THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE REPUBLIC.

[Thirteenth Paper.]

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS.

THE conception of a community so generally educated that each one of its members should know and fulfill all the duties of a good citizen, should obey the laws without constraint, and practice humanity, honesty, and propriety, should be trained to virtue, and cultivate self-control, is one that has suggested itself to most eminent legislators from the dawn of history, and is, indeed, so engaging a notion as to commend itself to every intelligent mind. The ignorant must be governed by rude violence; the cultivated rule themselves; and the fertile fancies of the Greek thinkers were early filled with projects for enforcing a universal education. None of them, however, succeeded except perhaps the Spartan legislator.[1] The idea made no strong impression upon the Romans. It was adopted by the Israelites and the early Christians, and was almost perfected in China. The Arabian caliphs founded a school in every village.[2] Charlemagne and Alfred strove to teach the savage Germans and Saxons. The Papal Church of the Middle Ages taught in its monasteries; and the private schools of Erigena, Gerbert, Abelard, Duns Scotus, and a series of early school-masters saved education from sinking into monastic dullness. But the true parent of the modern system of teaching was the Reformation. Luther urged upon Germany the necessity of general instruction,[3] Calvin filled his followers with mental activity, and it was in the Protestant states of Germany that the governments first assumed the task of educating all the people, and of fulfilling that conception of the duty of legislators which had dawned upon the active intellects of Greece. The government became the school-master, the nation a community of pupils. Prussia, Saxony, and several of the lesser states have carried on the theory to a wide limit. No one is suffered in Prussia to go without an education. In many districts it is impossible to find a person who can not read and write. Yet it must be remembered that it is only since the beginning of the present century that Prussia has made its chief advance in education; that it was after the disasters and the shame of the Napoleonic invasion that the king, the queen Louisa, and the minister Stein renewed the public schools, emulated the zeal of Pestalozzi and Zeller, and forged that intellectual weapon which was to cleave the armor of their triumphant foes, for it is allowed that the common schools and their teachers have chiefly produced the unity and progress of the German race.

The idea of popular instruction was brought to the New World by our ancestors in the seventeenth century, and has here found its most appropriate home. Puritan, Hollander, Huguenots, and Scots or Scottish-Irish, they had seen that most of their sufferings and persecutions had sprung from ignorance and blind fanaticism. They had become in Europe the most intellectual and studious of its people, and, amidst the bleak forests of New England and the middle colonies, planted almost at their first landing the printing-press and the school. Knowledge they thought the proper cure for social evils. It was the school-master and the school-house, they believed, that could alone save them from sinking into barbarism, and revive a more than Attic refinement in the dismal wilderness. Massachusetts and Connecticut early passed laws that might seem severe even to our present conception of the duties and powers of the State. Every father of a family was obliged under a considerable penalty to see that his children were taught to read and write, and were instructed in the elements of morals and religion. The provision was apparently enforced, and it is possible that the people of New England in the seventeenth century were better educated than those of any European nation. In the present century Germany has outstripped Massachusetts. But the honorable race is still to be run, and it may be hoped that the next and all succeeding centuries will witness a generous strife among the nations which can do most to cultivate the popular intellect. As school-masters alone can legislators hope to be successful. Mental equality is the foundation of popular sovereignty, and we must conclude with the Greek philosopher that no political institutions can be made lasting without the cement of a common education.

In the American plan of education the national government has no further share than to give liberally from its public domain to the State or Territorial schools, and by its Educational Department at Washington to collect and distribute important information.[1] Each State controls its schools in its own way, directs the course of education and the formation of the school-districts, sometimes prescribes what is to be taught, provides the way in which the school funds are to be raised, and governs by general laws. The local municipalities levy the school taxes and elect the school officers. These officers appoint the teachers and fix their salaries, build school-houses, govern and support the schools. Thus the people of each school-district choose their own school officers, and the schools are wholly under popular rule—the true source of their rapid growth and general excellence.

---

[1] Plutarch, Numa, asserts that "the fair fabric of justice" raised by Numa passed away rapidly because it was not founded upon education. Education was the leading principle of the institutions of Zaleucus and Pythagoras. Plato in the Republic, Aristotle in his Politics, enforce the same conception.

[2] Renan, Averroes, chap. i., describes the flourishing literary condition of Spain under the Arabs. And Charlemagne perhaps emulated the free schools of Haroun-al-Raschid. See Eginhard, Vita Caroli Imp., c. 33.

[3] Luther said if he were not a preacher, he would be a teacher; and he thought the latter the more important office, since, he lamented, it was easier to form a new character than to correct one already depraved.

In no part of the Union has education been so carefully and assiduously cultivated as in New England, and nowhere have its results been so important and remarkable. Wealth, industry, and good order have followed in its train. Massachusetts, although its soil is sterile and its climate severe, maintains a larger population in proportion to its territory than any other State. All New England is prosperous beyond example; and it has ever been the custom of its chief statesmen to attribute this rapid progress and general activity to the common schools. Of the early New England teachers Ezekiel Cheever, almost in the dawn of its history, holds a conspicuous place. Cotton Mather compliments him as the civilizer of his country. He was a scholar, learned, accurate, judicious; a severe and unsparing master, tall, dignified, and stern. He taught in the middle of the seventeenth century in Connecticut, and was afterward transferred to Boston, where he died at ninety-four. He was the founder of schools, and three generations of intelligent men were formed by his careful hand. He gave the Latin school at Boston its early excellence, and his ardent labors as a school-master for seventy years justify Cotton Mather's unstinted praise. "Educated brain," we are told, "is the only commodity in which Massachusetts can compete with other States," and to its long line of eminent school-masters New England owes its wealth and progress. Yet it has only been by a slow and often doubtful toil that in its natural home American education has attained its final excellence. The wild new land before the Revolution was incapable of reaching more than the elements of knowledge. When it became free, its eminent men were all the firmest friends of education. The two Adamses and their associates in all the New England States felt that their labors in the cause of freedom were incomplete, and even useless, unless they could teach all the people the duties of good citizens. But even in Massachusetts until 1834 the common schools had been comparatively neglected, their means of support were insufficient, the teachers were often incompetent, the school-houses rude and inconvenient. But in New England the principle had always been admitted that it was the duty of the State to educate its children, and in 1834 a fund of $1,000,000 was raised in Massachusetts to aid the towns in their educational labors. From that time a steady progress has been observed not only in Massachusetts, but through all New England. Gifted and laborious educators have given their lives to the perfection of the common-school system. Mann, Barnard, and their able coadjutors have raised the New England States to a high rank among the communities that teach the people. A normal school was opened in 1839 at Lexington; Massachusetts has now six. Connecticut and Rhode Island have made equal progress. Yet it was only a few years ago that Connecticut still demanded *rates*, and that the school-houses of Rhode Island were still imperfect.[1] In some districts of New England poverty and the thinness of the population prevent the perfection of the system. In Madawaska, Maine, where the currency is in articles of trade, and the brief summer scarcely supplies the people with necessary food, they are aided by the generosity of their fellow-citizens and are wholly exempted from school taxes.

