

the teacher that ceases to be a learner ceases to be the best kind of teacher, neglect such opportunities of self-improvement as have already come within their reach. Having gained their certificates they sit back content to apply only the methods of past experience, and take but little account of the progress of educational practice.

But the untrained, uncertificated teacher furnishes an especially difficult problem, and we sincerely trust that the time is not far distant when our training colleges will supply us with teachers fully competent to meet present-day conditions and to keep pace with modern educational requirements. Though several of these young people, we are pleased to say, exhibit more real teaching ability than others already hall-marked by the Department, and though almost without exception they import into their work considerable zeal and enthusiasm, still few of them possess that degree of professional knowledge and general culture which gives the teacher confidence in himself, and which, under present conditions, is absolutely essential for the successful conduct of even the smallest primary school. With them "training the children" is simply a matter of "making the children learn": they fail to realise, or they are too immature to realise that the value of the instruction is measured not by the number of facts communicated to the pupils, but by the habits of thoughtful inquiry and careful observation, as well as by the spirit of self-reliance that should be developed in the acquisition of knowledge. But the special difficulty that meets the untrained teacher is that concerned with the classification of his school. Individual examination is generally supposed to be a thing of the past. Under the circumstances just referred to, however, the Board will not be surprised to learn that it still prevails to a fairly large extent, and necessarily so, for where such a large number of our teachers are so poorly equipped for their work, it would be the height of folly to intrust to them the important duty of classification. So fully, indeed, do they realise this fact that in most cases they gladly welcome the Inspector's assistance. But it is not the inexperienced teacher only whose classification has to be revised, or even entirely determined by the Inspector. We take this opportunity of expressing our profound regret that a good many well-qualified teachers show a decided disinclination to wield the powers intrusted to them by the Regulations for the Inspection and Examination of Schools. Sometimes the examination schedules are handed to us with no indication whatever of the teacher's intention as to promotion; sometimes, again, with indications so vague as to be practically valueless. It has been so long and so ably argued that a qualified teacher is a much better judge of his pupils' abilities than is an Inspector, that when we find such a teacher unwilling to undertake the work of classification prescribed for him, we naturally seek for reasons for such a peculiar course of action. In our judgment the general public and the weak-kneed teacher are both at fault. The general public (considered as individual fathers and mothers) still think that yearly promotion from class to class is the only absolutely trustworthy criterion of educational results; the weak-kneed teacher is afraid to deceive them, and is, moreover, determined that if there must be a bogey-man in the question it shall be the Inspector. We confess to an uncomfortable suspicion that unless teachers bravely and loyally face their responsibilities in this matter we shall have to revert sooner or later to the treadmill of individual examination.

If we were asked to select from amongst the numerous subjects of our curriculum one, and one only—by the results in which the quality of the whole teaching of a school might be fairly gauged—we should unhesitatingly name composition. The keenness and width of observation developed by nature-study and observational geography, the accuracy of statement and logical arrangement of facts necessitated by arithmetic and science; the sense of proportion engendered by drawing; the spirit of patriotism invoked by history; the interest in all things human awakened by the reading-lesson—these are all more or less clearly reflected in the written compositions of the schools, which are also obviously incidental tests in spelling and writing. The vocabulary of the child, too—no mean part of its equipment for the battle of life—is therein displayed; and upon the skill shown in its disposition and use will depend much of the success to be attained in mature life. As an important vehicle of self-expression the essay ranks high. Where the education of a child is being successfully conducted it reveals originality, self-reliance, and reverence for truth, and is the index of a mind fully and accurately informed on the common topics of the day.

Considering all this, it is with some sense of disappointment that we state that the work in this important subject in a good many of our schools falls far short of the high ideal indicated above.

Passing in review the leading faults of the composition exercises, we should like to mention, first, one which was duly noted in our last annual report—their puerility. Now, none could be more averse to the use of stilted language and intricate grammatical construction by children, none more pleased to note the persistence of natural modes of expression as of natural modes of life throughout youth than we. It must be pointed out, however, that the language and style of a child of eight ought not to remain the language of the same child at the age of leaving school. Progress is surely a moral necessity at all ages.

Again, the range of subjects is, in many cases, much too limited; we have observed again and again inability to write compositions on any but the most trivial, commonplace, and hackneyed topics. In the higher standards there is often found an almost entire ignorance of the most striking questions of the day—moral, political, and social. This latter weakness may spring in part from a mistaken notion that it is an educational crime to impart information. There is a large element of truth in this notion, for the main duty of the teacher is doubtless to assist in the development of the whole nature of the child by encouraging it in suitable forms of activity, as nearly as possible spontaneous. But there are certain facts, some of them of vital importance to the interests of the child, that cannot be reached by the most skilful use of heuristic methods. It is the bounden duty of the teacher to place the child in possession of such facts by whatever means are available, since in such cases the fact is of much more importance than the method by which a knowledge of it has been attained.