

Graduating Thesis

Subject, Lasting Progress
of the Public Schools.

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The question of public schools is one that interests the people of our land more than any other subject. The schooling of 85% of our population never goes beyond that gained in the public school. No other organization has a greater influence on civilization. Its progress has been rapid and its influence has been lasting.

It is easy for a reformer or an advocate of improvements in school methods to convince himself and perhaps others that the old education is so inferior to the new that it may be considered as almost a failure, but with due study we are led more and more to respect the old education without even doubting the superiority of the new. The old education was good in a manifold number of ways but the new is better

in as many more. Good scholars were doubtless made in the little country schools of seventy five years ago, where one teacher taught everything from the "A.B.C's" to logarithms and Latin; but those scholars were made in spite of, and not on account of their surroundings. With each improvement of the school of today education is made more perfect and may be obtained with greater ease.

It is interesting to notice the evolution of the public schools. Its growth has made very much the same progress as many other factors of civilization. Originally the more intelligent and well-to-do families employed a teacher for the children of the household. An example of this may yet be found in the home of our National Executive. Soon, by general consent several families employed such a person to instruct their

children in common. This latter form also ~~exists~~ even to the present time. We find the private schools even in our own city. The public school soon grew out of this; with the new principle providing for the education of children whose parents could not or would not furnish them educational advantages. In many parts of the country the public schools are yet in their infancy; but for the most part they are in thorough working order under the supervision of the city, the district, the county or the state. They are governed by school laws of the state and nation and are supported by a permanent school fund; which consists of a general school tax, embracing state, county, township and district taxes increased by miscellaneous sources such as fines, licenses, gifts &c.

Under such circumstances they have flourished exceedingly. Until today there is a total enrollment of about 16 million pupils in the whole school order. "It has been estimated that sixty-nine out of every one hundred of the population between the age of five and eighteen years are enrolled. At this rate of attendance the entire population receives schooling on an average of a little less than five years of two hundred days each. In some states this average falls as low as two years while in others it rises as high as seven years!

Considering the public school proper which we find constitute 88 percent of the whole school order the total enrollment has increased from less than seven millions in 1870 to nearly fourteen millions at the present time. Such is the progress in numbers of our grand school system.

Statistics from the United States Commissioner of Education, 1897.

The cost has increased with no less marked rapidity: from sixty three million to one hundred and sixty five million per annum.

This increase, of course, is due to several causes chiefly: the cost of building and apparatus; higher wages for teachers and the great general spread of the public school system. The growth of villages and cities gives us the graded school in its extended form, which necessitates more and larger buildings, supplied with the later Educational appliances: such as maps, globes, charts, libraries etc.; saying nothing of the extensive laboratory methods which are slowly making their way into our schools. The special rooms such as the kindergarten and the primary must be supplied.

One of the latest and most popular movements, yet a pronounced item of expense, is the County

uniformity and district ownership of the textbooks. The larger schools call for an increase in the length of the school year, and demand a professional teacher for each grade. The rural schools in sparsely settled districts still continue the practice of holding winter schools of short terms, taught by inferior teachers. In such places the inducement for learning are always very limited. For the proper progress this constant growing expense cannot be avoided.

As any successful organization develops it becomes more and more systematized in its work. Thus we find an element of progress in the grading of schools. The professional teacher will no longer permit more than one in a day's program than there are children in the room. Uniformity of Textbook aids greatly in grading any school for

supposing there is a class ready to take up the fourth reader, and there are as many different text-books among them as there are members in the class, it is practically impossible to establish any satisfactory grade line unless some certain author's book has been taken as a basis of such grading.

The best work in this line depends some what upon the good judgment and genius of the teacher. The proper classification and promotion from one grade to another, is a novent idea yet it will never leave our school system.

The modern school is characterized by its improved methods of instruction. Its purpose is as broad as the nature of the child and is determined by it. The successful teacher must go far beyond the simple knowledge as shown by his certificate

He must study each child under his instruction and understand the psychological development of the human mind.

Instead of seeing in the boy or girl just entering the primary only one more to be watched while traveling the weary way through a half dozen readers; languages and mathematics to a limited extent; One book of geography or history; and then to be turned out as one who is educated - he sees the child in the process of becoming a citizen subject to the demands of the future, in the various complicated relations of life. He sees the child as body, mind, and soul each a sum of undeveloped capacities and powers for which he is responsible.

To set a task in geography or arithmetic and see that it is learned and recited is one thing; but to use these studies to train the child to observe, to

imagine, to feel, to reason and to will, is quite another and different thing. Education is something more than "book learning".

The child has such faculties as perception, conception, judgment and reason; to be educated he must be able to use these faculties.