Massachusetts expends more money upon its schools than any other State in proportion to its population. Its teachers are better paid, its school buildings generally more complete, and its people more carefully instructed. Of 292,481 persons in the State between the ages of five and fifteen in 1873, the average attendance at school was 210,248, or more than seventy per cent.[2] The rate of attendance constantly increases, new schools are founded every year, new buildings provided, and the normal schools and colleges send out annually a succession of well-trained teachers. The whole population of Massachusetts is probably a million and a half. They laid out last year in the various expenses of the public schools $6,180,848 64, or about twenty-one dollars for each person of school age. A cheaper mode of education could in no way be devised. In private schools the cost of instructing as many children would be four or five fold, and the public schools of Massachusetts are already better than any private schools, or are rapidly becoming so. But even in Massachusetts a rigid compulsory law is plainly necessary. Its uneducated population give rise to three-fourths of its crime, and an influx of foreigners has already filled it with a dangerous, because uncultivated, class. Connecticut, which has recently set in action its compulsory law, is probably in advance of any other State in the rate of attendance.[1] It has long been a centre of manufactures and of inventive progress. Its wealth and influence increase rapidly, and its capitalists have discovered that the public school is the sure path to good morals and order among those who labor. Hence they encourage education, and press on the improvement of all the instruments of public teaching.

---

[1] Theory of Education, Washington, 1874, p. 10, etc. The generosity of the general government to the public schools has never wavered, and but for its foresight and liberality they might never have spread so rapidly over the new Territories.

[1] The fine engravings of new school buildings that adorn the latest educational report from Connecticut are worthy of general study. In fact, all the educational reports of the various States are full of interest.

[2] Secretary's Report, 1873-74, p. 113.

In New York the growth of the common-school system has been slow, and its advantages only reluctantly admitted. I shall review its progress briefly, since in no State has the struggle for victory been more laborious or the triumph of the friends of knowledge more complete.[2] There was always a desire for education prevalent among its people, even when they were no more than a band of trappers and traders, and an accomplished school-master was one of the earliest importations from the shores of Holland. The free school still exists, founded by the Reformed Dutch Church, in the city of New York, not long after Boston had been planted on its three mountains. The Dutch clergyman usually kept a school, and the Dutch immigrants were probably not altogether illiterate. But in the opening of the seventeenth century the idea of a common education for all the people was still a phantasm and a Utopian vision; it was scarcely thought possible, or even desirable, to teach the laboring classes or to raise a whole nation to an equality of knowledge. Through the colonial period, and for a long time after the Revolution, the people of New York possessed no means of education except a village school and an incompetent teacher, a college and a few classical seminaries, and its chief political leaders, as the State increased rapidly in wealth and population from 1787 to the close of the century, felt the pressing want of some method of general instruction.

George Clinton, Governor of New York in 1795, suggested and laid the foundation of its common schools. He was one of those discreet and rational intellects that had sustained his country through the Revolution with unchanging firmness, and had learned amidst its perils the value of mental progress. Like Washington, Jefferson, or Adams, he had discovered that an ignorant people could not be a free one; that the education of the wealthy class alone was fatal to human equality; and in his message to the Legislature of 1795, Clinton recommended to the people "the establishment of common schools throughout the State." It was a period when such a suggestion was so new and so surprising as to have little chance of general approval, and the conception of a State expending its revenues in teaching was scarcely heard of out of Saxony and Prussia. New England had in part developed the idea, but to the people of New York it was altogether novel. The State was poor, and still in its feeble infancy; the savages still occupied a large part of its domain west of Albany; its chief city was yet a small though rapidly advancing town; no great canal had joined the Hudson to the lakes, and the wealth of a continent had not yet found its natural outlet to the sea. But Clinton's suggestion was at once adopted by the intelligent Legislature, and a sum of $50,000 was set aside to be divided among the towns and counties in proportion to the number of their electors, and each county was required to raise by taxation a sum of money from every town equal to one-half the amount allowed by the State. Such was the foundation of the common-school system, and for a time it flourished with singular success. In 1798, in sixteen of the twenty-three counties, 1352 schools were already opened, and 59,660 children had received in them at least some share of the public tuition. But the limit of the appropriation expired in 1800, the schools were suffered to languish, and the system was practically abandoned.

Soon, however, two remarkable men took up the cause of education, and forced it upon the attention of the people. Jedediah Peck, of Otsego, a native of Connecticut, and Adam Comstock, of Saratoga, deserve to be remembered among the chief benefactors of New York. Peck was a plain uneducated farmer, a religious enthusiast, who exhorted and prayed with the families he visited; was modest, meek, diminutive in size, and almost repulsive in appearance; yet his active labors in the cause of knowledge show that he had not only cultivated himself, but was incessantly leading others. Comstock, not more highly educated, aided him with equal zeal. They asserted every where that freedom, morality, and religion could only be supported by general intelligence. They pressed their theme upon the Legislature and the people. Peck was anxious that a school fund should be provided, like that of his native State, Connecticut, and he found a ready ally in Governor Clinton, who in 1802 again urged upon the Legislature the renewal of the common schools. But the people were no longer willing to be taxed for the diffusion of knowledge. Political troubles were impending, the State was poor, and all that the friends of education could obtain was a grant of the proceeds of certain lotteries, known as "Literature Lotteries," or the sales of the State lands, and three thousand shares of the capital of the Merchants' Bank of the city of New York, to found the nucleus of the common-school fund. Twice Mr. Peck's bill to authorize the towns to tax themselves for school purposes failed in the Legislature. But a strong impulse toward general education had now been awakened in England by the success of the Lancasterian system: the Dissenters, and chiefly the Methodists, had lent their influence to a new effort to teach the poorer classes, and the movement was already felt in the New World. The city of New York in 1805 founded its free-school society, and the Mayor, De Witt Clinton, with many other patriotic citizens, gave his aid to the cause of the popular education with valuable assiduity. The Lancasterian system was introduced, and the free schools made considerable progress. De Witt Clinton, whose sincere zeal for science, art, literature, and freedom has affected the prosperity of his native State more, perhaps, than any other cause, and who lived to prepare and perfect a great engineering work, which for that early period seems almost incredible, must also be ranked among the most eminent of the friends of the common schools. He was never weary of urging forward mental progress, and filling the minds of his contemporaries with the conception of a complete form of national education.

