

show how wide still is the gulf which must be bridged before children ignorant of reading, writing, and arithmetic are the exception instead of the rule in this district.

SCHOOL WORK.—Coming now to the character of the work done and to the methods employed by teachers in the preparation of the class subjects, there is reason in many instances to feel satisfied with the work which has been accomplished during the year. The necessary attention paid by School Committees to the welfare and prosperity of the schools I look upon as one of the most favourable omens for the future. At no previous examinations have I seen such interest taken by the Chairmen and members forming the School Committees, and at no time previously have I seen so many signs and marks of progress. School grounds have been cleared, trees and shrubs are beginning to adorn the borders of many of the school grounds, and, best of all, gymnastic apparatus has been provided in some of the larger schools, and all has been done by the self-reliance of the Committees themselves. Men who so work deserve to have good schools, for they inspire their teachers with confidence, and I am convinced that many of the defects in our worst schools would disappear, if only the teachers and Committees of them realized the importance of the duties they are called upon to perform. Wherever reasonable intelligence is brought to bear upon the school and its surroundings, there I find all the elements of a successful school. Go when you will into such schools, there is the busy hum that betokens activity and diligence. There is no need for special preparation to meet the Inspector, no apologies for "small school to-day," no excuse why the lessons being given are not in accordance with the timetable, and no evidence of neglect in and about the school-buildings. Bad habits make bad teachers and bad schools, and Committees indifferent to the welfare of their teachers and children engender the bad habits. Best among the schools in the district are the Napier and Gisborne, closely followed by Havelock, Takapau, Ashley Clinton, Hastings, Taradale, and in a less degree by Woodville, Petane, Ahuriri, Hampden, and Wairoa. In the preparation of the class subjects, I fear that very often failure is brought about by overlooking the necessity of thoroughness in the earlier standard work. It cannot for a single moment be doubted that children close upon nine years of age ought to be fully capable of passing the requirements of Standard I., and yet 16 per cent. of the children presented for examination in this standard, and of the average age of eight years ten months, failed to reach my standard test. In Napier the whole 53 children who were presented passed the examination most efficiently, and in Gisborne 32 out of 33 so passed. But in these schools the young children are taught to read with a certain amount of intelligence before they are drafted from the infants' department to prepare for Standard I., and in this respect teachers in charge of country schools, where infants and adults are worked in the same room, labour under very great disadvantages. Much as I approve and desire the extension of infant training under proper conditions, I believe that the mixing of infants and adults in the same room for teaching purposes is an unmitigated evil, retarding the progress of the latter and injuring the bodies and minds of the former. Further, I am convinced that it would be a great gain from an educational point of view, and therefore from a pecuniary point of view, if the same amount of capitation grant which is now paid for the training of children in country schools between the ages of five and fifteen years were paid on children between seven and fifteen years of age; in other words, that the capitation grant in country schools were so increased that all children below seven years of age could be excluded from attendance at school. Certainly the education given in the country schools would be much better, and the dumb show which the little children are compelled to practise during the progress of important work in the upper classes, though opposed to their nature, would disappear from among the list of educational cruelties still practised in this nineteenth century.

READING.—Of the standard subjects examined, reading is still one of the least satisfactory in its results. I fear some teachers consider that their children are prepared for the standard examination if they can pass through the reading-book at a kind of dog-trot. It is necessary to point out, however, that dull, monotonous, and often inaccurate reading is not sufficient to comply with the standard requirements, which state that children must read with intelligence, and this will never be obtained as long as teachers do not attach more importance to the preparation of this subject. No lesson, in my opinion, requires greater care and preparation than that of reading. Upon it depend spelling and dictation, word-meaning, composition, and grammar, and, if it is indifferently taught, the subjects which hinge upon it must of necessity be imperfect also. I feel sure that the results in this subject would not be so disappointing as they often are if teachers would keep in view the four stages which must be passed through in the mastering of every reading-lesson. These stages are—1. The familiarizing of words already though imperfectly known; 2. The mastering of all new words in the lesson; 3. The explanation of phrases and allusions in the lesson; 4. Practice in style, by which I mean mode of delivery, liveliness, expression, accuracy. I confess much might be urged against some of the reading books in use. As recently stated by Lord Norton in the House of Lords, "In teaching children the art of reading you must give them something to read. The present reading-books are too much in the way of grabbing desultory scraps of science without any sequence." I consider that no school should be without narrative reading-books, such as Scott's "Tales of a Grandfather," Johnson's "Rasselas," and Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield;" and this leads me again, as I did three years ago, to express a hope that School Committees will endeavour to establish school libraries for the benefit of the children in their districts, as, next to physical training, nothing so aids the work of the teacher in the formation of character among his pupils as reading good books.

WRITING.—On the whole writing is fairly taught. The general adoption of Vere Foster's copy-books, and the importance which I attach to clean and well-arranged exercise-books, have given a great impetus to the teaching of this subject, and there are now few schools where the writing is really bad. Care rather than thought is required in teaching the subject, and I must say that some of our teachers exhibit this quality in a marked degree.

SPELLING.—I have little to say on this subject further than I said two years ago. As in reading, if teachers would remember that spelling is a mental test only, and dictation a sight test as well as a mental one, and that the latter test requires the eye to be trained to distinguish in script form words already known to the eye in their printed form, and would act upon this principle, not only would their work become easier, but the results would be far better than they are now.