires to be taught, and is not merely a subject for filling in time. Some schools, however, still remain in their backward state, and teachers have ignored instructions, the result being that the letters in Standard I. were unrecognisable. Strange as the assertion may appear, the writing in the primer classes in some schools was superior to that in Standard II. in others. Some teachers foolishly expect their pupils to write with short, blunt pencils. On my inspection visits, as well as on examination days, I looked over all exercise-books and copy-books. More attention should be paid to the position of the pupils when writing. They should not be allowed to sprawl over the desks, with their cheeks resting on their arms, and their wrists under their slates. At the schools where I received the best writing in the lower classes I noticed that the children kept dusters and took especial pride in keeping their slates spotless and free from grease. The slate-work in arithmetic and writing at Stanway School was the neatest I have ever seen. Teachers would find it an advantage to place before their lower classes, when transcribing, cards upon which the letters of the alphabet are correctly formed, or headlines of old copies.

Arithmetic.—This subject also has improved. Some of the work in Standard I. was excellent, some very poor. Numeration and notation were the great trouble in Standards II. and III., and in the latter class pupils were more successful with money-sums than with the simple rules. In Standard IV. the most frequent errors were in bills of parcels, foolish mistakes being made that could have been avoided by a little knowledge of mental arithmetic and exercise of common sense. Standard V. was very weak pretty nearly throughout the district; but several schools came to the front this year in Sixth-Standard arithmetic. Want of thought, and inability of pupils to turn their knowledge to practical account, and work little problems (if the sums given could be called such),