---

[1] Connecticut attributes its inventive genius to the public schools established by its "fathers." See Report of the Commissioner of Education (Eaton), 1872, p. 47, and Connecticut Report of Board of Education, 1874. Of the effect of the compulsory law, says one school visitor, "In one of the largest villages I found the increase" (in attendance) "was sixty-seven per cent."

[2] Randall, Hist. Common Schools of New York. Boese, Hist. School System of the City of New York. New York State Reports. New York City Reports.

Peck, Comstock, and Clinton at last, after a brave contest against ignorance, were successful, and in 1812 a bill passed the Legislature of New York founding anew a common-school system that was to remain in action until 1842. A sum was given to every town for school purposes. The town was obliged to raise an equal amount by taxation. No district was to be left without its school-house, and no village without its teacher. The commissioners recommended the plan to the people by pointing to the necessary connection between knowledge and virtue, and by invoking the sacred name and authority of Washington. It was, in fact, in a period of singular gloom and public danger that the machinery of public education was first set in motion in New York. A barbarous war was raging on the frontier and over the seas; English cruisers swept the commerce of the republic from the ocean, and American privateers retaliated with more than common success. Poverty once more pressed upon the people. Yet in periods of public danger men see more clearly their true interests, and amidst the perils of war our ancestors founded the fairest of the fabrics of peace. Peck, Clinton, Comstock, were sustained by their fellow-citizens, and in 1813 Gideon Hawley became the superintendent of the common schools of New York. He was a young lawyer, active, intelligent, and cultivated in letters; and for eight years his energy and zeal kept alive the onward progress of education. Peace had returned; the vast resources of the State were slowly developed; the savages were removed from the interior counties; the famous wheat fields of the Mohawk and the Genesee rose into wonderful productiveness; a vast system of internal improvements was projected by Clinton that was to prove the source of boundless progress to the nation as well as the State. Yet the labors of the friends of education will probably outlive the material achievements of this busy period. And it is as educators that Hawley, Peck, and Clinton may be remembered in distant ages as the founders of the prosperity of New York.

The common schools advanced in general favor amidst much opposition. Hawley's vigorous hand kept them from falling into decay, as they had fallen in 1800. In 1819 there were already nearly 6000 school-districts, and it was estimated that almost 250,000 children had been placed upon their lists. In 1820, of 302,703 children of the proper age, 271,877 were taught in the schools. The number was still greater in 1821. Yet here the valuable labors of Gideon Hawley came to an end; a political opposition removed him from office, a person of inferior talent was put in his place, and thus New York repaid the services of its great benefactor by a cruel ingratitude. But the immense fabric which he had helped to rear could not now be torn down, and De Witt Clinton, the Governor of the State, resolutely pressed on the cause of education. The control of the schools was transferred to the Secretary of State, Yates, an intelligent and able man. The number of districts in 1822 was 7051, and 351,173, out of 357,000 children, had been taught during the year in the public schools. Joseph Lancaster visited the United States in 1818, and had been received by De Witt Clinton with signal interest, and his method of teaching was at that time the popular one; his presence at least gave new courage to the friends of knowledge, and the genius of Pestalozzi and the example of European educators were felt in New York. It was said that its education was even more general than that of Connecticut, which had a larger school fund, and where the common-school system had been longer in use.

Yet the idea of a free and public education for all classes of the people, a common source for all of equality and union, had not yet been openly avowed, and the division of castes was still maintained in the public schools. Those children whose parents were too poor to pay the rates were called charity scholars; in some districts they seem not to have been admitted at all to the schools. The right of every child to a free and full education by the community was seldom allowed. It may well be supposed, too, that the instruments of education were at this early period in its course (1822) very imperfect and rude. The school-houses were often bare log-huts in the country, or narrow and pestilential rooms in the cities and towns; the teachers were uncultivated and incompetent; the school-books worthless and worn; the whole fabric of education a vast misshapen pile that needed the skill of a master-architect to found it securely. Such a man was De Witt Clinton. To no single intellect is New York so widely indebted for its progress, vigor, and refinement; and in every part of his native State some trace of Clinton's energy and foresight may be found. He had just completed the great canal which had tested for so many years his courage and endurance amidst ceaseless opposition and unsparing assaults; he had seen the waters of Lake Erie mingle with the Hudson; he had been every where the founder of libraries, colleges, academies of design, and centres of art; and now he had been chosen Governor by a spontaneous impulse of a grateful people. One of his latest labors was to perfect the public schools. He urged (1826) the founding of schools for teachers, the extension of the course of study, the creation of school libraries, the increase of teachers' salaries, careful inspection, the higher education of women. None of those improvements that have since been adopted seem to have escaped his clear perception; and he founded all his projects upon a single principle. "I consider," he said, "the system of our common schools the palladium of our freedom."

Not long after, Clinton died suddenly. But his ideas live among us, and his successors have seldom shown any indifference to the cause of popular education. The statesmen of all parties have united in advancing the popular intellect. Spencer, Marcy, Dix, Flagg, aided in the organization of that immense scheme of public instruction which has ruled the fortunes of the State, and successfully resisted the assaults of various foes. In 1832 there were 9690 school-districts, and 514,475 children had been taught in the public schools. Only about ten thousand of the school age seem to have lost the advantages of education. But in the city of New York the extraordinary growth of the foreign population now began to lead to a struggle that was to rise into singular importance. For many years Ireland had poured out its excess of population upon New York, and the Irish immigrants had at first seemed willing and even eager to become thoroughly American and republican. They sent their children to the public schools, and were liberal and patriotic in politics. But unhappily a less discreet policy was advocated by their priests, who founded a number of private schools, and required that they should be supported by a donation from the public funds. The Irish population do not seem to have followed their guidance implicitly, and have always profited largely from the system of common schools. But Bishop Hughes urged on the sectarian contest with unyielding rigor, his priests and many of his people followed him, and already in 1840 that violent struggle had begun which seems fated to extend throughout the whole Union wherever the indiscreet counsels of the papacy can drive its Church into an opposition to the civil administration.

