

CRIMINAL CROWDING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.—II.

IN a previous article¹ I called attention to the overcrowded and unsanitary condition of the public schools in some of our large cities, a condition of which few of the otherwise well-informed residents of those cities were aware, and which the press in numerous editorials on the subject very properly characterized as alarming, shameful, and surpassing belief. I am now able to give more recent facts showing that, bad though the school accommodations were, they are in many cases growing deplorably worse. It should be kept in mind that the following statements are not those of thoughtless alarmists, but that they are based on information furnished by careful and conservative men,—men whose chief concern is for the welfare of the children in the schools, and whose personal interests would incline them to take as favorable a view as possible of the situation. These statements have never been called in question by any one at all familiar with the subject.

The condition of the schools in Brooklyn was miserable in 1893 : in 1894 it was disgraceful, as the following extract from the report of the Superintendent of Schools will show :—

“ The number of pupils on register in all grades exceeded the total seating capacity by 3,630. The number of pupils on register in primary grades exceeded the seating capacity of our primary-class rooms by 6,322.

It should be remembered, however, that, dreadful as is the condition of crowding shown by these figures, they tell only a part of the truth. They represent an average condition and not extreme cases ; they show the register, not when it is at its highest, but when, in midwinter, it is almost at its lowest. To appreciate fully the enormity of the evils caused by lack of sufficient school accommodations, it is necessary to take the register when it is at its highest,—in the month of October,—and to consider, not average conditions, but particular cases. In October, 1893, there were 377 classes whose registers exceeded 60 ; in October, 1894, there were no less than 447 classes whose registers exceeded 60. Of these 447 classes there were 278 that had registers between 60 and 70 ; 89 that had registers between 70 and 80 ; 17 that had registers between 80 and 90 ; 12 that had registers between 90 and 100 ; 10 that had registers between 100 and 110 ; 10 that had registers between 110 and 120 ; 16 that had registers between 120 and 130 ; 11 that had registers between 130 and 140 ; and 4 that had registers between 140 and 150.”

¹ “The Criminal Crowding of Public Schools,” THE FORUM, May, 1895.

Each of these enormous classes was kept in one room and had but one teacher. Owing to overcrowding, only one half the pupils in primary grades could be taught effectively, and the entire school system was paralyzed and clogged. There were by actual count 14,000 children in Brooklyn "either improperly provided with school accommodations or seeking admission in vain." This condition of affairs galvanized even the city authorities into action, and the legislature was asked for permission to issue bonds to build additional school-houses. The defects of the Brooklyn schools are faithfully indicated by the Superintendent, and that the city is finally taking action in the matter is to a great extent owing to his clear delineation of the facts of the case.

The most important function of a school report is to make known the needs of the schools, and the first step toward reforming the lamentable conditions that exist in many of our cities is to have the facts fully set before the public. We have a right to know the worst, and no man can claim to be a friend of education who wilfully conceals or keeps back such humiliating details. The public schools are largely what public opinion makes them, and it is only by giving the greatest publicity to the crying defects of the system that the proper authorities can be shamed into correcting them.

It is difficult to get at the exact facts with regard to the schools in New York city. There are few towns of 10,000 inhabitants that do not issue a more complete school report than the small pamphlet of 69 pages which embodies the New York report for 1894. On the day when the schools began, in September, 1895, the New York "Herald" announced that there were 50,000 children who would not be able to obtain accommodations. It is to be hoped that this is a large overestimate. Those who desire information as to the character of the accommodations enjoyed by the 200,000 who were so fortunate as to get in are referred to Dr. Douglas H. Stewart's article on "Unsanitary Schools and Public Indifference," in *THE FORUM* for September, 1895. When we know that thousands are vainly seeking admission to such dark and dingy schools as the city of New York can afford to give her favored children, it is with a sense of the ludicrous that comes sadly near the pathetic that we learn that the new provisions of the Truancy Law are to be strictly enforced, and that parents will be held equally culpable with the children for pupils' absence from school.

