

*Spelling.*—The failure of the higher standards to answer the dictation test accounts for the comparatively low percentage in this subject. In Standards I. and II. spelling was on the whole good, but almost no attention had been paid to transcription. In transcribing a passage of five or six lines from the reading-book, words were frequently mis-spelt, omitted, or repeated, the punctuation neglected, and an utter disregard shown for capitals. Further, in several schools slates were either not ruled at all, or ruled with such want of care that it was no uncommon thing to find the writing of a class varying from half-text to something so very small as to be nearly microscopic. Altogether, the impression was left upon me that little use was made of transcription, and that where it was practised regularly careful supervision was not given to the work. Partly to this fault may be attributed the breakdown of the higher standards in dictation, where mistakes were often made in short words such as "does," "seize," "until," "during," and the like, for the correct spelling of which the transcription exercise of the lower classes is extremely valuable. The shortcomings here, however, were in greater part due to the fact that dictation has hitherto played a less important part in the examination of the schools in this district, and consequently many teachers have confined their attention to spelling, pure and simple. I was frequently assured that if I asked the children to spell twenty of the most difficult words in the reading-book I should be surprised at the superior results. Possibly. Still, the ability to reproduce an average passage of three or four lines with a fair degree of accuracy is of sufficient importance to warrant us in assuming that the dictation exercise should not be neglected.

*Writing.*—In a large proportion of the schools there is considerable room for improvement in the writing. Great irregularity prevails in the matter of copy-books. Some teachers make use of two or three different sets, and, as a consequence, a variety of styles of handwriting is sometimes found in one and the same school. Others, again, seem to put little value upon regular daily supervision of the written work. Again and again copy-books were submitted in which mistakes were repeated, even aggravated, in successive lines, page after page showing no trace of a correction-mark. In a few instances pupils had no copy-books to show, and in many more a page or two was all that had been done—at least, was all that was available on the day of examination. On these occasions the teachers expressed surprise at my insisting that copy-books should be submitted to the Inspector. They evidently did not understand that after an inspection of the copy-books he is generally able to form a fairly correct estimate of the character of the school. The most frequent cause of complaint, however, arose in connection with work which bore every evidence of careful teaching, but was not in accordance with the regulations on the subject. In nearly all the larger schools of the district, and in a few of the smaller ones, the pupils in Standards II. and III. presented copy-books in text and half-text. I had repeatedly to point out that the syllabus required writing "not larger than round hand" at this stage. Still, I would not have it inferred that I am blind to the advantages of teaching large hand. Indeed, I am strongly of opinion that to produce good writing a child must be taught a fairly large hand before being allowed to write small hand. There is a natural tendency in all children to write small hand, and unless this is counteracted at the beginning the result cannot but prove harmful. Want of parallelism and straightness in lines, and of uniformity in turns, heights, and joining of letters, are all faults much more easily detected in large hand than in small. The style of writing that will make these defects most readily apparent to the child mind must necessarily be the best to cultivate in forming the hand. In this connection slate writing will be found a most powerful auxiliary. The degree of perfection to which even the tiniest of fingers here attain is sometimes most striking.

*Arithmetic.*—The results in arithmetic are by no means commensurate with the amount of time spent in teaching the subject. For this, faulty methods of instruction are in a great measure responsible. Problems alone did not bar the way to success. Fully one-half of the failures arose from sheer inability to perform the mechanical operations required in the sums. It is scarcely credible that a very large proportion of the pupils in our schools have not yet been taught the A B C of arithmetic. But so it is. In many schools addition has been so very imperfectly taught as to be quite unworthy of the name. On putting a simple sum, such as "Add sixteen and seven," I found the answer was not forthcoming until the pupils had done the reckoning either on their fingers, or by strokes on slates, or by bobbing their heads. This practice had become very general. At times it was confined to the lower classes; more frequently it would run right over a school, from the infants to the Sixth Standard. Such a fault is, of course, sure to prove fatal to anything like accurate calculation, especially where the mechanical processes involved in the sums make any call upon the pupil's power of mental concentration. No better proof of this could have been given than that afforded by the mental arithmetic test. This test was applied, not so much to see whether the pupils had acquired a knowledge of rules for performing rapidly certain calculations, as to show what degree of proficiency had been attained in working very simple every-day questions without the aid of pen and paper. The results were most unsatisfactory. Easy questions requiring scarcely any effort of thought—e.g., "How many twopenny stamps can be obtained for 6s. 6d.?"—were far beyond the power of the average Fourth Standard child; while in the Third Standard such a sum as, "Add 8d., and 7d., and 10d.," would call forth feats on the fingers that were quite bewildering. When children of eleven and twelve years of age, who have had about six years' schooling, are unable to work such sums as these, it may well be presumed that the teaching has been sadly wanting in intelligence. And it is not in questions that make a demand upon the reasoning powers that this is most apparent. It can scarcely be considered creditable to a teacher to allow his pupils to go through their school curriculum without acquiring greater facility in addition than that obtained in counting by units. At the very earliest stage of school-life no doubt it is desirable to show that seven and six are thirteen by fingers, strokes, balls on the ball-frame—in fact, by means of any concrete objects that are readily available. But all these familiar representations are only used to pave the way for the fact that seven and six are thirteen universally. It is impossible for the pupil to make any sound progress in the study of arithmetic until his mind has taken such a grasp of the elementary truths of the science that he can reproduce them without even pausing to think.