

In some directions want of thoroughness is still a serious hindrance to progress. This is seen in the learning of addition in some schools. It is more noticeable in the teaching of the grammar of Standards V. and VI. in the majority of our schools, and of the arithmetic of the higher classes in a considerable number. The work of the brighter pupils affords ample proof that these subjects are taught with satisfactory care and skill, but the average work shows as conclusively that the teaching is not thorough enough, and does not call forth serious interest and steady mental application on the part of a large body of the pupils. Considerable want of thoroughness, and of accuracy too, frequently marks the work done in science. The inaccuracy is directly due to ill-formed teaching, and is much less excusable than the superficiality just noted, for there is but little time available for teaching this subject, even in the largest schools.

If vivid and realistic teaching were more generally used no small benefit would ensue. Its absence is to be specially noted in the geography of Standard II. in a good many schools, and in the study of geometrical figures in Standards I. to III. I have found cases not a few, in which pupils in Standard II. could not point to the cardinal points, and in one instance a pupil (not an imbecile) could not show where the sun rose. I agree with Mr. Dickinson in desiring to see "a rough plan of the immediate neighbourhood of the school made the foundation of instruction in geography." Cutting out the geometrical figures studied in Standards I. to III. can be easily carried out, and this should be done everywhere. In several schools models of these figures were not to be found when they were needed for illustration; they had been made once, but had been lost! Mr. Mulgan pertinently says, "What a much better grasp of fractions pupils would have were they taught to represent them diagrammatically!" "Pictures," he adds, "might be made of great use in illustrating lessons in geography." Mr. Dickinson also notes that "those teachers who have gathered together a collection of pictures to illustrate the geography lessons find them very helpful. They make the lessons vivid and interesting." In this connection Mr. Mulgan draws attention to the great value of diagrams and blank maps drawn on a sufficiently large scale, and always ready for use. "Many teachers do not take the trouble to make these drawings, or draw them on the blackboard as they are required. Blackboard illustrations can never be altogether dispensed with; but in the case of maps and diagrams which are constantly wanted, much time might be saved by having the charts or drawings on paper. The trouble involved is slight and the expense trifling; brown paper and coloured chalks answer admirably for preparing them. With a blank map or a drawing the teacher brings out just what he wants, and so impresses his teaching with thoroughness."

An intemperate and almost unceasing use, or rather abuse, of oral teaching under the guise of explanation and exposition is a grievous failing of many able and intelligent teachers that works steadily against the realisation of a high type of teaching. This weakness is most noticeable in the handling of large classes, but it is not confined to the teachers of these. If some benign power would grant to the victims of this habit the power of hearing themselves at work for a few hours, they would for ever after be on their guard against the loquacity that so easily and sorely besets them. Receptive pupils are no doubt more or less entertained by this stream of talk, but it bores the great majority, who need continuous active employment to maintain their interest and attention. Moreover, it altogether fails in giving to pupils that constant exercise in thinking, and in expressing what they think and know, that alone ministers to the growth of faculty and understanding. For the educative part of school-work is mainly done by the pupil himself and not by the teacher, who, if he is skilful, avoids all unnecessary explanation and prompting as sure to defeat the main objects he has in view.

The readiness and excellence of the oral answering form one of the surest tests of intelligent and educative teaching. Judged by this test the majority of our schools fail to impart such a training as might fairly be expected of them. In most schools an effort is being made to cultivate the power of oral expression, and in a number of cases it has been very successful, but on the whole the results are disappointing. Frequently, indeed, the performance has the look of being perfunctory, of being adopted for the day to humour the Inspector's crotchet, as it is called, for hearing full, connected, and clearly stated oral answers. I hope for better things in this direction. A progressive training in good oral answering should be one of the teacher's most constant aims, and the pupils of the higher classes should be trained to give not only complete single sentences, but a continuous statement, narrative, or description, in reply to suitable questioning. The need and importance of this training are being more and more recognised by all thoughtful writers on elementary education. In this connection Mr. Mulgan writes, "Whilst in many of the schools [of his district] satisfactory results in oral answering were obtained, much yet remains to be done. Short incomplete or even meaningless answers are too often accepted, and children instead of being trained to reproduce in their own words where possible an exact equivalent of the question asked, are allowed to answer wide of the mark. More attention should be directed to fulness of expression, to accuracy and point, and, in the case of comprehension of reading-lessons, to training pupils to give the general meaning of whole sentences in their own words. As it is, many of them too frequently ignore the sentence, and singling out some particular word, give the meaning of that alone." Mr. Grierson also says, "A large number of teachers are apparently not fully alive to the obvious advantage of systematic and progressive training in good oral answering as a means of teaching composition. Even in schools where Standard I. and Standard II. are carefully trained to give statement-answers, the practice is very often discontinued in the higher classes, instead of being carried on step by step as it should be."

Frequent changing of teachers, unavoidable as this evil to a large extent is, must still be reckoned a serious hindrance to progress. The reports of teachers taking charge of fresh schools show that outgoing teachers frequently relax their exertions for some time before removal, and particularly before retirement from the Board's service. Several instances of this have been noted during the past year.