

are, or should be, familiar with the chief points of the story, and with these in their heads a fairly skilful teacher should have little difficulty in training them to write out an abstract or outline dealing briefly with all the principal facts. Such an exercise would necessarily be mainly in the pupils' own language, for if it gave a brief condensed version of the whole story it could not follow very closely the language of the book. It should, moreover, be easily within the pupils' powers, and, if suitably directed, would possess no mean educative quality. But though satisfactory exercises of this kind seem easily within the powers of pupils in Standards IV. and V., the fact remains that considerably more than half the numerous failures in grammar in these standards are due to the intolerably bad quality of such composition exercises. In Standard VI. similar exercises are, as a rule, of creditable quality, and this holds true of many of the smaller schools as well as of the larger ones. Another defect in the composition exercises was faulty division of the sentences; but this was in no way more prevalent than in previous years.

The faults on which we have been commenting are no doubt largely due to insufficient teaching of the subject. Under the new syllabus more time will probably be available for its study, especially in the smaller schools, so that improvement may be expected. But improvement will largely depend on a good selection of subjects. These should be such as are familiar to the pupils by reading or personal knowledge, and they should supply abundance of matter. Many of the lessons in the reading books, the object-lessons, and some of the science lessons, afford subjects fulfilling these conditions, and in all schools these should be largely used as texts for composition exercises.

The failures in arithmetic, though still numerous, are not more so than in previous years. Accuracy in simple computation is still much to be desired, and marks are as often lost for the want of it as for inability to solve the simple problems set. A considerable proportion of the failures in standards is due to pupils having got no marks at all in this subject. In a good many of these cases the other subjects were well known. A notable fact about arithmetic is the inequality of the answering by the pupils of the same class. It is seldom that some do not answer well, while others do badly or perhaps get no marks at all. Mental arithmetic is very generally taught, and often with marked success. As a rule, the neatness of the arithmetical work on slates cannot be commended, and in a considerable number of schools the steps of the work and their meaning are not clearly set out. Unless pupils are trained to do this in their everyday work, no one can reasonably expect them to do it when the examination comes round.

In a majority of the schools, and in the larger ones more especially, the reading was good, and in not a few it was excellent. Even in the others fluency of a kind was rarely wanting, but the reading was indistinct or devoid of natural expression. The instructions to inspectors require them to insist on ready and expressive reading, and in giving effect to the Minister's directions on this topic we have been compelled to fail a large number of pupils whose reading was fairly fluent but monotonous and expressionless. In nearly every school Standards I., II., and III. have read two books, and the more extended course of instruction has certainly led to greater readiness. It is matter for regret that the number of books to be read by the infant classes has not been more clearly defined, for much benefit would accrue from the perusal in these classes of a larger quantity of easy reading matter. In some cases very little judgment was shown in deciding the order in which reading books were taken up, a more difficult book being read before an easier one—the No. II. Star Reader, for example, before No. I. of the graduated series. Explanation of the language of the reading lessons was not on the whole as well done as we could wish, but there were many exceptions to this general statement. This defect was quite as prevalent in the larger as in the smaller schools. Preparatory study of the meaning of difficult passages needs to be more generally encouraged. In some cases it seems not to be attempted, and many children either have no dictionary, or have one that is of hardly any use. When time has allowed of it we have heard the pupils of Standard VI. read in a book or newspaper which they have not seen before. With easy matter the test was on the whole very fairly met; where it was difficult the pupils should have felt that they had still much more to learn in reading.

Writing and drawing are satisfactorily taught in most schools. The latter takes up a great deal of time, much more than can be spared in the smaller schools. This time has usually been found at the expense of writing, which has not, however, deteriorated to any marked extent, though improvement has been checked. In most of the larger schools the writing in exercise books is carefully superintended, and this has helped to keep its quality up to a fair average. Both drawing and writing vary very much under different teachers according as their influence with their pupils is great or small. A considerable variety of copy-books, some of them differing widely in style, has been found in use. To a certain extent this is a disadvantage, as pupils on moving to other schools have sometimes to entirely change the style of writing which they have been practising.

The marks for class-subjects and also the additional marks are the same as those for last year. On the whole, pupils do not now know the history read as well as they did when it was a pass-subject, and pupils and teachers too seem more indifferent about it. Geography, on the other hand, though taught with no great intelligence, was for the most part very fairly known. In some cases the drawing of maps of New Zealand, with the filling-in of important details, was badly done, and there were but few schools in which it is well done. In this subject a great deal of matter is taught, but with too little discrimination. The outstanding features are left on a level with the subordinate ones and not brought sufficiently into relief. In the oral examination we have endeavoured to discourage this, and we are glad to find that the new syllabus curtails the matter to be taught, a change which should lead to a more intelligent and interesting handling of the subject. Elementary physical geography, though everywhere taught, was seldom well known.

Science and object-lessons generally receive due attention, and the latter has been taught with very fair success. We can hardly say the same of the science teaching, except with regard to elementary physiology, and the principles of agriculture—a subject taken up in most of the rural schools. A few teachers have also given a good course of lessons in the elements of physics and