

pupil in Standard II. had been passed in every subject, although, following the system of examination I had adopted in other schools, I found that only one out of every eight deserved to pass, the work being unsatisfactory in four subjects out of five. In another case I passed, barely, two out of ten, whereas the master had passed seven. The pupils that are passed when unfit have little chance of succeeding the following year, and in case of transference bring discredit on the school. This has been brought prominently before me by teachers stating that new pupils possessed certificates for passing standards for which they were quite unprepared, and, though such statements must be accepted with much caution, I am afraid that there has sometimes been just reason for complaint.

I shall now proceed to refer to the subjects taught in the schools, and in pointing out defects I write with a view to their removal rather than with the object of finding fault, and I should consider this report incomplete did it not show the lines upon which it is desirable that the work should be carried on. If it should seem that I have given greater prominence to the defects than to the merits I have found, it must be remembered that this is unavoidable in such a report as I have to lay before you, for to say that a subject is good or satisfactory leaves little more to be said, but it is necessary, when defects are pointed out, to enter into some detail, and also to indicate some means of improvement.

*Reading.*—This is not on so satisfactory a footing as it might be, for too little attention is given to actual instruction in the methods of good reading, and to a comprehension of its essentials. Pupils are allowed to “go on reading” in rotation, making mistakes which pass unchecked, and destroying all sense by their monotonous utterance.

A good style of reading is acquired mainly by imitation, and consequently the foundation must be laid in the lower classes, where mimicry is pre-eminently the prevailing faculty. In the infant classes and in the lower standards the teacher should bring into play as much as possible this factor of mimicry, and to this end should give good models, not too long, and should require the pupils to imitate the emphasis, expression, and inflection exactly. After a paragraph has been dealt with in this way, a few words at a time, the whole paragraph should be read simultaneously by the class, or by a section of it, as the case may be, and then individual pupils may be called upon. When any error occurs it should be corrected, and the word written plainly on the blackboard, and with other words recapitulated at the end of the lesson. Other paragraphs should be treated in the same way, and the lesson should close with such exercises as the teacher may think most needful. The facility with which even the smaller pupils will grasp the idea of intelligent expression is astonishing, and in well-trained infant departments I have frequently found pupils who could read and recite in a manner which displayed considerable elocutionary powers.

In the higher classes much model reading is not so necessary, for by the time a pupil reaches Standard IV. emphasis, expression, and modulation should be well understood; but even here passages presenting unusual difficulties should be read by the teacher and repeated by the class.

By examination time the pupils in most schools have mastered the mechanical difficulties of the lessons, but there are many in which the results of “hearing reading” instead of teaching it are only too noticeable. Slurring of words and indistinct utterance are common, and give a tone of laziness and slovenliness to the work. Dropping the final consonant and misplacing the aspirate also are very common in some parts of the district, the latter being extremely difficult to overcome. Emphasis needs much attention. Upon it may depend entirely the sense of a passage, and by altering it a sentence may be made to convey possibly as many different meanings as there are words. For instance, the sentence, “Did you ride to Waitara yesterday with your brother?” can be made to ask no less than nine different questions by change of emphasis. In a few schools there is a tendency for pupils to hurry over the reading as soon as they become at all familiar with the words.

Reading in rotation should not be practised, as it results in inattention, the pupil preparing the passage he knows he will be required to read and paying no heed to the rest of the work. More attention should be paid to the position assumed by the pupils when reading. I have found pupils almost lying back on the seats with their books on the desks, or standing lazily with necks bent and shoulders rounded. They should usually be placed at the back of the desks so that to be heard they must speak out, and on no account should they be permitted to assume lazy attitudes, for “Lazy attitudes produce lazy minds.”

In the lower classes, especially in those of the larger schools, the pupils become so familiar with the lessons that they know them off by heart, and I have not infrequently asked the pupils to close the books and to proceed with the lesson. This they have done as accurately as though the open book were before them, and proud of themselves are they when they go through from the beginning to the end without being prompted. In Standard II., in one of the largest schools, I had to mention only the number of the page in the book and the pupils could tell me the name of the lesson and repeat it almost word for word. One can imagine how monotonous it must be for pupils to keep repeating such lessons day after day for twelve months, and how uninteresting books must be to them. I do not think it is too much to require that in Standard I. and Standard II. in the larger schools two books should be read during the year, and in the higher classes that the History Readers should be used as supplementary books from which the pupils may be called upon to read at examination, but which they may not be required to prepare as regards spelling, &c.

With reading, the recitation is so closely associated that I will here say a few words with reference to it. In the earlier stages, the intelligent repetition of a piece of poetry depends upon the faculty of mimicry before referred to, and if good models are presented and are carefully imitated the pupils will gradually come to see how they can best express the ideas, the emotions, and the meaning of the writer. Too little intelligent instruction had been given, and consequently much poor recitation was heard. At the end of the text-books in use there are certain pieces for recitation in which the inflections are marked by a well-known authority, and yet I found school after school in which the pupils, in even the highest classes, could not tell me what the signs meant.