

In the computation of the per cent. of attendance.

By "per cent. of attendance" is then meant the ratio which the average number of pupils in daily attendance bears to the number of pupils belonging. This measures the true condition of the school in respect to regularity of attendance, and in our reports is seen to make a creditable showing for those whose absence falls below the five day limit.

It is a source of regret, however, that the next table does not make so good a showing. It is seen here that the average daily attendance of pupils in all grades throughout the city is scarcely more than half of the number enrolled, and in three grades is less than half. In this table we have a representation in figures of a most serious evil that has been inherited from a former dispensation when attendance at school was allowed to be a matter of convenience or of pleasure.

I cannot characterize in language strong enough the ruinous effect of the habit of irregular attendance, which this table shows to be alarmingly prevalent. The most trivial excuses often are considered sufficient for parents to detain their children at home, and not infrequently it is considered an impertinence that an excuse is asked for at all.

A single day's absence will put a pupil at a disadvantage in his class; and when that absence has been prolonged for several days, either he must be placed in a lower class—and that action would be regarded as tyrannical—or his teacher must neglect all the other members of the class in order to bring the delinquent up to grade, and such a course would be unjust to all who are at pains to be punctual in their school attendance.

By universal agreement absence caused by sickness or other urgent necessity is excused, and the effort to repair the loss cheerfully made; but, apart from such causation, the amount of irregularity of attendance in our schools is a reproach to their good name, and should be checked by the voluntary effort of our patrons, or be rigorously dealt with by the board.

THE GRADED SYSTEM.

The consensus of opinion in the educational world upon the subject of school organization is that the graded system wherever applicable is the most efficient as well as the most economical. Whenever any considerable number of pupils of varying attainments are brought together, it is evident that they will naturally fall into groups, each of which will consist of individuals whose condition in point of intellectual growth and advancement in studies is nearly the same. This natural grouping of pupils, promoted by the practical unanimity which prevails in every community as to the kind of studies which shall engage the efforts of children at successive periods of their development, furnishes a basis for a gradual classification of pupils in the schools. Upon examination of the subject it will be seen that the gradation of pupils on this basis, with the assignment of teachers to appropriate grades, is merely the employment in school administration of the principle of division of labor, the use of which in industrial pursuits has so many times multiplied the productive energies of the world.

The first beneficent result of the adoption of this system is a great increase in the length of each recitation period. Fifteen children properly classified can be instructed as profitably together as if each individually were to receive the undivided attention of the teacher. A second advantage consists in the fact that each member of the class brings to it first the information derived from his own study, and second the difficulties which he has met in the preparation of his lesson. The presentation and discussion of this information contributed by each to the common fund, together with the resolution in class of the difficulties which each has met, must have the effect of producing a thoroughness and breadth of knowledge otherwise unattainable. A third and possibly the most marked benefit of such classification is the wholesale emulation which it induces.

With insufficient knowledge of the ultimate value of the studies which they are pursuing, very few pupils will work upon their lessons eagerly unless they feel the stimulation of a desire to equal or surpass the efforts of their fellows. The organization of the school into grades, then, not only multiplies the teacher's efficiency many fold by enabling her to instruct as many classes of well graded pupils as she could individuals who were not so graded; but aside from considerations of economy of effort, it is seen to possess advantages of other kinds which can not easily be over-estimated.

Although far superior in its practical results to any other method of school organization which has been brought into prominence, yet the graded system as commonly observed has been charged with defects and limitations. The most serious of these grow out of the practical assumption that pupils who are classified together are really equal in natural ability and preparation for the work in hand. The strong and the weak, the quick and the slow, are made to travel at the same pace, with the effect of cooling the ardor and destroying the ambition of the one and discouraging even possible effect in the other. This very apparent defect can be removed only by recognizing the fact that all pupils are not physically or mentally of the same mold and fibre. This recognition will lead to a frequent sifting and readjustment of the grades, taking the strong and able pupils from a lower class and placing them in a higher, where for a time at least they may exercise to the full their brighter abilities side by side with pupils of duller intellects who yet have the advantage of maturer development as well as of longer study in preparation for present work.

The classification of pupils in these schools has been made in such a way as, so far as possible, to carry out this view. Instead of a single reclassification at the close of the year, two are regularly made, one at the close of each half year. In addition also to these regularly appointed readjustments of classes, provision is made for the transfer at any time of pupils from lower to higher or from higher to lower classes, as evidence is presented to justify such change.

Each of the eight grades in the schools is thus subdivided into two

classes, an A and A B. The arrangement thus adopted makes them sixteen successive steps in the course preparatory to the high school. The flexibility produced by these more frequent readjustments thus relieves the graded system, in large measure, of the most serious criticism that can be charged against it.

EXAMINATIONS AND PROMOTIONS.

No other feature of public school administration is at this time receiving so much adverse criticism, both inside and outside the ranks of teachers, as the system of written examinations that has so long been employed. It cannot be denied that this method of testing the fitness of pupils for promotion has been applied too exclusively, with the effect of turning the minds of pupils into lumber rooms for the cramming of crude knowledge which they cannot assimilate, and of frittering away the energies of teachers in the exhaustive task of examining papers.

But with the tendency to extremes which is so characteristic of the American people, there is danger that the pendulum may be made to swing too far in the opposite direction. Indeed there has already arisen in many places a demand to do away entirely with this "effete system." To turn from too much examining to no examining would, I believe, be simply to substitute one bad practice for another. This hostility to written examinations undoubtedly comes about from a wrong conception of their function.

The purpose of examinations is not chiefly to test the knowledge of the pupils, as it is commonly regarded; that purpose may incidentally, to be sure, be subserved by them; but from the knowledge of each pupil's character, ability and comprehension of the subject, derived from daily class recitations, the competent teacher will be able to determine with precision his fitness to undertake more advanced work. To make such determination the formal examination of pupils is not necessary, and therefore should not be employed. But the proper use of the examination is as a disciplinary exercise, and as such when judiciously given it has a real educational value, not to be dispensed with.

When the pupil knows that the lesson he is preparing is to be called for after today, he will prepare it in a way very different from that which would serve his purpose for the ensuing recitation.

But not only is more thorough preparation secured by the expectation of an examination, but the latter itself is a most wholesome drill for the pupil in requiring him to take a comprehensive view of what he has studied, to concentrate and hold his thought upon a definite subject, to give expression in his own language to knowledge which he has gained, and to transfer to paper his thought in well-arranged sentences, requiring careful mechanical execution.

In these schools then, while not used for the purpose of affording the most important evidences of a pupil's capability to enter higher classes, written examinations are still employed from a belief in their value to the pupil.

GOVERNMENT AND DISCIPLINE.

In no direction, it is believed, have the results of the new dispensation been more satisfactory than in the im-