

convenient means of forming bad habits, but how are good habits to be formed? The means to this result are equally simple, but they must be persistently used. Frequent exercises in copying and dictation which are to be examined and rigidly corrected will after a time result in the formation of habits. There should be a minimum of written work required, but it should be chosen with a definite purpose.

Boston has had its season of running wild over written work in primary schools. There are strong indications that the tide has turned, but it takes time to counteract so violent a movement. Over and over again I have visited schools where the main object seemed to be to keep children busy with the slate and pencil and where the quantity of the work and not the quality was commended by the teacher.

Granted, then, that the preparation for composition work in its simplest forms consists first in the child's power to express himself orally in complete sentences, and second, in the ability to write in the proper form from a copy or from dictation, we next ask how much of the child's school life shall be devoted to acquiring these habits? Roughly speaking, much can be done toward establishing them in the first two years, and very little is gained by attempting any written work outside of this in these two years. During the next year the same work should be continued, but the child may also spend a comparatively small part of the time devoted to written language in answering questions in his own words, in reproducing brief stories or fables, guided at first by the teacher, sentence by sentence, and finally—because the sentence habit has been established he may be left to himself to reproduce in writing what he has

shown himself capable of reproducing orally. He may also write simple letters, guided at first by the teacher, sentence by sentence, in the expression of his thought, and finally, left to himself, he may write upon certain topics agreed upon beforehand.

In the lower grammar grades, that is the fourth, fifth and sixth years of a child's school-life, this work should be continued and reproduction in writing from topics of lessons previously discussed orally may be introduced. In the higher grammar grades the pupils may attempt essays upon subjects connected with the school-work or upon any other topics which interest them.

If the objection is urged that this plan is too limited and cramps the child's originality, it may be said in reply that there are ample opportunities in the school-room, both in lessons and friendly conversation, to encourage and develop the child's individuality, without running the risk of developing habits of careless written expression, which is inevitably the case, as some of us know by sad experience, when the average child does much unaided writing.

Why is the composition hour so often an occasion of childish misery? Why do most healthy children "hate" compositions? Is not the opportunity to tell what we know and care about in and of itself a pleasant and desirable thing? I think it is, and I dare say that more of our children would think so if we used a little more common sense as regards our choice of subjects, and our methods of conducting the composition exercise.

In the choice of topics, two extremes are to be guarded against. One is the tendency to confine the composition work too closely to school matters, so that the child once within the four walls of the school-room finds no escape and sees no delightful, inti-