The question was whether the public schools should be converted into a series of sectarian institutions, whether each sect should have its own schools, whether the Bible should at least be excluded from the public teaching, or whether the common schools should resemble the government under which they had grown up, and take notice of no difference of religious or secular opinion. In the one case they must be remodeled upon the plan pursued in Europe; in the other, they must remain wholly American. In one, separate churches or sects would be recognized and maintained by our government; and in the other, the sects would be held in complete obedience to the civil law. The question was debated with earnestness. A single sect alone demanded a change in the principle of free education, and even of that one many of the most intelligent members were satisfied with the equity and liberality of the American system, and the common schools have retained their unsectarian character in spite of the ceaseless and often dangerous assaults of their foes. Still more important advances were now made in the material and nature of public instruction. From 1842 the system rose rapidly to a completeness which had scarcely been looked for. The cultivated zeal of the Hon. Horace Mann, from Massachusetts, lent new ideas and a fresh impulse to education in New York; and at a distinguished convention of superintendents and others, held at Utica in 1842, the various topics of the important theme were discussed with fresh animation. It was shown from recent statistics that crime decreased with the advance of education, and that the more perfect the schools, the less costly would be the prisons and the almshouses. It was shown that knowledge should be free to all the people, and that all the people should, if possible, be educated in the same schools. The defects of the common schools were pointed out—their imperfect buildings, uncultivated teachers, worthless books. Emerson, from Massachusetts, told of the value of the normal school which had been established in his own State, and showed that the teacher should be the highest and most cultivated of his contemporaries. Horace Mann enlarged with all the eloquence of his intellect upon the grandeur of the work in which they were engaged. And from the convention of 1842 education began to assume a more scientific form among us and to penetrate more deeply among the people.

A normal school was now (1844) established at Albany, the first of those excellent institutions which have raised our public teachers to a high standard, and which seem capable of being made the source of a great moral advance. The aim of the normal school is to produce a perfect teacher, to soften the manners, refine the taste, and cultivate the faculties of those intrusted with the care of children. Time has proved their usefulness, and may raise them to a still higher excellence. It is not impossible that our normal schools may at last educate our professors, and produce our most active men of letters. District libraries began now to be improved and widely extended, teachers' institutes were formed, the fabric of education was enlarged and amended; but the system was still in its infancy, and the principle of a common education provided by the state, and possibly enforced by it, had not yet become familiar to the people. The school-houses were still, in many districts, painfully rude; of 7000 only 2000 had more than one apartment, and in some counties they were wholly unfit for scholastic purposes. Instead of being the finest and most imposing building in every town and village, the school-house was often one of the rudest and least convenient. In many counties the school rates were still exacted, and parents refused to send their children to schools where they were looked down upon by their wealthier neighbors. The principle of free education had not yet been admitted in New York; and when the friends of education pressed upon the State Convention of 1845 the duty of the Legislature to provide for the instruction of the community by a general taxation, the motion was defeated, and the system of charity schools was maintained for another twenty years. It was not until the rebellion and the disasters of the civil war had forced men to see more clearly their own interests that an efficient and universal system of common schools was extended over the State.

For fifty years the idea of public education had been slowly unfolding itself in New York. The finest intellects of the State had been employed upon its development; from Peck and Clinton to Dix, Spencer, Seward, Young, Flagg, Greeley, Morgan, an endless array of accomplished citizens had joined in the school conventions, and lent aid to the growth of the intellect. Already in 1845 the Hon. Horace Mann could say, "The great State of New York, by means of her county superintendents, State Normal School, and otherwise, is carrying forward the work of public education more rapidly than any other State in the Union or any other country in the world." And the Hon. Henry Barnard, of Connecticut, thought its system superior in many particulars to any other he knew of. But the county superintendents were abolished in 1847, and the common schools began at once to decline. Their enemies were active, and a violent struggle arose upon the question of free education. A free-school act was passed in 1849, yet still clogged by rate bills and assessments. In many instances in the country wealthy property owners refused to be taxed for education. The free schools were assailed with new energy by their opponents, and the Roman Catholic editors demanded the repeal of the free-school law. They required the schools "to be subject to the clergy;" otherwise, said their leading paper, they will be "a source of demoralization and public nuisances." A large party joined the opposition to the schools. But the people rose in their defense. Fish, Hunt, Phelps, Wool, Nott, Greeley, and a throng of able men led the party of education. The elections of 1850 decided the question in their favor, and in 1851 the principle that the State must educate all its children was sanctioned in theory by the popular vote.

Meantime—for I must pass rapidly over the history of this great struggle of the intellect—within the next ten years the school-houses grew into convenient and costly buildings, supplied with all the requirements of careful tuition. The normal school gave out a succession of intelligent teachers. In 1861 there were 11,400 school-districts and 872,854 pupils; but it was noticed that the school libraries were neglected, and the books often wasted and destroyed. One normal school was not sufficient to supply with teachers ten thousand schools, and the odious rates were still exacted. The war came, and the graduates of the common schools were found among the foremost defenders of the Union; and amidst the terrors of a civil convulsion, roused by heroic ideas, the people of the State in 1862 threw off forever all the lingering prejudices of the past, and declared education free to all as the light of heaven. The common-school idea was adopted in all its limitless expansion, and the State proclaimed itself the mental parent of all its children. The people admitted that they had no higher duty than to see that no one should live among them without an education; but it was some time before they could learn that ignorance was a crime against society. From the declaration of the principle of universal public instruction the schools of New York have flourished in the midst of a thousand foes. The great influx of uneducated foreigners has exposed them to a mass of hostile voters. They have been assailed by secular and clerical influences, and have sometimes suffered from indifference and neglect. But the abolition of the rates and the improvement of the system have drawn in a growing throng of pupils, and already in 1869, 1,161,155 children had been taught in the normal schools, academies, colleges, and private schools of the State, and, what was somewhat disheartening to the friends of education, 300,000 between the ages of five and twenty-one had attended no school at all. An ominous cloud of ignorance had gathered under the very shadow of the common schools.

