

*English.*—The work in this subject has made some advance during the year, and, though we are far from satisfied with the results in the majority of the schools, we are glad to note that in comparison with the attainments of some few years ago a considerable increase in efficiency is manifest. The infant classes have made much progress, and on the whole do really creditable work, both oral and written.

We should strongly advise teachers, however, to give full consideration to the need for training and encouraging the children to talk *individually*, to find subjects of interest upon which they can talk, and to ask questions both of the teacher and of the other pupils in the class.

No exercise in written English should be attempted in the lower divisions until the subject-matter has been fully treated orally. Even in the reproduction of stories—a common form of exercise in English composition, but not, as some teachers appear to think, the only form—oral composition or a discussion of the subject by the children should be the first step, the written exercise not being required until the following day. In this way even the children of the lower standard classes should be able to express orally a story that they have heard, or describe orally an incident that they have witnessed, and at a later stage they should begin to reproduce these exercises in written composition; for, for them, there is practically no difference between oral and written composition as far as style, simplicity, and directness are concerned.

The following plan, based on the suggestions made in the report above referred to, may be found helpful in connection with the teaching of composition. First, as regards the early lessons, which, as we have before recommended, should be upon the subject-matter of the reading-book: Let a series of questions relating to the story be prepared on the blackboard and placed before the class. The children are called upon at the teacher's discretion to answer one or more of these questions in their sequence. At the beginning the answers may be written down briefly on another blackboard, and made headings for the written exercise. The second stage consists in the intermediate step between the reproductive and the inventive type of exercise. As a concrete illustration we may take the story of Barbara Frietchie. One child may assume the part of the old lady herself, writing to a friend; another may impersonate a soldier who saw the incident; another, Stonewall Jackson; and so on. The original poem becomes in this way the basis for quite a considerable group of variant exercises, and yet remains a standard by which may be judged the pupils' accuracy and intelligence and their powers of expression. The final stage, that of original composition, should begin with that which is clearly and even frequently within the child's experience. It should take the forms of (a) simple letters to friends, (b) narratives of domestic or school events, or stories couched in an autobiographical form (the history of a doll, a plant which has been grown at school, a pet animal, and the like), (c) stories about pictures.

These exercises should advance in difficulty as the child progresses, but they should be consistently set on such subjects as lie within the pupil's grasp. There is ample range in choice if they look no further than the subjects growing out of school or of home life. Abstract subjects and even proverbs and familiar sayings should be introduced with caution, and these subjects should be treated only through concrete instances.

We notice, however, a distinct break in the quality of the work after the stimulus of the constant oral teaching of the lower standards has ceased to be applied in the upper classes, and this is, in our opinion, the cause of most, if not all, of the weakness so often apparent in the latter classes. Teachers complain that they find it hard to get a good list of suitable topics, and that the pupils cannot write more than a few sentences even when suitable topics are found. It should not be too difficult for a teacher to select at the most forty topics for a year's work; the children themselves will be able to suggest many, and their selections will probably be found very suitable. Inability on the part of the pupil to write more than a few lines is due mostly to the fact that he is not sufficiently acquainted with the subject—in other words, he has not been taught.

The following remarks, addressed to teachers in public schools in England, may be made here: "It should be remembered that it is as easy for a child to write on one subject as on another, provided his interest in and his knowledge of it are equal. The advance made should be in the mode of presenting the subject rather than in the subject itself. The structure of the sentences, their relation to each other, may become more highly organized, the use of illustration and comparison may become more frequent and varied, and in both directions the teacher may be helpful and suggestive, but he should watch a fitting opportunity, and not introduce a new construction, still less attempt to develop one, until he has noticed its occurrence in the oral lesson. No matter how advanced the composition may be, the *oral exercises should never be discontinued*. Composition, either oral or written, should form a part of every lesson given in the school, and its effect in increasing clearness of thought and expression will be evident in every part of the school-work."

Still, English language and composition, which more than any other subject demands to the full the earnest attention and utmost skill of the teacher, remains the least satisfactorily taught subject of the school curriculum. We know that teachers recognize its importance and the difficulties of teaching it, but we usually find on reference to the time-table that it is subordinated to arithmetic, receiving less than half the time allotted to that subject. The efficiency of a school can be accurately estimated by the pupils' attainments in English; and, indeed, this is how the public actually judge our schools—not according to the proficiency in arithmetic. Want of success is due also in great measure to the failure on the part of the teacher to draw up satisfactory schemes of work in English. Indeed, in some schools we find that no scheme has been drawn up, and there is not even a programme or list showing the topics dealt with during the year. The typical mistakes in English made by the Maori children are repeated year after year, being carried forward by the pupils from the time when they were in the lower classes. The commonest of these