

may be, for only a day or two more than the stipulated minimum, but, in many cases, nearly the whole of even this meagre attendance has been made during the earlier part of the year—so long before the examination that much of what has been learned may have been forgotten by then. It is to be hoped that at the forthcoming Conference of Inspectors some remedy for this wrong will be devised. No reform that does not approximate to an exception in favour of those who have attended during less than two-thirds of the school year can be regarded as satisfactory.

*Non-presentation in Standard I. of Children more than Eight Years Old.*—The number of children returned under this head is 208, about the same as it was last year. The causes assigned for keeping these children back may be arranged under three heads: Irregularity of attendance accounts for seventy, shortness of school life for ninety, dulness for forty-eight. The total number thus held back is not unreasonably large, the explanation given by the teacher in each case being sufficient.

The following brief estimate of the comparative success with which each subject included in the school course is being taught will probably be useful, provided it be distinctly understood that criticisms, from the nature of the case, are only of general, and not of universal, application. In dealing with so many widely diverse cases, the mean can only be taken into account in a general survey. Extremes, whether of merit or demerit, will be treated separately in the detailed estimate of the present condition of each school.

*Reading.*—As long as our teachers devote so much time and pains to the art of reading intelligently, as most of them do at present, the continued success of this portion of the school course is pretty well assured. In a few schools, however, the habit of suddenly dropping the voice at the end of every sentence has become inveterate, and quite spoils the effect of the reading. As this defect has invariably been commented on by the examiners wherever it exists, and as it is quite curable when reasonable pains are taken, there is no excuse for its being suffered to continue, and its recurrence at next examination will be treated as it deserves.

*Writing.*—The improvement in handwriting referred to in last year's report has extended with the extended use of the vertical style of writing in this district. Slovenly and ill-shaped handwriting, already rare, ought, given reasonable care, to entirely disappear from our schools in a year or two at furthest.

*Spelling.*—Great attention is still paid to this subject, the result being that our more advanced scholars, at least, are rarely caught tripping with words in ordinary use; but, as will probably always be the case where the pupil's range of reading is narrow, and his vocabulary consequently limited, mistakes are still common enough in such outside words as "phenomenal," "metropolitan," and "antipodes." Nearly all that is practicable seems, however, to have been done in this direction.

*Arithmetic.*—Little fault can reasonably be found either with the methods of teaching generally adopted or with the amount of time, pains, and skill devoted to this subject in our schools. And yet it must be admitted that year after year more of our scholars break down in arithmetic than in all the rest of the subjects included in the syllabus put together. The faculty of computation would seem to be most unequally distributed. It is not unusual to find in a class the members of which are of similar age, and have received similar instruction, that a fourth of the pupils can solve correctly, and well within the prescribed time, all the six questions contained in the paper set. Another fourth, and that by no means the dullest in other matters, can barely manage one, or, at most, two sums. This great inequality of arithmetical power renders the task of an examiner exceedingly hard, for, if the difficulties of the paper are to be toned down to the capacity of the slower scholars, the powers of the best arithmeticians would be very inadequately tested. What seems at first sight the obvious remedy—to lengthen the period daily devoted to arithmetic—is not practicable. As it is, an unduly large portion of the school-day is appropriated to this subject when regard is had to the number and importance of the other matters to be taught. The present mode of classification, rendered necessary by the demands of the standard-pass system, is really responsible for this, as for so many others of the defects in our public schools. Were the scholars graded and taught according to their arithmetical capacities, without reference to their attainments in other respects, the anomalies pointed out would disappear.

*English.*—Some improvement has been made during the past year both in the length and the quality of the essays written by the older scholars. This improvement may be partly due to the fact that the subject-matter, as a rule, was taken from a book chosen as the reading-test on examination day. One fault, however, cropped up in so many instances as to argue a serious defect in the method of teaching composition in many of our schools. In these the pupils, with few exceptions, had not acquired the art of breaking up what they wrote into sentences or paragraphs. Their essays ran on for half a page or more, clumsily pieced together by "and's," "so's," and "then's," without the relief of even a comma, not to speak of a capital, or a full stop. A reformation is urgently needed here, which shall insist, as a beginning, on the composition being broken up into short, compact sentences, in which not only the period, but the semicolon and the comma should find a place.

*Geography.*—On the whole, the result of the examination in geography showed little or no advance on the somewhat feeble performances of last year. Scores of altogether unsatisfactory papers were sent in by even the older scholars, physical and political geography being alike defective. The best work was that of the Third Standard scholars, for whom the prescribed range of study, though narrow, is laid down very definitely. In the Fourth Standard, where geography figures as only a class-subject, the papers of the bulk of the candidates were so meagre and so slovenly that, had this been continued as a pass-subject, the list of failures would have been hugely swollen.

*Recitation.*—Although it may be doubtful how far the practice of recitation helps forward the art of reading, there can be no doubt as to the beneficial effects of committing to memory passages of well-known English poetry at a period of life when that organ is "wax to receive and marble to retain." Something worth keeping is sure to abide in after-life, even with the most forgetful.