A compulsory law, passed by the Legislature of 1874, has completed, at least in theory, the public-school system of New York; and it is probable that succeeding generations will see nearly all their children gathered in the school-house and the academy. Nor does any where a more effective and imposing machinery for general education exist, nor does any community expend its money more bountifully upon the elevation of the popular intellect. New York gives $11,000,000 annually to public instruction. A free college in the city of New York is filled with the best students of the public schools. A fine normal school for female teachers adorns the metropolis; and in every part of the State the normal colleges produce every year a great number of accomplished instructors. The school-houses in the cities are often palaces of education, filled with the latest improvements in the art of teaching. The teachers' salaries are slowly advancing; the reputation of the profession rises with the higher cultivation of its members. Yet it must still be allowed that some errors have crept into the system, and possibly the whole theory of education may yet be in its infancy. The school-houses in the country districts are too often imperfect, unadorned, and rude. They should always be centres of taste, comfort, and convenience. In the city schools too many branches of knowledge are taught at once. It would be wiser to perfect each scholar in the simpler elements. If religion can not be taught in the schools, the moral nature should be especially instructed, and no pupil should leave the public care without having acquired the conception of kindness, gentleness, modesty, as well as mental power. In this the example of the teacher is the chief guide, and the highest literary culture and the purest characters should alone be suffered to form the dispositions of the young. Republican simplicity should be inculcated from the cradle—a contempt for European follies and the glitter and display of foreign barbarism. It may be hoped, too, that, through special schools, trades, industry, and all branches of labor will form at last a part of the education of every American.

Pennsylvania, like New York, has passed through a long struggle to reach its present educational advantages. It has also adopted the common-school system in its widest limit.[1] Its school property is of great value; it expends more than $8,000,000 annually upon its schools; it has no general school fund, and derives all its school moneys from taxation. It has seven State normal schools and a great number of excellent technical schools and private colleges. This wonderful community, enriched by the boundless gifts of nature, is also one of the most widely educated. The spirit of Franklin has ever filled it with mental activity. New Jersey is already emulating Pennsylvania and New York. Its common schools are fast rising in excellence. The four Middle States (for even Delaware has shown marks of progress) have already joined in a generous enthusiasm for knowledge.

But if we turn to the Southern portion of the Union, the prospect is less encouraging. It is not that the first settlers of the South were less intelligent or cultivated than those of the North. Some of them were Huguenots, learned, thoughtful, heroic in their devotion to their faith; some were Scottish-Irish; some Quakers, or Friends. The most intellectual races of Europe were represented on our Southern coasts. And after the Revolution, Washington, Jefferson, Henry, Lowndes, Gadsden, and Rutledge would have held it their noblest mission to spread knowledge among the people. But slavery intervened. The great designs of Jefferson and Gadsden were never to be perfected. With slavery a notion grew up that knowledge was only the privilege of the ruling class, and that tradesmen, mechanics, and slaves were better left in ignorance. While the Northern States seized upon the mighty engine of education to win ease and industrial progress, the Southern States suffered their free schools to perish, and even for their higher education looked to the North or to Europe. The rebellion threw open the South to a new intellectual movement; a system of common schools has been introduced into every Southern State; the colored and even the white laborers of the South are said to be anxious to make use of this opportunity to raise themselves by an intelligent education to the condition of men. Yet we are told by the report of the Commissioner of Education that the common schools are not favored by an influential class of the people. They seem to languish in most of the Southern States.[1] The condition of the Southern people is one of extreme ignorance. Of the 5,643,534 persons in the Union wholly "illiterate," 4,117,589 are found in the Southern States. Of course these "illiterates" are nearly all native born. The subject is one that may well employ all the intelligence and observation of the South, for it is education alone that can give good order and prosperity to its people. Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky are already laboring to provide a general and effective system of instruction. It is certain that the extension of common schools over the whole South and a general education of its people would double the value of its lands, and foster more than any thing else foreign immigration.

---

[1] Pennsylvania Report, 1873, p. 12. Only one district, a small one, was without its common schools in a population of 4,000,000. Pennsylvania has adopted the system of free education in its widest extent.

But if the common-school system has been forced to make its way slowly against the opposition of caste and sectarianism in the North and East, and was nearly banished from the South by the long prevalence of slavery, in the new States and Territories of the West and the Pacific coast it has won an almost immediate popularity.[2] Here among the settlers of the wilderness its value was at once perceived. The school-house, the church, the newspaper, telegraph, and railway have grown up together. Nowhere has the American plan of education been found so perfectly suited to the wants of a progressive people. Nowhere were ever such vast and complete educational systems so rapidly perfected as in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, or in the newer States of Minnesota and Iowa. Through all this wide, populous, and productive territory, the granary of half the world, caste and sectarianism have been laid aside forever; by a spontaneous movement of the people education has been made free to all; such great sums are lavished upon the teachers and their schools as naturally startle our European contemporaries, and the money of the people, which in Europe has been expended usually upon priests and kings, has here been devoted to the cultivation of those who earned it. Ohio spends nearly ten millions of dollars annually upon its public schools, Indiana and Illinois together a sum not much less. The fair, convenient, primary school house shines out upon the prairie and in the forest; the higher school houses of Chicago or Cincinnati are unsurpassed in New York or Boston; the science of teaching is carefully studied in a host of teachers' institutes, and with republican liberality the West and the great Northwest care for all their children.[1] This remarkable enthusiasm for education penetrates all the nation; it has become the distinguishing principle of American progress.[2] In the heart of the Rocky Mountains, and in the midst of the gold and silver bearing peaks of Arizona and Colorado, the free school is the sentinel of civilization. In Tucson or Denver the love of knowledge has survived the prevalence of what is usually thought the stronger passion, and the cities of the miners are seldom without their public school. The most splendid of our high school buildings is said to be that of Omaha, seated on a lofty bluff over the Missouri. California has produced a system of education so complete and valuable as may well serve as a model for all older communities; its teachers are made examples of propriety and tenderness, its scholars are taught integrity and moral excellence; sectarianism and caste are forbidden to divide the people, and the prosperous State is already feeling in all its industrial pursuits the happy influence of the common school.

