

as much liberty in dealing with these as is consistent with the exigencies of the syllabus set forth by the department. The impression, however, remains that in assessing the work of individual pupils these are the subjects which have, on the whole, caused least anxiety to the examiner.

"The important subject of arithmetic has in some instances betrayed undesirable weakness. This was especially noticeable in the case of girls in Standards V. and VI. It is within my own experience that many of the elder girls in these standards take but a languid interest in the more advanced parts of arithmetic, being rather disposed to bestow attention upon subjects of a literary cast. So long as grammatical knowledge was essential to a pass in these standards the mental training obtainable therefrom was no bad substitute for that discipline of the reasoning powers which the study of arithmetic ought to afford. Grammar, however, has been assigned a place in the group of class-subjects, and in many schools the resulting treatment has been such as completely nullifies any educative influence it once possessed. For the present, therefore, it seems evident that, quite apart from its mere practical utility, sound arithmetical training becomes more and more important.

"Writing, as a pass-subject, seems at present to call for no special comment. In almost every school yet visited writing has been taught with such a measure of success that no great difficulty arose in estimating its value. Mention may be made, however, of the peculiar fact that in no instance within my recollection has writing attained equal excellence with freehand drawing.

"By the last revision of the syllabus composition became a pass-subject in all standards above the Second, and this led to its receiving increased attention. The outcome of this change, so far, seems to lie mainly in a greater facility of expression; but my own prepossessions are by no means favourable to mere verbosity, especially when marred by frequent technical errors. In two of the smaller schools examined towards the end of December it came upon me as a pleasing surprise to find compositions showing careful attention to those minutiae of detail which distinguish scholarly work. There is much to be said in favour of the system of examination formerly followed by my senior colleagues, whereby grammar and composition were taken as complementary to each other, strong composition being allowed to counterbalance weak grammar, while accuracy in grammar might supplement a meagre exhibit in composition. The proficiency which children show in this subject is in general directly proportionate to their range of private reading. As a rule I have found the best work in schools where at least a fair proportion of the pupils had access to a library and made some use of its contents. The attitude which a section of the community has lately assumed on the question of 'home lessons' still further accentuates the importance of good school-libraries. Although the idea of founding these had strong pretensions to antiquity many years ago, the present seems an opportune time to urge their claims upon public support. The ridiculous, if not mischievous, profusion with which prizes (so-called) have been awarded during recent years is a matter calling for serious consideration. A reprehensible feature of the competition between neighbouring schools has manifested itself in the direction of one striving to underbid the other in bestowing prizes upon the slightest possible provocation. An indolent child who has consistently striven to achieve the least possible amount of work during the year, and who at its close has barely escaped failure in the standard examination, may be chronicled as a deserving prize-winner, may carry home a book gorgeous enough in its external appearance, and may possibly allow its contents to remain for ever thereafter a hidden mystery. Such practices in awarding prizes are hardly likely to develop very exalted ideas on the subject of duty. A large proportion of the prize funds might, with material advantage, be expended in the equipment of well-selected libraries. Cheap reprints of works by standard authors are now so numerous, and show such excellence so far as typography is concerned, that there is no excuse for permitting our young people to grow up ignorant of the rich inheritance bequeathed to them by our best writers.

"The spread of education and the cheapness of good books have probably combined to bring into disuse the practice of reading aloud. Though there may at present be less real need for accomplished readers than there was formerly, still it is very desirable that something beyond mere mechanical accuracy in reading should be attempted in the public schools. In the majority of them fairly intelligent reading is obtainable, but in a few others the margin for improvement still remains a wide one. The reading of suitable passages with due attention to emphasis and expression may be made a mental exercise of no small importance.

"Of the class-subjects laid down in the syllabus, history under present conditions possesses very questionable value. Its whole scope, as defined by the regulations, is specially adapted to the methods of a teacher prepossessed in favour of the art called 'cram.' Under such circumstances much credit is due to those who still utilise the history lesson for the purposes of mental training in general, as distinguished from a mere effort of memory. Still greater is the credit due to teachers who, beyond all this, endeavour to awaken a patriotic spirit, and to inform among their pupils some appreciation of what we owe to the worthiest makers of British history.

"In some of the schools visited very meritorious specimens of mechanical drawing were shown. Such work, being quite outside the ordinary routine, seems to deserve special mention. Without placing this additional subject on a list already somewhat formidable, it might be made possible to recognise officially skilled labour bestowed so freely, and so useful in its tendency.

"With regard to the important matters of order, discipline, and behaviour of pupils, the schools of North Canterbury appear generally to good advantage. Considering the extent to which children are influenced by home surroundings, it would be unjust to burden the teachers with the entire responsibility in those few instances where some shortcoming is apparent under this heading."

We have, &c.,

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