As regards the government of children, the spirit of the schools has changed even more than that of the home. Only a few years ago corporal punishment was not only common but was regarded as beneficial even in large amounts, for the proper education of children.

Today cruelty or severity is repugnant and fast becoming intolerable to the modern mind.

It is well understood that the instructor of highest ability never strikes a blow upon the trembling body of a helpless child. Any teacher who does will mentally if not orally utter an apology.

as a confession of his weakness. The "birch" and the "femur" are no longer conspicuous schoolroom ornaments, flowers and pictures have taken their place.

School "masters" and "floggers" have given way to gentle intelligent teachers, who rule by love and companionships. The pupils are treated more as equals and not as subordinates. Public opinion heartily endorses the present methods. The press aided by lecturers and scientific and literary associations continually denounce any system that is so far from the "Law of love" as some of our past school governments have been. Past experience teaches that very little true education ever came from the use of the rod. The old regime will never be restored - Once gone it is gone for ever. Such progress

knows no retrogression.

By what means have these improved methods been accomplished? The child from the age of five to fifteen years is very much the same as the child of that age fifty years ago.

He now goes to school for education the same as children always have done; but he gains much more than former schools had within their power to give him.

It is to the teacher that we look for still greater improvements.

"As the teacher, so the School"

Other things have their influence but are governed, to a very great extent by the teacher himself.

A broader and more practical education is essential. The time is not far distant when all teachers of our public must be graduates of our higher institutions of learning.

As woman's culture rises and her work becomes more efficient, it is shown more conclusively how unjust have been the discriminations against her in this field of work where her services are even more valuable than man's.

Our American public schools today owe their high standard in no small measure to the noble character, enthusiasm and devotion of women, who make teaching not only a means of remuneration but in addition make it a mission service of love for the work and for children.

It must be conceded that the mother is the most potent factor in the ^{proper} development of the child. Woman's work is especially the care of the home and of children.

Men have their place in Education. They make stronger

workers in our colleges. It is easily proven that they predominate in the professors' chairs in all the higher institutions of learning. Our own grand institution has but four lady teachers in a faculty of twenty three members. This perhaps is no exception to the rule. In schools of this kind however the littles are not taught. Students are now in the deeper world of study. They are realizing that they are working for themselves. They are no longer in need of kinder influences.

School progress has welcomed women into the ranks, and our lower seats of learning will never be found without her.

She has had little place in the schools of the past. She now holds equal place with man. In 1893-4 there were employed 122,056 male teachers, and 260,954 female.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ (Statistics of Commissioner of Education, 1893)

There has been a constant decrease in numbers of male teachers since 1880, while the number of female teachers has increased 75% during that period. In the future she will be found as the most prominent of all instructors for children.

The question of licensing teachers is an important step to be noted in the progress of our schools. We are working toward a uniform system. At the present time we can simply report rapid progress in this line. Our method is far from being perfect. Some states have no uniformity even within the county. Simply leaving the whole matter in the hands of the various boards of examiners. The system used in this state is perhaps one of the best. beginning with the County Certificate issued for one year, it extends to a state life certificate. This

shows progress indeed compared with the oral examination given by a district in rural schools of sixty years ago.

One of the principal disadvantages under which the schools are laboring, is the difficulty of securing and maintaining good professional teachers on account of the comparatively small salaries paid and the tenure of office.

Civil Service reform promises not to counteract both these difficulties. If so, the school of the future will have one great obstacle removed from their pathway.

Our whole progress in the best schools of today is towards the true education in which the intellect and the body are trained together. The former being the Elements of Education which in the first steps are the same for every child. The latter the training in gymnastics - which

may as well be the use of the tools of a trade as any other - perhaps better. If it were absolutely certain that a child of the humble laborer was never to have an opportunity to rise above the position in which he is born, it might not be advisable for the state to expend time and money in giving him other than the manual training aided incidentally by teaching him the "three R's." But who has power so infinite as to look into our public schools and say with any degree of certainty; "this boy will never become a Franklin or a Lincoln."

Similarly if it were certain that a child would never use a tool; that his hands might never show the marks of toil, any manual training might well be dispensed with. - But "kings may fall" - The child of any American

citizen is very sure sometime in his life to find an opportunity for practicing the arts which he may have partly learned while yet in the public school.

Every child should be so instructed that he may find no lack in his primary training that will serve as an obstruction to such upward progress as his talent, his ambition, and his enterprise enable him to attain.

The amount of schooling given every American citizen teaches him how to read. The great libraries and current literature furnish him what to read. In order to digest all this the knowledge gained in the public school is of vital importance. It is the starting point of an education which will end only with life.

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