

rehearsed. Here, again, a wider latitude might with advantage be conceded to the examiner. All such limitations—made, it would almost seem, in the interests of teachers, and intended as a safeguard against the exactions of unreasonable Inspectors—tend to defeat the object of an examination—the ascertaining by every available method what a child really knows. I am not wholly satisfied either with the spelling of our scholars or with the methods of teaching it. Much time is habitually wasted in giving out easy words, in which it is almost impossible to go wrong, while sufficient pains are not bestowed on mastering those words—really not very numerous—in which every experienced teacher knows blunders will constantly be made. If a list of the well-known words, such as “separate,” “business,” and “believe,” which are habitually misspelt, were hung up in a conspicuous place in every schoolroom, and added to from time to time as fresh mistakes were made, the scholars might be so drilled as to the proper spelling of this black list that the blunders so exposed would in a few months be laughed out of the school. What may be termed grammatical mistakes rather than misspellings, such as the substitution of “their” for “there,” stand on quite a different footing. No cure for this class of errors can reasonably be looked for until the children have reached the higher grades, and are able to understand for themselves wherein lie the right and the wrong of the matter.

WRITING.—As in reading, I am able to report a certain, though not very striking, advance upon last year's performance in writing. The approach to uniformity in the kind of copy book used has probably contributed somewhat to this result; the efforts of our teachers to remove a well-merited reproach have doubtless done more. I have still to regret that simultaneous lessons are never given in several schools, and that the use of the blackboard in giving a writing lesson is persistently neglected. The schools in which pupils are regularly trained to sit in the right posture and to hold their pens properly may still be counted on the fingers of one hand.

ARITHMETIC.—No fault can reasonably be found with the way in which, as a rule, arithmetic is taught in the district. This opinion is put forward in spite of the fact that year after year more scholars fail in this than in any other branch. For the subject itself, however carefully explained, is essentially a hard one, especially where problems are involved, and is, besides, so wide that it cannot be fully tested by a paper the scope of which does not extend beyond half a dozen questions at the outside. So limited an area of inquiry may well shut out much that a child really knows. And it is notorious that in every school there is a certain proportion of children—and those among the brightest—who are deficient in the arithmetical faculty. I have long held that a disproportionately high place has been assigned to arithmetic in our schools, to the exclusion of much that will be found of at least equal practical value in after life. Beyond a certain moderate standard, not very difficult of attainment, the study of arithmetic is nothing more than a mental whetstone—and a whetstone of a somewhat coarse type. A skilful teacher can, indeed, draw from an ordinary reading lesson more varied and more elevating matter for thought than can ever be extracted from the wearisome variations of the theme, “If fifteen horses can plough eleven acres, &c.,” which now absorb something like a third of the scanty school hours during which so many other important things must be taught, or, at least, attempted.

ENGLISH.—Formal grammar, as a rule, gets quite as much time and attention as it is entitled to, letter-writing receiving somewhat less than its due share if the great practical value of the art of putting one's ideas into clear and connected English be taken into consideration.

GEOGRAPHY and history are generally efficiently taught. Comparatively little is exacted in these subordinate branches, though even that little is not invariably forthcoming.

DRAWING seems to be a popular study with the children, the specimens submitted to me being generally respectable, and in some instances most creditable.

NEEDLEWORK, so far as I can judge, is efficiently taught.

After an inexplicable delay a beginning has at last been made in the direction of improving the system hitherto followed of supplying the children with books and other school requisites. A list of books the use of which alone is sanctioned by the Board has lately been published, and circulated among the teachers. But the question of providing an ample and readily available stock of books remains just where it was. A single instance taken not from a remote district, but from a town school, will serve to show that the present method cannot be regarded as satisfactory. Six months after the burning of the borough schools I examined a class of twenty-six boys in Blenheim who could muster among them no more than half a dozen reading books. Under the Nelson system, the adoption of which I have so long and so ineffectually urged, every pupil in the borough schools would have been supplied, within a week of the disaster, with every school requisite.

I see no reason for altering the favourable opinion expressed in last year's report as to the discipline and manners of the children throughout the district. That, in common with most other colonial children, they have far too much of their own way at home is undeniable. But this fact redounds all the more to the credit of their teachers, who, in spite of the notorious laxity of parental control, contrive to maintain good order among those who in too many cases have to learn their first lessons of prompt and implicit obedience in the schoolroom. If all those whose duty it is to exercise a reforming and restraining influence on the young were to perform their part half as well as our public school teachers do, there would be little to complain of in the morals of the generation now growing up.

A far more serious drawback to the Marlborough schools than the dearth of books—for which a skilful teacher will to a certain extent make up by oral teaching and by other well-known expedients—is irregularity of attendance. During the past year 220 children have attended less than half the time during which their schools have been open. Nor does this way of putting it by any means show the full extent of the mischief. Fully half as many more scholars whose names appear as regular attendants have made little more than the minimum of attendance that causes a child to be excepted, and thus to be fairly classed among the “half-taught.” Yet it is by no means easy to discover a remedy. So stringent a compulsory clause as would be really effective would not at present be tolerated by colonists, nor could School Committees be induced to put in motion