

attention with much greater ease and success. The floor-lessons will be short (say, fifteen minutes, or at most twenty), and will seldom prove wearisome and exhausting, as lessons in much larger classes are apt to do. At this stage the training in proper attention to the lesson is in every way as important as the training in knowledge, and the routine of teaching should aim at compassing both. I suspect that a certain want of thoroughness contributes largely to the slow progress made by these classes. Before a book is left pupils should be quite familiar with all the words that occur in the lessons, a result to be secured only by regular revisal of back lessons, and, if desirable, by a rapid re-reading of the whole book. In some cases the beginners are taught by pupil-teachers in an unskilful way. For this the teachers in charge must be held responsible, for with good direction pupil-teachers readily learn to do routine work of this kind with very fair and often with marked success. In the smaller schools the preparatory classes suffer because the teachers concentrate their efforts mainly on the standard classes. To neglect the work of the beginners is, notwithstanding, one of the gravest blunders a teacher can make, for the want of a good grounding at the bottom of the school course creates friction that endures for years, and greatly enhances the difficulty of securing efficient work in several of the lower standard classes. It is here, above all, that the hurtful effects of frequent changes of teachers make themselves felt, for if a teacher expects to leave his present school in a year or two he will usually be less careful to labour for a reward that may be reaped by his successor and not by himself.

It is especially in arithmetic (counting and adding) that the teaching of the preparatory classes is wanting in breadth and thoroughness. Counting, under which I include numeration and notation up to 100, is seldom clearly taught and addition is for the most part not taught at all in any proper sense of the term, though numberless exercises in it are set. The result is that the pupils up to Standard III. seldom have a ready or thorough knowledge of addition and subtraction, while an immense amount of time is wasted in learning—painfully and imperfectly—what, with proper arrangements, should be thoroughly mastered before the work of Standard II. is entered on. In my opinion, the teaching of this subject in the preparatory classes should give pupils about to be advanced into the Standard I. class a ready command of counting up to 100, of the addition of numbers up to 9 and 9, and of easy oral subtraction. Until this is accomplished, multiplication tables should not be touched. Nothing in the schools has surprised me more than the every-day sight of pupils in Standard III., and even in Standard IV., habitually counting on their fingers, or by dots or units in some disguise or other, without which aid they could not cast up a column of eight or ten figures with reasonable quickness and accuracy. This state of affairs is anything but creditable to the teachers and the official directors of education, and it certainly carries with it its nemesis in the shape of a vast amount of unnecessary labour, discouragement, and drudgery to nearly all concerned.

There is but one way known to me of getting children to add readily and accurately, and that is the daily teaching of, and oral drill in, addition tables and easy exercises in the preparatory classes. The work must be almost wholly oral, and when slate exercises are set they should never require a knowledge of addition results that the pupils have not already mastered. If this condition is not carefully observed, the practice of counting on by units in some form or other must be resorted to, as in no other way can the pupils work out results that they do not already know. The thorough teaching of addition really presents no difficulty for teachers who care to take trouble and persevere. Table-grinding is, no doubt, uninteresting and disagreeable work, but no good teacher will neglect it on that account. When the results are firmly fixed in the memory a great deal has been achieved. Pupils are in a position to make rapid and easy progress, and both they and their teachers are more free to concentrate attention on other and less mechanical acquisitions.

The last impression I need here notice is that in many schools the attention is not what it should be. This seems due in large measure to the way the pupils are spread over the floor, as a consequence of the dual-desk organization. For all oral lessons I think it most desirable that the classes should be concentrated, as far as possible, immediately in front of the teacher. At such lessons—which include reading, recitation, grammar, geography, history, object-lessons, and science—three pupils could easily sit at each desk, and the whole class would thus be brought into focus, and made more amenable to the teacher's eye and voice. In support of this, which struck me the first day I saw a class being taught at dual desks, I am glad to be able to cite the favourable opinion of one of the highest modern authorities on education, Dr. J. G. Fitch, till this year Chief Inspector for England. He says, "The dual desk has this enormous advantage that, whereas it gives plenty of room for the writing-exercises of two, it suffices for three scholars when listening to a lesson, and it enables the teacher to draw the pupils closer together." It is strange that teachers have so commonly neglected to avail themselves of this palpable advantage. The wide diffusion of the units composing classes is not, however, the only cause of the inattention noted, but I shall not now attempt to specify the others.

Reading is by far the most important of the subjects of instruction in the elementary school. A young person who has learned to read easily, and who understands what he reads, can go on and add to his education in nearly every direction except mathematical study. He then holds in his hands the key to an almost boundless range of higher knowledge, and the means of entertainment for the term of his life. If we fail to give our elder pupils the power of reading readily and with understanding we fail in the major part of education. Great importance is thus rightly attached to success in teaching this subject. So far as I can judge, our success in dealing with it still leaves much to be desired. This is especially true of the large body of pupils who complete the compulsory course of education, and leave school on passing Standard IV. These, I believe, rarely gain any ready command of reading, and still less do they understand the matter. Pupils who pass through the six standards are in a much better position. As a rule they can read any book of ordinary difficulty with very fair ease (I have tested this in a number of schools), though they do not show much grasp of the meaning even of the books they have read at school. Our failure to give pupils who