

SCHOOL LIBRARIES.

THERE is one function of our public schools which ought not to be overlooked by those who desire to see things in the large, to study tendencies, and to mark movements of progress or retrogression in our civilization: that function is to furnish compensations, to redress wrongs, to restore the balance. So near does this great system, without centralization, without uniformity, come to being the free, spontaneous, and full expression of the living organism of the nation that if one watches any widespread movement in the public schools, any reform, any new departure which is not local, but sporadic all over the country, one may pretty surely see in it an indication of popular thought, and not the theory of certain zealots, or the imposition of some master hand. For, in the effort of the people to right itself, the public school is almost necessarily called upon as an instrument to effect the readjustment.

For example, the kindergarten is not merely the demonstration of a philosophical theory regarding the foundations of education: it is a practical measure to restore to large numbers of little children what has been lost out of their lives through the pressure of toil weighing more and more heavily upon the mothers of these children. Given such a reform of social conditions as shall make the humblest mother both a homekeeper and one trained in the lore of childhood, and it is within the bounds of possibility that the kindergarten should shrink into smaller compass. Again, the introduction of manual training schools would have been an anachronism when every boy spent a large part of his time out of school in the handling of tools, and when the apprentice system was in vogue. So also the teaching of sewing, even of cooking, in city schools is an attempt to compensate for the loss of training at home.

In all such cases there is, indeed, a perfectly natural relation of these studies to the rounded education of the child, yet the point we make is that the assumption of the training by the public schools is in consequence of the failure, for one reason or another, of the family or the industrial society to provide for such training, as these forces once did, and may do again under changed conditions. The same may be said of what is regarded as more intimately and fundamentally a part of systematic school education. What is the meaning of that most interesting movement, now gaining great headway, by which enduring and noble literature is ousting the commonplace and ephemeral reading books from our schools? Undoubtedly a very strong impulse has been given by the reasonableness of the change as soon as the attention of teachers and others interested in education has been called to it. But aside from doctrinal arguments, the argument drawn from practical experience has been very powerful. It has been seen that there is a decay in the habit of strong reading out of school; that the child who does not find the best books in his school work does not find them in his home, and between the two misses great literature altogether. So the school comes in to redress this wrong; it even gives the child fairy tales and nursery legends, because he hears them no longer at home; it goes on step by step and initiates him into the mysteries of literature, because in a vast number of cases the school-teacher is the only priest of literature.

The incorporation of the best literature into the regular school curriculum is leading inevitably to another great advance in the enrichment of the school. Formerly, when the reading for an entire course was packed into a mechanical

series of school readers, the apparatus for reading was very simple; and as these readers had little inspiration in them, they created no want, and no want thus had to be supplied. But it is the great function of true education to create wants, and the moment books which had inspiration in them found their way into the schoolroom the want began to be felt for more books, — for books which took up the parable and went on expanding and enlarging it. Therefore schemes were framed by which the public library should be made more distinctly an adjunct of the schoolroom, and for several years the reports of the most active superintendents have abounded with lists of books advisable to be read by pupils in school.

Now, great as has been the advance in the public library system, we are still more or less under the influence of the old traditionary view of the library as a storehouse of books. We have unchained books, to be sure, and the greatest public libraries in the country are, with few exceptions, lending libraries. But it is chiefly in the libraries based upon commercial considerations, like circulating libraries and those of mercantile associations, that readers are regarded as customers, and books are provided to meet the demand for a great many of the same kind all at once. In such libraries, a new and very popular book is not kept singly, but by the shelf-ful; and if ten persons want it on the same day, nine do not have to wait for the tenth to read and return it. It is plain that if all the teachers in the city are recommending a particular book to their pupils, and the public library has but one copy, it is the boy with fastest heels who will get it, and the rest may wait till he is done with it.

We have spoken of the public library, but there is another consideration which should not be overlooked. Just as the child is now doing much in the schoolroom which under other conditions would be done at home, so the poverty of the

home in the matter of books is likely to force the schools to make compensation. Indeed, the schools have hastened this movement by the widespread system of free textbooks. Once the child bought his books, and meagre as was the intellectual diet, yet the reader, the geography, the history, were his own, and often constituted the sole library possessed in his home. Now even this little supply has been cut off, and the city or town owns the books, and keeps them in use till they are worn out.

Again, therefore, we see the working of this law of compensation as a function of the public school system. The introduction into each schoolhouse of a collection of books to be borrowed and read by the children puts the pupils on the footing which children once enjoyed when a family collected books as a matter of course; and, rightly used, such school libraries will go far toward repairing the defect of homes without books. It was maintained with some sophistry, not long ago, in the *London Spectator*, that private collections of books were an anachronism; that it was as absurd for a man to buy a book when he wanted to read, with a public or lending library at hand, as to buy a horse and carriage when he wanted to drive, with a cabstand round the corner. What we believe may result from the widespread introduction of school libraries will be the ambition of one here and another there to own the best of the books he reads; and since he can borrow readily, he will naturally restrict himself in ownership to the books which he wishes to consult, or to read again and again.

