

well known. But composition exercises and dictation tests from other suitable books reveal much uncertainty about the spelling of many common words. At the last examination for certificates of proficiency the word "meant," for example, proved a veritable pitfall. The continued prevalence of mistakes in the spelling of common words affords presumptive evidence of carelessness in the correction of the spelling of everyday written exercises. If these mistakes were carefully corrected every time they came under a teacher's notice, it is unlikely that they would prove so persistent.

Writing is still, and has long been, one of the best-taught branches of our school-work. For a number of years Collins's Graphic Copybooks—a series at no time recommended by the Inspectors—have been in use. These are now to be replaced by a modified Vere Foster series, published by Messrs. Blackie and Son. The new books do not differ very greatly in style from those lately in use, but they offer facilities for more rapid execution, a feature of no small importance. Perhaps the only serious criticism that can be made on the current teaching of writing is that it is painfully slow, in some schools little more than a form of drawing. The proper holding and manipulation of the pen are, however, by no means universally enforced, the discipline being too infirm to secure a due regard to direction in this matter.

Composition continues to show some improvement, and, though unequal, is, on the whole, satisfactorily taught. In many of the larger schools the work done in the upper standards deserves unqualified commendation. The wider reading of matter easily understood, which Mr. Garrard recommends so earnestly, is of special benefit here. The use of the *School Journal* has in this way helped very distinctly to further progress, and a still wider course of easy and varied reading would exercise a great influence for good. The substitution of more interesting reading matter for the Geographical Readers that have come into use during the last few years would allow of much more extended reading of a helpful type within school hours. The Geographical Readers, as we know them, are of very doubtful utility, for they do not effectively teach geographical knowledge, and they do not win children to the habit of reading, as they are devoid of interest, and make no effective appeal to the imagination. Books of this type should not count as "readers" at all. Mr. Plummer writes of the teaching of composition as follows: "Some teachers expect success if they merely require their pupils to write essays week after week. Model compositions are not made use of. In some cases the subjects are not well chosen. As a rule, the subject for composition should be one about which the child has ample first-hand knowledge. He should not be supplied with matter by the teacher, nor should he have to cudgel his brains for it. To prevent monotony of treatment, originality should be encouraged, and the attention of other pupils should be drawn to points of excellence in this respect. Errors in correct statement or in spelling should never be passed over. The writer should always be required to rewrite the faulty sentence or word. Common errors should be dealt with in oral lesson. Instead of dealing with all the errors in a miscellaneous fashion, it is better to take one typical mistake at a time, and let it form the basis of an oral lesson in the correction of a number of sentences containing similar mistakes. A number of teachers do not yet recognize the value of oral composition, and, as a result, make little use of it."

Mr. Burnside, writing of the schools of the south-western district, says, "Composition is the subject in which fewest good results are obtained. In not many of the schools is the work better than satisfactory. For Standard VI proficiency, however, very fine work was shown by the large schools (not of his own district only), there being abundance of matter systematically arranged. . . . Before an essay is attempted some definite scheme of arrangement should be devised. I fear that many of the errors made at examination are errors that have been made by the pupils many times before, and allowed to go uncorrected. . . . Essay-writing is the surest test of a school's efficiency—it is a test of a pupil's general reading, of his habits of observation, of his powers of logical arrangement, and of his ability to decide what is essential and what is immaterial."

Mr. Burnside's estimate of the outstanding value of essay-writing and composition as an indication of a school's efficiency I hold to be indisputable. It tests the creative and adaptive power that pupils have gained over the direct and remote elements of their experience, whether gathered from observation, reading, or intercourse with teachers, parents, and companions; and reveals both their reach and their manner of thought. No other branch of school study or practice does this to anything like the same degree; no other study or discipline has so many close and vital links with school-work generally, or is so serviceable for the pursuits of mature life. In comparison with it, arithmetic gives a relatively mechanical and one-sided training—a training in severe accuracy, in dry clearness of statement, and in cold narrow reasoning. I dwell on this with some emphasis because I see growing up around us a tendency to subordinate the adequate and live teaching of composition and English to the teaching of arithmetic, that already usurps even more than its due share of school-time.

The instruction in sentence-structure and in the grammatical aspects of English takes up a good deal of time, but is proving of no great essential service. This is largely due to the want of a sound knowledge of the elements of the sentence—the parts of speech, and the constituent phrases and clauses—and partly to the too prevalent practice of making the questions of old examination-cards issued by the Department the usual basis of instruction, which is in consequence unsystematic and out of living relation to other current work in composition and reading. It would be a distinct gain if these cards were put in the fire; teachers would then more easily discover the advantages of systematizing this part of their work and of keeping it in closer touch with the other departments of English study, and would use their own resources more freely and to better purpose. On this topic Mr. Garrard writes, "The English or grammatical part of the subject is still poor, a fault to be accounted for partly because teachers have too little time to give to the subject, and partly because the subject is not made of living interest to the pupils. The English lesson often consists in pulling to pieces a sentence—divorced altogether from its context—or in substituting words for phrases or the reverse—tasks absolutely uninteresting to pupils and teachers alike." It is not, I fear, easy to make work of