

Reading, unlike arithmetic, gets much less time and pains bestowed upon it than it really deserves, and the result is correspondingly unsatisfactory. Reading is, in fact, the part of our school work that is worst done. The lesson too often consists of the mere hearing a class read in turn, with little more teaching than the correction of words mispronounced or given wrongly. In order that more time and attention may in future be given to this important part of an education, the requirements in arithmetic will be somewhat lowered next year, especially in the higher standards—a change that may be more easily effected under the amended regulations that will then be in force. Still further to induce carefulness in reading, it will probably be found expedient to refuse a pass to any scholar, however well taught in other respects, who reads stumbingly, with a whine, or without expression. Teachers who wish to know practically what is meant by good reading cannot do better than visit Hardy Street Girls' School, where an excellent example of what a reading lesson ought to be is given daily.

Writing is, on the whole, fairly well taught, the only copy-book now supplied, the Abbotsford, giving as a model a plain, round, nearly upright hand, undisfigured by long tails and flourishes, and easy of imitation. The papers sent in by most of the older scholars on examination day also show that neatness and orderly arrangement are by no means neglected.

Geography, as a rule, is sensibly taught, considerable attention being now paid to that interesting part of physical geography which deals with natural phenomena. The explanation of causes and the description of processes are more likely to abide in the memory than lists of names of places which usually have no meaning for the learner. Especial pains are also bestowed on map drawing, the geography of these islands receiving great, but not, as it seems to me, undue attention.

In teaching history the oral method is gradually coming into use, though there are still a few schools in which little is done beyond hearing the scholars read from their class-books, and asking a few questions about the portion just read.

It being found that many children, on leaving school, did not know how to write in proper form, or to address neatly a letter, all the schools have this year been supplied by the Board with note-paper and envelopes in abundance, that the scholars might have plenty of practice in letter-writing. The hundreds of neatly written, correctly spelt, and well expressed notes on familiar subjects that were handed in on examination day show clearly that the expense thus incurred has not been thrown away.

Formal grammar has not been lost sight of, though the time taken up by letter-writing has caused grammar to take a less prominent place this year than has hitherto been assigned to that valuable instrument for mental training.

Energetic steps have been taken to revive the practice of drill, both class and military, which had latterly fallen somewhat into disuse. Cadet corps are being formed at some of the larger schools, and already the good results of the movement are clearly discernible in the improved carriage of the boys, and in their greater promptitude in carrying out orders.

*Holidays.*—The whole question of holidays seems to me to need revision. Abuses and anomalies have crept in which have only to be stated to be recognised as serious drawbacks to the success of our schools. The great discrepancies in the length of the working year in different neighbourhoods, as shown by the quarterly returns, induced me to make out a list of the times during which every school in the Nelson District had been open during the twelve months beginning June, 1884, and ending June, 1885. I selected this period as being free to a great extent from the disturbing elements of measles, whooping-cough, and other epidemics. I found that the school year varied, in different schools, by as much as sixty-eight days, the highest number recorded being 231, the lowest 163 working days. Twenty country schools were open, on the average, for no more than 184 days, or not quite thirty-seven weeks of five days each, during twelve months. Even the town schools made only 206 school days, leaving 159 days for recreation. It is true that many schools have been closed for six or seven weeks at a time because the bulk of the scholars were engaged in hop-picking; but surely this time should be deducted from, and not added to, the sum of holidays. It is indeed very doubtful, now that this industry is, unfortunately, on the wane, whether any school should be closed on that account. The cases must be rare in which some of the children would not attend, and there seems no good reason why their school life should be unnecessarily shortened. I attach but little importance to the plea that the strain of teaching an elementary school is so excessive that the "monstrous cantle" of the year usually devoted to recreation is absolutely essential to the health of the teacher. This is just one of those statements which, by dint of persistent reiteration, have come to be accepted without question by nine people out of ten. A comparison of the harassing work and long hours of a railway or telegraph officer at one of our busier centres of population with the work of the ordinary schoolmaster ought at once to dispel this time-honoured illusion. There are few bank-clerks who do not undergo a severer strain—to say nothing of their working twice as many hours—during their six weeks' balancing than any country teacher is subject to in as many months. It is incredible that a week of five days, each of barely five hours, should result in the utter prostration of any one enjoying even a moderate share of health and vigour; and it was surely never intended that teacherships of public schools should become harbours of refuge for the feeble. It is not proposed that there should be uniformity in the times at which holidays should be taken—those must always vary with the varying circumstances of different neighbourhoods: I simply suggest that an amicable agreement should be come to between the Board and the Committees as to the duration of the holidays throughout the year, which certainly ought not to exceed by more than a day or two seven weeks in all, including occasional holidays.

*Home Lessons.*—Closely connected with the question of holidays is that of home lessons. For the ground of defence of long and frequent holidays is often shifted, and it is urged that they are absolutely necessary for the health of the children. But if the doctrine I have so often insisted on, and which is getting to be pretty generally believed is true—that all that our school children need learn can be thoroughly taught in the ordinary school hours—the second argument also breaks