Thus the American system of education pervades and covers every section of the Union. By the spontaneous impulse of the people it has been made the foundation of our political institutions. It has grown up with little direction from the general government. It has flourished in the cities and in the wilderness; it spreads its golden links from ocean to ocean, and holds in its embrace the destinies of the republic. A few statistics will show how immense is its influence and how important its results. By the census of 1870 it appears that an army of nearly 200,000 teachers conduct the public schools of the Union; of these, 109,000 are females. The number of schools was 125,000, and has no doubt largely increased. Fifty-eight millions of dollars[3] were raised in 1870 by taxation to educate the people—a sum nearly as great as the annual cost of a European army. There are also endowments and other sources of revenue, making the whole amount spent upon the common schools $64,000,000. The number of pupils in 1870 was more than 6,000,000. Thus the annual cost of each scholar enrolled was apparently only about ten dollars. Many of these pupils have attended only for a few months at the schools, others have been irregular and inattentive. Yet the fact that 6,000,000 children were brought under the control of the common-school system in one year, and learned some, at least, of the proprieties of life, is sufficient to show its immense influence upon the young; and it may be estimated that at least half the number were thoroughly instructed in the common branches of knowledge.

---

[1] So in Georgia they were closed in 1872. Report of the Commissioner of Education (Eaton), 1873, p. 69. And in Texas in 1873 they were "abolished," and have scarcely been re-established.

[2] Yet even in the Western States the labors of a series of patriotic men alone have saved the common school and university funds, and made education free. See Tenbrook, American State Universities, p. 141, and p. 118-120.

[1] In all these States a sectarian party exists, but the majority favor free education.

[2] See Ed. Report, 1873. Minnesota and Iowa are filled with the educational spirit.

[3] These figures must now (1875) be largely increased, and it is probable that $70,000,000 yearly are raised for school purposes by taxation alone, and the number educated has risen in proportion.

When we look over the returns of our illiterate population, of the great mass of ignorance that has grown up at the side of the common schools, we might at first conclude that our popular system of education had wholly failed. Few civilized countries present a more lamentable scene of intense and almost savage dullness. Our illiterate population over ten years of age numbers 5,600,000. And an unfriendly critic, the *London Quarterly Review*, April, 1875, seizes upon this singular contrast as a ground of attack upon the American system of teaching. Yet the assault fails wholly. The great mass of our illiterates are in the former slave territory, where the common schools were never suffered to come, and where a large part of the people were forbidden by law to learn even to read and write. Slavery has produced more than 4,000,000 of our illiterates.[1] Of the remainder, who live in the Northern and Western sections of the Union, one-half are due to the neglect of England to educate its poorer classes. Our German immigrants are nearly all well educated. The English and Irish can seldom read or write. Of the 1,300,000 illiterates in the Northern States, 665,000 are foreign born, and they come chiefly from Great Britain. Thus, excluding the former slave territory, we have only 690,000 native-born illiterates, and of these a large number are the children, no doubt, of foreign parents. If we allow 500,000 as the number of native-born Americans who have escaped the influence of the common schools, we shall not possibly fail in liberality. The people of the Free States number at least 26,000,000. Only one person out of fifty, therefore, among us has been untouched by the influence of the public school. Reaching over the wild wastes of the new States and the thick crowds of our cities, the common-school system, often imperfect and rude, has been almost as thorough and effective as the older systems of Germany and Holland.

Wherever it extends, crime diminishes, the morals of the community improve, and taste and culture flourish even in the wilderness. An absurd charge is sometimes raised against the public schools that they are "godless and immoral." Some recent statistics taken in Massachusetts show that eighty per cent. of its crime is committed by persons who have had no education, or a very imperfect one, that a still larger proportion have learned no trade, and that not far from seventy-five per cent. of its criminals are of foreign birth;[1] intemperance, the natural resource of ignorance, is the parent of the greater part of this crime, and ninety-five per cent. of it is hereditary, transmitted from depraved and uncultivated homes. A similar condition of things exists in New York and the Western States. If all the children of the community could be well educated and taught productive trades, crime would be diminished by more than one-half; and so effective already have been our common schools that they have reduced the criminal class among the native population to a small figure, and secured the peace of society. The reports show that uneducated foreigners produce three-fourths of the crime and pauperism of our large cities. It is plain that the money expended upon the public schools is not laid out in vain. The seventy millions we give annually to education is the wisest outlay a nation ever entered upon.

The influence of the common schools penetrates through all our social system, teaches equality and republican principles, offers the elements of commercial knowledge, and creates the reading public. The press plainly lives in the rapid progress of the teacher. Our common schools have produced a throng of readers, such as was never known before—countless, bountiful, and never satisfied. The periodicals and newspapers printed in the United States very nearly equal those of all the rest of the educated world. In 1870 it was estimated that 7642 were published in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and in our own country 5871.[2] Since that time our publications have increased, it is supposed, nearly to an equality with those of all the world besides, and our forty millions of people read as much as all the rest of the hundreds of millions upon the same globe who can read at all. To our free institutions much of this inquisitive spirit is due; but to the common-school system we owe the capacity of gratifying our curiosity and cultivating a general knowledge of the condition of our fellow-men. It is estimated that the number of copies of newspapers and periodicals printed in Great Britain in 1870 was 350,000,000, and an equal number in France.[1] The census returns show that in the same year 1,500,000,000 copies were printed in the United States. Our readers consume and pay for a periodical literature twice as great as that of the two populous centres of European civilization; and the census reports show how closely the progress of a demand for newspapers is connected with the advance of the common schools. Where there are no public schools, there are no newspapers; where the teacher leads the way, the press follows. In uneducated Georgia, for example,[2] with a population of nearly 1,200,000, there are only 123 newspapers and periodicals; in Massachusetts, with a population of nearly 1,500,000, there are 280. The circulation of the newspapers of Georgia is 14,447,388; of Massachusetts, 107,691,952. In educated Ohio the annual circulation was, in 1870, 93,000,000 in a population of 2,662,681. In uneducated Texas, fivefold as large as Ohio, with a population of 885,000, the circulation was 5,813,432. Only seven copies of a newspaper are printed yearly in Texas for each inhabitant; in Ohio, 35; in Massachusetts, 74; in New York, 113; in Pennsylvania, 67. The total number of publications in North Carolina, we are told, would allow only one paper to each inhabitant every three months;[3] New York prints 113 copies a year for each of its people.

