

## Visits to English Schools—III.

By G. U. HAY.

The pupils in our schools have home lessons to learn, perhaps not in all, but certainly in most of the schools in this part of Canada. The other evening I met a little maid carrying a load of six books strapped together. She told me she had a lesson to learn for the morrow from each book. If this was done with any kind of thoroughness, it would take considerable time from the child's recreation hours. If it was done by other pupils of the same school a larger portion of the time of the teacher would be taken up in hearing and marking recitations instead of teaching. If the teacher spends an hour or two in her own preparation of the same lessons that are given to the pupils, there may be an advantage in giving home lessons in moderation. But it is not an advantage if the child has too many, and if the preparation of these saves the teacher the necessity of *teaching*.

In English elementary schools no home lessons are given to the pupil. A teacher may stimulate his more ambitious pupils to "look into" the subject-matter of a lesson at home, or a pupil may do so of his own free will, but there appears to be no compulsion exercised in the matter.

In a village school where I spent a few hours, a young teacher was giving an oral lesson on history. No text-books are used in history in English elementary schools, so far as I could learn, but the teacher gives orally stories of leading events. The class was composed of boys of the sixth standard, about ten or eleven years of age. The story told by the teacher was an incident from Nelson's victory of the Nile. The pupils were expected to listen attentively and reproduce the story in their own words. The teacher had evidently caught the spirit of battle, for he repeated with considerable unction at every interval where he seemed to lose the thread of the story, or to be at a loss for suitable ideas, "Our fellows licked the French," a sentiment that each young Briton before him religiously reproduced when it came to his turn to give a version of the story. The teacher had referred several times to "Napoleon Bonaparte, the French admiral, and the little chap, his son Casabianca," and gave a dramatic finish to his story by reciting how "the admiral's flagship 'L'Orient,' blew up with the little chap Casabianca at his post on the deck." No explanation was given of the memorable part of the

incident—that Casabianca was at his post in obedience to the orders of his dying father, nor was there a hint of the heroism of the boy and his sacrifice to duty. After the class was dismissed, I ventured to hint to the teacher that Napoleon was not Casabianca's father, and that the illustrious general was not even in the battle of the Nile. I hope the teacher has reconstructed his story by a closer examination of the facts, which he could have done in the first place by some thoughtful preparation of his work.

In this village school and in others that I visited, the first hour of the morning was taken up by the principal in giving religious instruction. On this day he impressed very clearly the duty of obedience, the duty to God and to one's neighbour, the being honest and faithful, and avoiding every appearance of sin and the lusts of the flesh. He spoke of the care of God for every one of us, in keeping us in health and providing us with the good things of life. There was nothing approaching to any dogma or creed in the teaching of that particular morning, and its simplicity and directness impressed me.

In the infant department of this school there was more of an approach to kindergarten methods than we usually see in the first classes of our primary schools. All the teaching was done from objects. A class in number was adding and subtracting by means of small shells in figures above ten—or at least the teacher was doing it for them. The little ones, between the ages of four and six, could of course have no conception, except in a few individual cases, of what they were attempting to do.

In the principal's room two classes were being taught at the same time, which led to considerable confusion. The desks and furnishings of the room were of Spartan plainness and simplicity—wooden benches and desks which made a harsh grating noise every time they were moved, which was frequently, along the stone floor; the stone walls of the room were ornamented with a few pictures, chiefly on religious subjects, and antiquities, none of them of a cheerful nature, and none having references to characteristics of the country, or of its institutions, except the picture of the King and Queen. The school was situated in the midst of what may be justly regarded as the most beautiful scenery of England, and yet the building was the most hopelessly plain in its exterior and interior furnishings of any I saw in the village.

Plain English people perhaps think anything is