It is a fact that the number of school libraries is rapidly increasing, and that the interest in them is widespread. California, Colorado, Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, and some other States are doing more or less, by direct or indirect appropriations and by legislation, to extend systems of libraries for schools. Missouri has a

"Library Day," when collections are taken for school libraries. In other States where there has been no special legislation, there are communities where collections of books are provided for the schools, and where people are making careful and intelligent studies of the growing body of good literature for young people. Publishers are studying the rapidly increasing demand for this kind of literature, and are causing teachers to be more exacting in their demands.

It is not to be supposed that this new movement is absolutely a new one. The idea of school libraries is an old one, and was long ago put into practice. It is the concerted movement and the closer relation to new methods of education that render this revival of importance.

When Wisconsin¹ was admitted to statehood in 1848, a large proportion of its most influential citizens were vigorous men, in the prime of early manhood, from central and western New York. In their schooldays libraries had been placed in nearly every school in New York. The volumes of these collections were excellent in character, and even when somewhat weighty in substance had attracted and inspired the more active-minded and ambitious young people of the schools, although they had proved too difficult to interest the smaller pupils. The influence of these men from New York led to the insertion of a clause in the constitution of Wisconsin which provides that part of the school fund income annually apportioned by the State shall be used for the purchase of a "suitable library" for each common school. In the early days of the State the school fund was small, and meagre libraries were bought. The volumes were copies of the books used in the New York libraries, but they were presented to a different public. Large numbers of Germans and Scandinavians were plotting the lands of the

new commonwealth into farms. They and their children were learning a new language, and the books of the libraries contained too many unfamiliar words. And so it came about that the expenditures for libraries gradually diminished. The simpler books soon disappeared from the libraries first purchased, and with their loss nearly all the interest in school libraries faded out.

In 1887 the teachers of the State secured a law authorizing town officers to use certain moneys for township library funds. These funds were to be used to buy township libraries which were to be sources of supply for district schools. The volumes drawn by the districts were to be collected and redistributed occasionally, in order to give each district an opportunity to use all the books belonging to the central library. The books purchased for this library were to be selected from lists prepared by the state superintendent of education.

The first libraries procured under this law contained too large a proportion of difficult books; but this proved a means of securing better selections in later years. When the town officers attempted to collect and redistribute the books, they found teachers reluctant to turn back certain volumes which had proved of daily service in the schools. This suggested the thought that enough copies of such books should be purchased to supply each school. This change proved so satisfactory that the districts are practically obtaining permanent school libraries. The unwillingness of town officers to make the rounds of the town, collecting and redistributing, has aided to bring about this result.

Recent lists of books recommended by the state department of education do not contain the titles of more than one eighth as many books as were found in the first lists. While the law has not been compulsory, it has secured the interest of Public Instruction at Madison, Wisconsin, for the interesting facts here recorded.

¹ The writer is indebted to Mr. F. A. Hutchins, Library Clerk, office of State Superintendent.

roduction of libraries in more than one half of the rural schools of the State. It has induced teachers to buy more books for school and private use, and has led them to buy more intelligently. It has provided more and better libraries in the city and village schools, and has incited an active interest in the matter of supplying good reading to young people.

Such a movement as this should be followed with the closest attention, that it may not, as in earlier instances, be started with enthusiasm, and then gradually lose its impetus. We do not think this will be the history, because, as we have pointed out, the movement has a deeper relation than previous ones to the actual condition of educational methods. But in order to its success not only should teachers and superintendents take a lively interest in the libraries; there

should be a systematic endeavor to enlist the intelligent interest of pupils. That is to say, there should be a certain amount of formality in the treatment of the libraries. Regulations, not too petty, but looking toward the dignity of books, should hedge the use. The devices of larger libraries should be employed, not in the way of incumbering the administration, but of making it orderly. It would be well, indeed, if care were taken in the choice of editions, so that the scholarly treatment of books by editors and publishers should stand for value in the eyes of buyers and users. In a word, these libraries may well be made to conduce to the love of good books in good form, so that out of this movement shall spring individual regard for literature, and that educated interest in books which marks a high degree of civilization.

H. E. Scudder.

SPECTACLED SCHOOLBOYS.

ORDINARY people are in the habit of regarding with some misgivings the constantly increasing use of spectacles. In earlier days, these rather unsightly lenses were reserved mainly for old age; and it is not without sadness that the uninitiated see innocent schoolgirls and sturdy schoolboys disfigured with these appendages. We had learned to speak with some compassion of the spectacled German nation as having fallen, perhaps by excessive tobacco-smoking and overstudy, into a state of possibly hereditary debility of sight, usually associated with the "slipped pantaloons;" so that the picture of a whole schoolful of children carrying the "satchel," with "spectacles on nose," seems incongruously to mix the symbols of the extremes of the seven ages. But we must learn to correct these old-world notions.

Mr. Williamson, the president of the ophthalmological section at the annual meeting of the British Medical Association, recently held at Newcastle, looks forward with hopeful satisfaction to a time when, as an evidence of increasing knowledge among the people and advancing civilization, we may ultimately reach a position in which "a man who goes about with his eyes naked will be so rare that the sight of him will almost raise a blush." The prejudice against glasses is still so strong that in some cases and in some public services a man may not wear them at work, even when they give him perfect sight. But this prejudice is lessening, and many people are inclined to think that the more men learn of the complexity of the mechanism of the eye as it is now studied and understood, and the more they recognize the