

We have now seen the completion of a second year of school work under the conditions and regulations prescribed by the revised syllabus, and accordingly speak with some assurance as to their effects and their adaptability to the needs of the children and the district. So far as the every-day work of the schools is concerned, this latest form of syllabus has wrought no very noticeable change. As to the examination of pupils for promotion, on the other hand, we have noted great diversity of opinion and procedure. In the majority of cases we were entirely satisfied with the teachers' classification of the pupils. There were not wanting cases, however, in which the classification had been arrived at apparently without appeal to the dictates of common-sense or of good conscience. Between these two extremes an indefinite variety of views on the subject was entertained. Some teachers thought that they were acting in accordance with the letter and spirit of the regulations in granting a certificate to pupils who, though doing satisfactory work in the majority of subjects, were disgracefully backward in one—say, spelling, writing, or arithmetic. In the milder of such cases we did not always object to the promotion; but, for the reputation of the school and the district, we distinctly objected to the issue of a standard certificate. Some teachers, again, either did not promote their pupils in arithmetic, or turned them back in a wholesale manner during the course of the year to the work of the standard for which they already held a certificate of proficiency. As we pointed out last year, we take it that the intention of the syllabus is to provide for the cases of exceptionally backward pupils, not merely to simplify the work and organization of the school. In yet other cases teachers promoted pupils in Standards III. to V., indicating at the same time the pupil's degree of proficiency in reading by a query, though the syllabus clearly implies that weakness in reading is to be regarded as an absolute bar to the issue of a standard certificate. We found it necessary, therefore, in order to secure something like uniformity in the standard of promotion, to modify the teachers' classification at some schools, and at others to take the work of classification entirely into our own hands.

From the tenor of the last paragraph it will be seen that in a considerable number of schools there are as many standards of promotion as there are teachers. "*Quot homines, tot sententiæ.*" Nor is this altogether a matter for surprise when the disturbing factors in the process of classification are taken into account. There is the motive, strong but happily weakening, to secure for the school the talismanic formula—90 per cent. of passes. There are the desire to conciliate parents and the desire to get over an unpleasant duty in the pleasantest possible manner. There is the vague, but usually vain, hope that pupils promoted on slender grounds will make good their position during the year that is to come.

It might be expected, in view of the state of affairs indicated, that we should advocate the reimposition of the individual test by the Inspector. We have come to a conclusion the exact opposite of this. We advocate the total abolition of the standard pass, with all its unsavoury associations. Examinations there must be, but examination as understood for the last thirty years, or, say, since the discovery of the School Inspector, has been, it is to be feared, only too often an institution for the making of bricks without straw. If the teaching be faithful and skilful and the tone of the school good, we need not fear the issue. There always will be in the economy of school-keeping a place for examinations, which, however, could be so far rationalised as to become distinctly educative factors. Meanwhile, we would advise any teachers to whom this matter may present difficulties to carry out their formal examinations according to certain definite principles. Examinations should not be frequent, and they should cover definite sections of a programme of work outlined at the beginning of the year; the questions set should be within the comprehension of the average pupil of the class, and, as far as they go, the tests should be absolutely thorough; above all, pupils should be led to see that there is no virtue in doing well at examinations except in so far as the well-doing is the result of loving and faithful work. So will our young people come to see in examinations not a series of systematic checks intended to discover how much is unknown, but times thoughtfully set apart for their encouragement by finding out how much they know and how much they can do.

We will now give some impressions on the teaching of the different subjects, premising that these impressions were gathered partly at our visits of inspection, when the work of teaching is as a rule carried on conjointly by the teachers and the Inspector, and partly at the annual visit, when the teacher and the pupils are supposed to render an account of their year's labours.

As usual, we will begin with reading. We believe that the progress noted in our last year's report was maintained, if not continued in an even increasing ratio. None but the teacher has any conception of the difficulties in the way of giving successful instruction in this subject—the patient drudgery, the hope deferred, and the weary waiting till at last in too many cases the pupils slip through the teacher's fingers, fruit and harvest barely in sight. The mistresses in the larger schools—and, indeed, in nearly all the schools—take infinite pains in teaching the initial and more mechanical steps of the subject. For their encouragement, and for the encouragement of all who in the upper classes of our schools endeavour to instil into the minds of their pupils a love of the mother-tongue in its infinite richness and variety, we take the liberty of quoting an often-quoted passage from Lowell's "*Books and Libraries*": "Reading is the key which admits us to the whole world of thought, fancy, and imagination, to the company of the saint and the sage, of the wisest and wittiest at their wisest and wittiest moments. It enables us to see with the keenest eyes, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voices of all time. It annihilates time and space for us, and revives the age of wonder without a miracle. We often hear of people who will descend to any servility, submit to any insult, for the sake of getting themselves and their children into good society. Did it ever occur to them that there is a select society of all the centuries to which they and theirs can be admitted for the asking—a society, too, which will not involve them in a ruinous waste of time and health and faculties?"

Our experiences with regard to the subject of spelling were distinctly varied in character.