

SUBJECTS OF INSTRUCTION.

Reading.—A very steady improvement in the teaching of this subject has been noticeable through the year, especially with respect to the comprehension of reading-matter and an appreciation of beauty in expression. A very common source of faulty, mechanical reading lies in pressing children forward too fast into difficult books. In such cases children, finding the phrase beyond them, revert to the word as a unit, and produce as a result reading without fluency, expression, or understanding. As it is the business of the teacher to teach all pupils to speak standard English, and to speak it clearly and with expression, the teacher must be ever on the alert to correct such errors as constantly drift into the pupils' speech. It is suggested that for reading purposes larger classes might very well be divided into sections, the brighter pupils being allowed to read silently by themselves, while the teacher devotes more attention to the dull and backward. In this way the better readers will cover much more literary matter in the course of the year, while the others will be benefited by the greater attention received.

Writing.—Last year we reported adversely on the quality of writing in our schools: this year we have to report that no advance has been made. Indeed, to such an extent has this subject deteriorated during the past few years that we intend to impose severe strictures on such schools as continue to produce work that is distinctly below average. Script-writing has been tried out with varying success. In some few cases excellent results have been obtained; in other schools it is feared that prejudice has resulted in neglect. Whichever system (script or cursive) is adopted, there must be definite and persistent teaching. No scribbling should be allowed in any exercise written in the school; neatness should always be insisted on.

Dictation and Spelling.—Greater accuracy in the spelling and dictation tests has been in evidence during the year. Teachers are beginning to realize that children have no interest in words when divorced from their context, and hence the practice of drawing up long lists of words and submitting these as the course in spelling is to be roundly condemned. Most of the spelling required can be taught in connection with the reading and the composition, in which subjects words well within the comprehension of the children can be best dealt with. A teacher should not be too ready to correct mistakes in spelling occurring in the composition exercise. It is much better, especially in the higher classes, to require the child to use a dictionary wherewith to make his own corrections. Where this plan is adopted the children become more self-reliant, and at the same time acquire the habit of using a book of reference. There is still too much tendency to regard errors in spelling in other writing exercises as less faulty than errors in the set spelling exercises. A wise teacher pays special attention to such errors, keeps a list of them, teaches the words, and makes them the basis of future tests. Only by repetition can the necessary familiarity with form and the necessary muscular action of writing the words be correctly attained.

Composition.—This subject is well handled in many of our schools, but, nevertheless, in a considerable number the written essays are often of a stilted and scrappy nature, clear evidence that sufficient attention has not been given to oral expression throughout the school. If our composition is ever to reach a high standard more actual teaching must be undertaken with a view to widening the vocabulary of the child and giving him a good command over his mother-tongue. This can be best secured by cutting down long written exercises to a minimum, and spending more time over oral instruction. Almost every lesson affords ample scope for training in free expression, and the teacher who does not avail himself of it is certainly losing a golden opportunity whereby the child would gain the power to express himself freely and fully. The crudeness of some of the essay work in the upper standards is unpardonable in these days of cheap books and well-established school libraries.

Punctuation.—Although this might well be dealt with under the heading of "Composition," yet we feel that it is of sufficient importance to warrant a special reference. Seldom does punctuation receive sufficient treatment in our schools, and it is sometimes lamentable to see the lack of knowledge with regard to it, as evidenced in the essay-writing. Correct punctuation is comparatively easy of attainment even in Standard III if taken in conjunction with the reading lesson and the essay work. The importance of the blackboard in demonstration cannot be exaggerated.

Arithmetic.—In the teaching of number work a very considerable improvement (especially in the infant division of our schools) can be recorded. At the expense of repetition we cannot too strongly emphasize the necessity for accuracy in calculation throughout the standard classes. In the lower classes we find that the tendency is to overdo the concrete and neglect the abstract, the resultant consequence being slowness in making ready calculations in small numbers. The foundation of success in arithmetic in the upper standards ought to be laid in the lower classes: to that end the memory of the child should be called upon as an aid—in short, tables should be thoroughly memorized. Mental arithmetic should be more frequently given—not mental gymnastics, but such calculations as might be expected to arise in the everyday life of the average adult. In some cases, too, the exercises given have little or no relation to the written arithmetic exercises of the day.

History.—Very seldom have we cause to complain of the unsatisfactory nature of the course drawn up by the teacher in this subject. We find that the failure to teach history successfully does not arise so much from the want of a suitable programme as from the lack of skilful treatment of the work undertaken. Many teachers are still inclined to depend too much on the lecture method only. The children themselves must take an active part in the lesson, and not be mere passive listeners. These activities can best be stimulated by children being called upon to ask questions, tell stories, act the parts, and by drawing, modelling, and writing stories. We are sure also that in some schools not enough use is made of maps, pictures, and charts as teaching-aids. In most of our schools suitable courses in