in several respects; the division of reading, especially, into three instead of six grades, being defective. I have come to the conclusion, however, that, in view of impending changes, which may affect the whole system of examinations, it would be unwise to alter a plan that, whatever may be its defects, has the great merit of enabling the reader to compare readily the present with the past state of each school since its opening. And this is an advantage not to be lightly abandoned by an Examiner, or by those for whose information he writes. Nor do I think it possible, by means of the most elaborate system of tabulated statements, or by any arrangement of figures, carried out to any number of decimal places, to give such a picture of a school as will not require to be supplemented and modified by a written estimate, however short.

So many factors must enter into such an estimate before justice can be meted out to each teacher, that the most carefully devised array of figures, taken alone, may be absolutely misleading. For instance, not only the age of each scholar, but his school age—that is, the time he has actually spent in the schoolroom—must be taken into account. It is also necessary to know how long a teacher has been at work in his school, and in what state he found it; while such essential matters as the general tone and discipline of a school cannot well be represented by figures at all.

On the whole, I do not apprehend that an ordinarily careful reader will find much difficulty in gathering from my tables and report, taken together, as much as is really worth knowing. Exquisitely nice adjustments are out of place in so simple a machine as the Nelson system of primary education.

Reading.—The number of readers marked as "good," that is, who can read an ordinary passage of prose with tolerable fluency and expression—1,262—is slightly in excess of that given in last year's return. This most important subject is still generally well taught. Drawling and whining have been fairly laughed out of most of our schools, and the remarkable absence of provincialism has been noticed by more than one competent critic from other colonies.

Writing.—In the majority of our schools writing is carefully and successfully taught. The schools on the West Coast, however, with one or two exceptions, still lag most unaccountably behind the rest in this respect. In 16 schools, attended by 700 children, there are only 53 good writers, scarcely more than half as many as appear on the return for the first division of Hardy Street Girls' School, with only 65 scholars.

Arithmetic.—In the highest grade of arithmetic there are 60 more passes this year than there were last year; but in the lowest grade, which goes only as far as simple division, there is a serious falling off, not more than 366 having succeeded in 1877 as against 758 in 1876. This state of things clearly shows that in a large proportion of our schools the teaching of arithmetic is too ambitious. Had the children been properly grounded, no such list of failures would have been possible. In several schools, both in town and country, where the teachers have laid a good foundation, and have taken an accurate measure of the powers of their scholars, not a single scholar has failed to pass with ease. It must be borne in mind, too, that in my examinations for arithmetic the teacher is at liberty to select whichever grade he likes, not only for each class, but for each member of a class, all that I ask being that a certain proportion of the work taken up shall be done correctly. My object in allowing this unusual latitude is to discourage cramming.

Grammar.—This subject is much better taught than it was a year ago, when the text-books used were too bulky and too difficult for young scholars, and when many of our teachers tried to teach more than could well be digested. The only text-book that will be issued this year is "Bowden's English Grammar for Beginners," a sensibly-written little work of great practical value, comprising as it does within the compass of sixty pages all that children who attend primary schools need learn of English grammar, including the analysis of sentences.

Geography.—Although the method of teaching geography now pursued is more rational and more interesting than it was in bygone times, there is still room for improvement. Following the plan laid down in Phillips's Colonial Geography, a work written expressly for New Zealand schools, our teachers now very properly start from this country as a centre, and pay considerable attention to the geography of the basin of the Pacific. Map-drawing and collective lessons before the wall maps are also common. I find, however, that the relative positions of even well-known places are ill understood, many of the children, for instance, being quite at a loss to explain what course would be taken by a ship leaving Nelson for Sydney, "south" and "north-east" being among the answers frequently given.

History.—The teaching of history is now confined, as it ought to be, to the upper classes in our advanced schools. Although few, even of these, know more than the barest outlines of so vast a subject, I should be sorry to see it entirely excluded from our school course, were it only because it gives quite a different kind of reading from that found in our ordinary class-books, and thus helps to relieve the intolerable monotonousness of going over the same unvaried round of lessons. For the same reason I think it advisable to make an entire change in the reading books, however excellent they may be, at least once in every five years.

Spelling.—Good spelling, formerly the exception, has for the last two years been the rule with us. In our best schools it is the practice to combine a writing and a dictation exercise, with the best results, as the numerous fairly-written and correctly-spelt exercise-books submitted to me testify. Great attention is now being paid also to the proper formation and arrangement of figures, points that will be found of some importance in after-life.

Discipline.—Except in about half a dozen instances, and those not very glaring, the discipline of our schools is quite as good as ought reasonably to be expected. With very little of the parade of class-drill, so imposing to a visitor, and with hardly any unnecessary harshness, our teachers contrive, on the whole, to preserve such an amount of order as enables the work of their schools to be carried on without serious disturbance or loss of time. A school is not a penal establishment, and such a system of repression as would compel absolute silence throughout the schoolday is hardly worth introducing into institutions where more than a fourth of the inmates are under seven years old.

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I have, &c.,
W. C. Hodgson,
Inspector.

The Chairman of the Education Board, District of Nelson.