---

[1] Compendium of the Ninth Census, p. 456, and Report of the Commissioner of Education (Eaton), 1872. In 1870, of 28,238,941 persons of age to read and write, more than one-fifth were illiterate.

[1] Report of the Commissioner of Education (Eaton), 1871, p. 549. Rep., 1872, p. 589. Rep., 1873, p. 173. Of 102,855 criminals in England only 4297 could read and write well; only 206 had had a "superior" education.

[2] Hudson, Journalism in America, p. 773, 774.

California stands next in this proportion, and allows eighty-three copies a year to each inhabitant. Its people probably consume at home more newspapers in proportion to their numbers than any part of the world—a proof that the emigrants to the Golden State have been well educated, and their common schools effective. It would, indeed, be ungenerous to pursue further this contrast between the literature and intelligence of the different portions of our country. Temporary obstacles have divided us in this particular. We may reasonably trust that the common schools will win at last an equal victory and control in every section of the Union.

These two great intellectual agents, the schools and the press, indissolubly united, have produced the physical progress of the country. They have built railways, canals, steamers, telegraphs. Our people converse with each other through their newspapers, and hold their consultations in open day. Publicity has become a part of our national life. Like the Roman patriot who desired all his acts to be seen and known by his countrymen, we throw open all our doors and windows to the public. All is activity with us, curiosity, and vigilance. It would be quite impossible, indeed, to trace in a few pages the achievements of the common schools. They have extended the duration of human life among us,[1] checked disease, cultivated cleanliness, founded new States, planted cities, indicated the sites of future capitals. The publisher finds the purchasers of his books in their graduates, the merchant and manufacturer depend upon their silent energy, the churches are filled with their pupils, and the lecture-rooms gratify the curiosity excited in their midst. Millions of active intellects, the offspring of the public schools, listen to the sweet strains of Bryant, Longfellow, and Whittier, muse with Bancroft on the thrilling exploits of freedom, or wait to hail the new bard and the rising thinker, whether he comes from the Sierras of Nevada or the crowded cities of the East.

That the common-school system is still imperfect no one can doubt: it is a vast machine, whose various parts are capable of ceaseless improvements. Truancy prevails to a great degree, and can only be removed by a general compulsory law. The teachers in many parts of the country are themselves imperfectly trained, their salaries are often miserably low. Men have not yet learned that it is cheaper and safer to build school-houses than ships and forts, and that good schools are always profitable. But the idea is rapidly spreading, and it can not be long before our school-houses will be every where models of neatness, and our teachers at least as well paid as our judges or constables. In one direction the system is destined to make an extraordinary advance. The plan of technical and industrial instruction is already beginning to make great progress among our educators. It has long been found in Europe that the elements of a trade could be rapidly acquired in childhood. Germany, Austria, and Belgium have all their industrial schools, where manufacturing, masonry, building, carpentering, engineering, are taught practically, and where young men, while they study history and geography, may also learn a trade.[2] The educated artisans of Germany already surpass those of all other countries. If we wish to preserve our equality with the European workman, we must turn the vast powers of the common schools to industrial instruction. Already the subject has met with careful attention among us. Schools of science have long been in use, but they scarcely reach the industrial classes. In 1862 Congress gave a liberal endowment of land to each State to establish these schools of labor.[1] New York received 990,000 acres, Ohio 630,000, and every State its share, proportioned to its population. Various excellent institutions have been founded. Illinois has a flourishing industrial university. Michigan led the way in opening these schools.[2] Nearly all the States have employed the national gift in some useful manner. But the chief problem of our future educators will no doubt be how to make every common school the means of spreading a knowledge of the arts, and to join invariably with every education some useful pursuit. There is no reason why our working classes should not also be our most highly educated classes, the most intelligent, the most refined. What the republic requires is the healthy mind in the healthy body; and regular physical labor should always be joined with mental. To unite these conditions in our national education will no doubt be more than ever the aim of the teacher. Gymnastic sports are useful; riding, leaping, rowing, are not to be neglected;[3] but labor on the farm, in the factory, with the mason or the mechanic, will prove of signal value in producing health of mind and body, and the experience of foreign schools shows that children learn with eagerness and pleasure the elements of all industrial pursuits. Every child must at last be taught some useful trade.

---

[1] Hudson, p. 774.

[2] Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1871, p. 561–563. See Compendium of the Ninth Census, p. 510.

[3] Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1871, p. 559.

[1] So Haushoffer, Statistik, p. 200. Wo die Civilization die grössten Fortschritte macht, beobachtet man auch die grösste Abnahme der Sterblichkeit. We want more careful statistics on this nice point, as on many others.

[2] J. W. Hoyt, Report on Education, 1870, p. 118–127, notices the "building schools," agricultural, commercial, etc., of the Continent. Lace-making, clock-making, and all the arts are taught.

In the higher grades of education our system is capable of a wide improvement. Our method of grading the schools is every where imperfect. Mr. Matthew Arnold presents an attractive picture of the organization of the higher schools of Prussia.[4] Step by step they rise from the primary schools, through a course of instruction suited to every pursuit in life, until they blend with the Berlin University, the most perfect, it is supposed, of all the means of intellectual improvement.[5] The gymnasia, pro-gymnasia, real schools, and upper burgher schools afford instruction for the merchant and the scholar. The gymnasia prepare the students for the university, the real schools for other pursuits. In the latter the modern languages take the place of the ancient. The thoroughness of the Prussian system is due to the strictness of the examinations, the regular promotion from grade to grade, the necessity of a university degree to the acquisition of a profession: and it is certain that our own schools may well borrow the strictness of the Prussian. No one should be permitted to take what is called a "degree" without proper preparation. To win a degree should be made an object of real value and interest. It should be part of the duty of government, if it assumes the charge of our national education, to see that it is well done, to enforce thoroughness, and provide for an adequate return for its outlay; and this in Prussia is secured by a system of rigorous examinations.

