

Intervals.—There is a tendency in some schools to deprive pupils, even those in the preparatory classes, of an afternoon interval, and to shorten the midday recess. A short interval in the afternoon is an absolute necessity in the case of younger children, and where these are concerned in no case can its abandonment be sanctioned. The midday recess in all cases should extend over at least one hour; any shorter time than this, even in the case of country schools, is insufficient to enable pupils to obtain the needed relaxation from class-room effort. To act as some teachers are doing in the matter of shortening or abandoning the intervals set apart for relaxation is to ignore methods that scientific investigation has proved to be of great hygienic value.

School-grounds.—It is gratifying to find that increased attention is being paid to the matter of improving the appearance of the school-grounds by planting and fencing, and, what is of greater importance, by arousing in pupils a feeling of pride in their surroundings and a desire to prevent injury to school property. In many cases the appearance of the playground has been very appreciably improved and brightened by the formation of a garden in which both pupils and parents are interested. The amount of work done by the pupils themselves, however, in connection with the playground varies considerably from school to school, and this is just the kind of work likely to bear fruit in after-years. What we mean is, that it is still a common experience to find hired labour doing work which could readily be undertaken by some of the pupils—*e.g.*, trimming hedges, erecting light fences, digging rough ground, removing tree or small roots. Such work under the direction of the teacher would be enjoyed and respected by pupils, and would assist in no small degree in encouraging and developing that spirit of self-help and self-reliance, one of the main objectives of education.

Conference of Teachers.—About the middle of the year we had a conference with the members of the Headmasters' Association, to which teachers generally were invited. A representative gathering assembled in the hall of the Training College, where a pleasant and profitable day of two sessions was spent. The subjects for discussion were selected by a committee of teachers and the Senior Inspector, and included some of the larger questions and problems of education in which the people of the Dominion are interested. In addition to this conference, at which all the Inspectors were present, others were held between individual Inspectors and teachers from time to time, at which methods of instruction and school-management, aims and details of work-schemes, construction of time-tables, staffing arrangements, training of pupil-teachers and probationers, and other similar subjects were freely and frankly discussed. We are more than ever convinced of the great importance of these meetings between Inspectors and teachers, which offer such splendid opportunities for the removal of misunderstandings, the solution of difficulties, the clearing-up of misconceptions and the explanation of policy, and which tend towards promoting a feeling of mutual confidence and respect. In many parts of the world a strong feature is made of the meeting of Inspector and teachers in conference, and we look forward in this district to a gradual increase in what has already been done in this direction.

INSTRUCTION.

Progress.—In view of the difficulties, already mentioned, of procuring and maintaining a supply of efficient teachers, we regard the general progress of education in this district as satisfactory, for although, as we indicated in a former paragraph, much remains to be done in the direction of further improvement, we can point to a relatively large proportion of efficient schools whose influence is gradually extending, and to a large number of zealous teachers fully alive to the importance of modern developments and genuinely anxious to discharge their onerous and responsible duties in the interests of the community and of the State.

Reading, Comprehension, and Recitation.—In a considerable number of schools reading is well taught, pupils being able to read with ease and fluency and to reproduce in their own words the meaning of the passage read with some fullness and accuracy. There are still, however, many schools where these conditions do not obtain. In spite of the regulations issued four years ago making the use of a continuous reader mandatory and that of a miscellaneous reader optional, a number of teachers persist in postponing the use of the continuous reader till late in the year. They place it last instead of first. In such cases there is a lack of silent reading, one of the most fruitful methods of encouraging and developing the reading habit. In some schools simultaneous reading still persists, and in others, where simultaneous reading has been abandoned, simultaneous recitation is still retained. Simultaneous work of this kind destroys individual responsibility, conceals individual defects, and obscures individual merits. If it does not actually substitute noise for quality, it undoubtedly tends to do so. These remarks do not apply to simultaneous recitation in the preparatory department.

Comprehension of the matter read shows improvement; but there are still too many schools where an unduly large proportion of the time which ought to be devoted to reading is occupied in explaining the meaning of words in such a way as to isolate them from the context. Comprehension should aim at leading pupils to appreciate the meaning of the text, and, although understanding the significance of each word in a paragraph will undoubtedly assist in the process, the weary monotony of the method as frequently applied can hardly fail to discourage interest and check any desire to read for information or pleasure. We have frequently during the course of our visits tested pupils by asking them to read a few lines of simple matter and then explain them, and the results in many cases were altogether disappointing. No method of teaching reading, which must include what is known as "comprehension," can be deemed satisfactory which does not aim at training pupils to follow with intelligence the author's meaning from paragraph to paragraph and have some appreciation of the general sense of chapter or book.

There is a growing practice, much to be commended, of selecting classic extracts for recitation. It is doubtful, however, if any good purpose is served by the memorizing of a number