

We now proceed to make a few observations on some of the subjects of instruction.

With regard to reading, we have little to add to what we said last year. So far as the prepared books are concerned, it is in quite a large proportion of schools distinctly good. The chief faults in those in which it does not satisfy us are indistinct enunciation (due generally to too rapid utterance), defective modulation and phrasing, and inaccuracy in small words. The definite article, when the first word of a sentence, is frequently omitted altogether; "adjective" is pronounced "adjetive," "surprise" is pronounced "supprise," "usually" is pronounced "usully," "family" is pronounced "famly," "Arctic" is pronounced "Artic," and so on with other words in which, unless resisted, the law of economy of effort will assert itself. It is to our thinking unwise to insist on fluent reading in the junior classes, for fluency there comes not from ready recognition of the words, but from too frequent repetition of them in the same sequence: it is recitation rather than reading. This practice certainly tends to blunt the child's power of observation; and we have no doubt that the frequent inaccuracy in small words in the middle and upper classes is a legacy of this faulty beginning in the junior. We feel sure, too, that the frequency with which the lessons are read and reread also tends powerfully to induce this fault. From the point of view of education it is a blunder to attempt to make every child letter and word perfect in every lesson, yet this is what we try to do. In future examinations we intend to test every class in unseen reading books. This will no doubt lead to wider reading during the currency of the year. We are pleased to be able to report marked improvement in the treatment of the meaning of the language of the reading-books. Instead of, for example, asking the meaning of "ajar," of "ungrateful," of "victim," the teacher now makes the children put the door ajar and say what they do, tell how they feel when they are grateful, and name animals they have seen the victims of others. This is undoubtedly the natural method. It is surprising how few are the words in the reading-lessons that denote things wholly unfamiliar to the experience of the children. The things have been seen, or felt, or heard, and the teacher's work is to make the children observe that this new word and that are simply names for things they have had experience of. This makes the study of language a training in observation of experience, induces the mental habit of looking through the words to the things that lie behind them, and tends powerfully to enlarge the children's vocabularies.

In the lower classes and standards spelling continues to be very good; but in Standards IV., V., and VI. it is not so good as it used to be under the old regulation. Many pupils pass on the maximum number of errors—in Standard IV., three in eight lines of prepared matter. The children learn, but they are not taught, spelling.

Vertical writing is taught in a good many schools, but it is a real success in very few. To teach it well teachers must themselves learn it, and this is what many of them have not done. Four styles of writing are in vogue in this district. We do not advocate any of them; but, when consulted by teachers as to their relative merits, we advise them to choose the one they consider the best, and, having chosen it, to adhere rigorously to its slope, spacing, turns, and relative lengths of letters. Copybook-writing we regard as an exercise in form, a species of drawing from the flat, and pronounce it good or bad according as it is or is not an imitation of the model. Judged in this way much of the writing we examine is not good.

In nearly all our large schools and in many of the small ones the drawing is good, often very good, and in very few does its quality fall below fair. We find the weakest work in model and plane geometrical drawing.

So far as blackboard exposition is concerned, arithmetic is one of our best-taught subjects; but in the majority of schools there is altogether too little concrete illustration of principles and processes. We are apt to forget how limited is the experience of children, and how difficult it is for them to interpret what is said to them about subjects of which they have little or no experience. Without previous sense-impressions there can be no ideas, and in much of their arithmetical work children have had no sense-experience at all. They have neither measured, nor weighed, nor traded, and consequently what is said to them about these operations is for the most part words and nothing more. So long as they remember the rule they will arrange words and symbols as they are taught to arrange them; but from want of experience of things they are unable to look through the words and symbols and see what lies behind them; hence, when there are placed before them problems differing not in principle but only in form from those they have been accustomed to solve, only the cleverest of them know how to proceed with their solution. To render vivid what is meant by arithmetical phraseology and symbols we must do what we can to supply an ample background of experience. To this end the children should, from the beginning of their course, be made to perform on objects the operations that correspond to those they perform on their slates. In the little arithmetic-books used in most of our schools there is a large quantity of "oral work"—concrete examples involving numbers so small that they can be easily represented in the concrete by marbles, small stones, nuts, sticks, pence, &c. These objects can be imagined to be anything—sheep, pounds, half-pounds, ounces, what you like—the important thing being to make the abstract slate-work rest upon a concrete foundation. It is not enough for children to see this kind of work done by their teachers; they must do it for themselves. In this way they would gain sense-impressions of magnitude, of number, of the numerical relations implied by the expressions "so much more," "so much less," "so many times as much," of relative number and magnitude, and so on, that would enable them to realise vividly the effect of each operation upon the things denoted by the symbols they have to manipulate. Treated in this way arithmetic is an exercise in handling, in *observing* quantitative relations of weight, of value, and of magnitude—an exercise, indeed, in the methods of science applied to number and magnitude. This kind of work may, of course, be overdone. It should be discontinued as soon as it has created a sufficient background of experience to enable the children to realise vividly the nature of the work they are called upon to perform. "It is," says Fitch, "a sure test of a good teacher that he knows when and how