It is somewhat mortifying to be assured that, after all our generous outlay upon our common schools, we are still surpassed in some particulars by the Europeans, and that even our costly school buildings in Boston and New York are excelled by those of Berlin, Vienna, and London.[1] The village schoolhouses of Switzerland are said to be unequaled in grace and simplicity. They are surrounded by gardens or play-grounds, and imbedded in flowers. In London, where land is cheap, a large play-ground is provided for the children; and several of its new school-houses are so convenient and admirable that they may instruct even our most successful builders. And of the foreign teachers, especially those of Germany, we are told that they are graduates of a university, acquainted with the whole range of letters and science, and carefully instructed in the art of teaching; that they have given themselves to their profession from early youth with ardor, and improve each year by active practice. They form a dignified community of state officials. They have usually, at least in the higher grades, adequate salaries, and a pension in sickness or old age. In Holland the teachers have already become the most respectable class in the community; and in Prussia their value is allowed by a most intelligent government. Yet we can have no doubt that many of our American teachers already equal in attainments even those of Holland, and that our great army of instructors is rapidly improving in discipline and skill. Our teachers are already often the purest and wisest part of our people. When their profession is made a safe and profitable one they will seldom leave it. Our best teachers already give their whole lives to their pursuit, and it is chiefly those who are badly paid who seek some other means of living. It must be the aim of our system to make the teacher's employment permanent.

The tendency of American education is

---

[1] See Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1871, p. 425.

[2] See a careful account of the Western higher schools, Tenbrook, American State Universities.

[3] In London even swimming is taught to a part of the school-children.

[4] Higher Schools and Universities in Germany, p. 7. "I believe," he says (p. 44), "that the public schools are preferred in Prussia on their merits," etc. This feeling must also become prevalent with us.

[5] "The most distinguished and influential university in the world," says Mr. Hoyt. Report, p. 349.

[1] Massachusetts Report, 1873-74, p. 35. Mr. Philbrick's criticism is just, but I fear his notion of the happy condition of the European teacher is not well founded. In Prussia the primary teachers are badly paid.

evidently to constant and valuable progress. Our schools and teachers are far better than they were ten or twenty years ago. Our school buildings are finer and more complete, in general, than those of any European nation, except, perhaps, Switzerland and a part of Germany.[1] Of infinite grace and variety, these palaces and cottages of education adorn all our land. Normal schools are springing up in all the States with singular rapidity; practical learning is making constant advances among us. We have already discovered the defects of our system, and are laboring to amend them. But the question is already presented to us whether the national government should not provide for the common welfare by insisting upon the general education of the vast mass of our illiterates. In the instance of the colored people, it seems a duty imposed upon the nation to educate them all; and the immense influx of uncultivated foreigners and the large body of uneducated whites at the South demand some immediate remedy for a pressing danger. The safety of the government requires that it should enforce and support every where popular instruction. Where a State fails to educate its people, the national government has plainly a right to interfere, and a general system of public instruction might be formed which would enforce every where thorough and practical teaching, uniformity in study, and mental equality throughout the nation. Our colleges and universities must finally form a part of the national system, and offer a free education in the highest branches to every intelligent citizen.

The extraordinary cheapness of the American school system,[2] its effectiveness, its admirable influence upon morals and public order, its equity and liberality, have been proved in every part of the Union, and, like a prudent family, the nation educates its children in common. The chief excellence of our system is that it teaches pure republicanism. In private schools and colleges the principle of human equality upon which our country leans for safety is sometimes forgotten. Foreign impulses, frivolities, fashions, barbarisms, may at times corrupt our youth, and reach even the pulpit and the press. But the public schools bravely repel the wave of European reaction, and are founded upon the immutable principles of 1776. In the public schools Samuel and John Adams, Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin speak to us with the fresh ardor of the dawn of freedom, inculcate a rising humanity, and demand for their new republic a plain advance over the savage blindness of the past. So long as our public schools flourish, the country is safe. So long as American ideas are taught by accomplished and patriotic teachers to each new generation, the republic will ever live. When falls the common-school system, freedom perishes and reason dies. Possessed of this admirable instrument, we may teach with irresistible clearness the principles of 1776, and the second century of the republic may witness a rapid growth of knowledge among us unequaled among nations.

NEW YORK. EUGENE LAWRENCE.

THE LOVER'S PROPHECY.

THEY sat on the beach till the tide was full
  And the fishing boats returned,
And looked where the breakers were white as wool,
  Where the light-house beacon burned.

"To-morrow," he said—"to-morrow I'll be
  Sailing beyond the bar,
Out on the sad and desolate sea,
  Beyond reach of that lonesome star.

"The wind shall beckon and be my friend—
  Blow, merry breezes, blow!—
But through life and death, and unto the end,
  You are mine in spite of your 'No!'

"You shall wake at night from a dream of delight
  And list to the breakers' tone,
Where you'll seem to hear a voice once dear
  Imploring again for its own.

"You shall start with fright at the fall of night
  As you walk—not alone—on the sand,
Should a heedless wave disclose a grave
  There at your feet where you stand.

"Living or dead, here be it said—
  'Tis so hard to do without you—
You shall see my sad face in every place,
  You shall feel my presence about you.

"By the fireside's blaze in the long summer days
  You'll be never again alone,
For I shall inherit, in body or spirit,
  The heart that you call your own."

A year had passed, when his ship at last
  Discharged its motley crew,
And the color came to her cheeks in a flame
  When she thought what a year could do.

She stole to the shore at dusk, or before
  The stars were large in the sky,
And cried, "Oh, my own, I am waiting alone!"
  In answer there came—a sigh!

He stood before her, her true adorer,
  One instant, only one;
But that moment's bliss was enough for this—
  It told what a year had done!

White and wan as the sky at dawn,
  Like a trembling mist, I ween;
He seemed to be but a breath of the sea,
  Through which the stars could be seen.

---

[1] A great mass of information may be found in the reports of Mr. Eaton, the National Commissioner of Education, and the value of his bureau is already apparent. It has spread many striking facts.

[2] The elegance and convenience of such buildings as the Worcester High School, the Omaha palace, with its Mansard-roof and graceful spires, the New York Normal School, or the infinite series of magnificent school buildings reaching from ocean to ocean, would scarcely seem to admit of the idea of cheapness, yet the cost of a single Versailles or Blenheim would surpass all that we have laid out thus far on school-houses.