

is in large measure due to the simplicity and faulty graduation of the Readers now used in Standards II., III., and IV. It is this evil that led me to advise the Board to adopt Longmans' "Ship Literary Readers" in lieu of the new Readers, and I cannot but regret that the Board did not give effect to the alteration recommended.

The foregoing estimates are not altogether in accord, but they doubtless reflect correctly in the main the state of the teaching in the districts to which they refer. My impression, gathered from the considerable body of schools I have visited and examined in the course of the year, is much the same as that formed by Mr. Grierson. The reading was in general accurate, fluent, and distinct, but marked by a smaller measure of intelligence, and of the crowning grace of expression that has its root in clear comprehension of the language and a lively appreciation of the sense, than might be expected from the care and the average skill with which the subject is taught. The most common and striking defect in all the standards was a want of taste and judgment in the insertion of short pauses to indicate the close of phrases that are not shut off by pointed stops. In brief, phrasing is very generally faulty. This point needs much more effective attention than it now receives. Good phrasing and correct emphasis are the outcome of intelligent apprehension of the sense rather than a result of teaching-drill. But the latter should suffice to correct such faults as putting a pause after the word "and" instead of before it, and giving too emphatic prominence to such words as "of," "to," "at," &c.

It is my wish that no mean standard of proficiency in the art of reading should be insisted on for a pass in the subject. Reading marred by inaccuracy, by indistinctness, and by want of fluency, should not be accepted as satisfactory by the Inspectors, and has nowhere been passed by myself. Expression, a more intangible quality, and one more liable to be adversely affected by bashfulness and timidity, which, moreover, cannot exist without the previous acquisition of accuracy and fluency, cannot be insisted on in a high degree; but the total want of it should debar the reader from passing, and has in not a few cases done so during the past year. Judged by such a standard of attainments, the net result of the year's work is far from discreditable to our schools and our teachers, since 90 per cent. of the pupils examined in reading satisfied the examiners.

The reading in the classes taught by one teacher is generally all of a piece, and its quality varies from school to school more than that of any other subject, except writing and drawing. Where it is unsatisfactory the fault is in general the teacher's, who wants the force or the skill to interest his pupils, to kindle their imagination, and to raise their efforts step by step to his ideal of the proficiency they might attain. Wherever serious defects in the teaching of reading are observed the fact needs to be plainly noted in the official reports on the work of the teachers concerned. Such defects are, no doubt, often due to unfavourable conditions, but a skilful and enthusiastic teacher rarely fails, often in a surprisingly short time, to surmount this difficulty.

Next to irregular attendance in many rural schools, the greatest obstacle to improvement in this subject is undoubtedly the neglect of preparation for the teaching of the lessons by very many of our teachers. Regular preparation is indispensable if the treatment is to be lively and interesting, fitted to inform the mind and rouse the imagination to a vivid apprehension of the scenes opened to the reader's mental gaze. Many aids to improvement can be gleaned from the newer and fuller text-books of school method*—books which are throughout this district, with very rare exceptions, conspicuous by their absence from the teacher's table and his school library of professional guides. Their usual mentors are antiquated, and, being mere outline sketches, insufficient to boot. Great progress has been made in elementary education during the last twenty years, and those here engaged in the work need to keep themselves more closely in touch with the onward movement. The conservative policy of the Central Department during these years, and its failure to suggest books for study in preparing for professional examinations, have helped to keep us out of the current of progress. One of the worst consequences of the teacher's neglect to prepare reading-lessons before they are taught is a noticeable want of aim and plan in their treatment of them. Defects of many kinds are apparent in the pupils' performance, and they are all more or less dealt with in an unsystematic, disconnected, and relatively ineffective way. This kind of treatment is to some extent inevitable, but at successive stages of advancement the handling of the lessons should disclose some large and dominating aim, such as accuracy and distinctness in the lower classes, fluency and ease in the intermediate ones, and intelligence and expression in the upper. Other points are not to be ignored, but these greater matters should receive a preponderating share of care and attention. One often feels that teachers are too anxious to show how many defects they can detect and point out, and that they display but little sense of the relative importance of small and of great interests in their direction of the efforts and the training of their scholars. Much benefit would result from a heartier encouragement of home preparation, and, in suitable circumstances, of preparatory study in school, of reading-lessons. Only a few of the teachers I have seen at work during the year make a practice of testing this preliminary study. Those who do so tell me they find the practice very helpful; and I should like to see it in universal use in the higher classes. This counsel, together with much more that has been submitted to teachers in the "Suggestions," and in previous reports, has not been acted on as carefully as I could wish.

In spelling and dictation the work of the year shows no falling-off, and I gladly note greater freedom from errors in spelling, both in composition and in geography exercises. In future I do not purpose to take account of mistakes in spelling in composition and geography exercises as elements in determining a "pass" in spelling. It is doubtful if this course is lawful, and I therefore willingly abandon it; but in determining passes in composition and geography the spelling in these exercises will be taken into account, and should receive assiduous attention. The great majority of the pupils who fail in spelling fail through blunders in common words which they have met over and over again in their reading-books. "Teachers," Mr. Grierson remarks, "evidently do not practise

* See in particular Cowham's "New School Method," and Cox and MacDonald's "Practical School Method."