

doubt, a few instances—occurring chiefly in very small schools—where unjustifiably sanguine views are found to prevail; but on the whole the present privileges in this respect are exercised with commendable honesty and due discretion, and in many cases the standard adopted represents a higher ideal than the Inspector would himself feel justified in seeking to establish. Of a desire for greater freedom of classification in subjects than the present conditions encourage we have not seen any particular indications in this district, and we do not think that parents would relish a further material change, made with this object in view, in the form of examination adopted. But without entering into any discussion on the matter, we may say that, were the Fourth Standard the standard of exemption, as with the age limit at fourteen some of us are inclined to think should still be the case, we should be quite satisfied to see the schedule estimates applied only to the Second, Fourth, and Sixth classes—a reduction which would leave sufficient indications of the general progress of the pupils to remove any fears of unsoundness.

*Inspection.*—The inspection of schools takes approximately one-third of our time, and, so far as the school course is concerned, is mainly directed to the observation of methods. In these we find a very general informity, the variation consisting more in the different degrees of skill with which they are applied than in any striking evidences of original departures marking the teacher's individuality. To this kind of informity, whether it is viewed as a merit or a defect, the system of examination has no doubt largely contributed; but even with the teacher's present options examination need not prove a bar to a material extension of characteristic developments, and still less should it do so with an improved scheme and the further option in the selection of programmes of work which we hope to see embodied in the long-looked-for revision of the syllabus. The extension of manual methods, as indicated in our last report, so far as the apparatus at the disposal of the teacher and general conveniences will permit, marks the line of most promise in this direction; but teachers of good ideals may also find scope for improvement on other lines to which manual methods are less applicable. A few observations on the English subjects may prove suggestive.

*English Subjects.*—The reading of our schools is improving with the spread of more liberal ideas of the scope and value of the exercise; but to get the best results at the higher stages two things are necessary—one without and one within the teacher's present option. So far he has found himself practically tied down to the use of one or perhaps two text-books, the greater or less difficulty of which in regard to spelling bulks largely in his choice, and he has little encouragement to venture on a wider field of practice which would make the reading lesson more interesting and fruitful. It is probably a wiser counsel of the English Code which now severs the intimate connection of the reading-book with the teaching of spelling, and prescribes for the latter feature a special course of instruction founded in part on a word-building basis. Though in unskilful hands the severance involves greater danger of poor results, the prospective advantages of a new departure in this direction seems to us to give sufficient warrant for the experiment. So long as inability to spell correctly is looked on as a sign of neglected education, we must have good spelling in our schools; and if good spelling can be obtained without difficulty on intelligent methods, let us by all means adopt them. No doubt the spelling of our tongue is so far anomalous as to afford ground for the remark that spoken and written English are different languages; but there is sufficient of law and order in English spelling to make systematic instruction profitable, and the anomalous forms within the range of the children's ordinary vocabulary are not too numerous to be learnt separately. To good spelling on this basis good teaching of reading, requiring clear and distinct articulation, would materially contribute; practice in transcription would be relied on as an important aid; word-building would supply the regular formations with the significance of prefixes, affixes, and inflectional terminations; and word-grouping, with the making of sentences involving the use of contrasted forms, and the application of a few simple well-recognised rules, would practically complete the scheme.

The other departure to which we refer in connection with reading concerns the use of silent reading. Much of the time spent by the better members of an upper class in listening to the efforts of his poorer class-mates and the teacher's corrections would be in many cases far more profitably employed in reading in silence a few pages of fresh matter, the knowledge and industry of the pupils being tested at the close of the lesson by a few minutes' questioning on the facts or incidents forming the subject of the passage. The value of such practice must be obvious, for it encourages intelligent reading, promotes self-reliance—a quality apt to prove deficient where, as in most large classes, the teacher does so much—and it leads the pupil to begin in his school days what he must do for himself afterwards. The suggestion is not original; but it is one that commends itself not only to teachers, but to the Inspector, as indicating a means of profitably varying his methods of testing progress and intelligence.

The last but not least important subject of the English teaching with which we wish to deal—composition—is admittedly the subject which presents most difficulty in the elementary school. The narrow experience of the children, their poverty of ideas and vocabulary, the fact that only a few have acquired reading habits or have the advantage of hearing correct English spoken outside the class-room, must always be obstacles to good results in the subject. If the child comes from a good home the teacher's task is comparatively easy; if, on the other hand, the environment be unfavourable, all the resources of the teacher's skill and experience must be brought into play, and then the result will depend as much on his method of treating other subjects of the school course—e.g., reading—as on the methods directly bearing on the composition itself. In this connection we have already had occasion to remark on the value of the use of oral composition, and to suggest to teachers the fuller employment of this aid to success, especially in the earlier stages. Conversational lessons, encouraging the use of language, are frequently found on the programme of our infant departments, and we can recall quite a number of cases in which a feature of the school instruction is a careful training in question and answer, which requires that every request and every statement made by a child to the teacher shall take the form of a sentence. Without strain-