In Jersey City, during the year 1893-94, 1,732 applicants were refused admission to the schools, and in September, 1894, there were

1,836 children attending half-day sessions, 1,606 more pupils than seats, and 775 had been refused admission. With that liberality to which we are so well accustomed where matters of education are concerned, the legislature authorized the issue of \$250,000 worth of bonds, when \$500,000 could have been "wisely, economically, and profitably expended." Owing to lack of funds, the State law of New Jersey, which requires that all books, stationery, and supplies be furnished to pupils free of charge, is systematically violated, and there is little if any money for the purchase of maps, books of reference, and the ordinary school apparatus. The work of the schools is seriously retarded because modern methods which require supplementary books in reading, geography, and other studies cannot be followed for lack of means. That children eager to learn should be turned away from the schools of a prosperous city, is unwise and unpatriotic, and we apparently have yet to learn that efficient schools may be a protection to the state as well as line-of-battle ships and armored cruisers.

Some of the Philadelphia school buildings are known to be defective in many respects, and there are numerous children who are forced to attend on half time, but it is not easy to obtain any information on the subject.

In Washington the wretched conditions of 1893 were accentuated in 1894. Practically all the white schools of the first and second grades, and 2,000 pupils of the third and fourth grades, were limited to half-day sessions, while two-fifths of the entire number of colored schools were in similar straits. Superintendent Powell calls the half-day system for schools above the second grade "a farce," and adds: "To give a lad twelve years of age opportunity to attend school but three and a half hours a day, knowing well that he will spend the rest of the time on the street, is robbery of the boy's time and a danger to society." The children of the poorer classes lose by this system one-half their schooling, because they must begin to earn a living before the time comes when they can enjoy the privilege of an entire day at school. There is one square mile in Washington, "well populated by colored citizens, in which there is no school at all, and several other sections are little better off." We read of floors in the colored-school buildings worn to the thinness of veneer, of window-sashes loose and so badly decayed that they will not retain the glass during a moderate wind-storm, thus rendering it almost impossible to heat the rooms. Doors are without proper fastenings, and thousands of dollars' worth of property left without protection.

The President of the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools, in his report to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, makes the following statements, which show a situation that we should be more ready to believe of the schools of Pekin than of those of Washington:—

“It will be observed that these unfortunate conditions result solely from the failure to supply adequate schoolroom accommodation. A sufficient number of teachers is provided for all the schools; and if we had as many schoolrooms as are needed, every child now in attendance could receive the benefit of a full day's schooling without the employment of a single additional teacher or the expenditure of a single additional dollar for teachers' salaries. As was pointed out on a former occasion, we occupy precisely the attitude, from a business standpoint, of an employer who finds it necessary to engage and pay the wages of 1,000 skilled employees, but who receives the benefit of only half-day's labor from a third of their number because of his own refusal to provide working-room for them all.

“The showing thus presented is sufficiently unfortunate without the emphasis of any further facts. The board feel it to be their duty, however, both to you and the community, to point out the further fact that the above inadequacy of accommodation remains after resort has been had not only to rented rooms, —which, as shown by Superintendent Powell's report, ‘are, without exception, unfit for school purposes, being without ventilation other than open windows and open doors, which are always harmful and fraught with danger, and are without adequate, and in some cases even without respectable, closet accommodation,’—but, even after converting the basements of the school buildings into schoolrooms, rooms never intended for such a purpose and wholly unfit for it, ‘having no means of ventilation, no proper means of heating,’ and lacking all the necessary conveniences. No member of Congress would consent to the use of such rooms for his committee, or for any other purpose which would require him to pass the working-hours of the day in them; and no member, we are confident, would be willing to condemn the immature bodies of little school children to conditions, sanitary and otherwise, so unfavorable.”

In Baltimore, during the year ending December 31, 1894, there were 4,500 children who were housed in rented buildings that were “generally old dwellings or halls unfit for school use and detrimental to the health of those who occupy them.” In some such wretched room it is by no means unusual to crowd two schools with their teachers, where the school authorities frankly admit that there is only a sufficient supply of air for one class. There is not unnatural complaint that by these unwholesome conditions the health of teachers and pupils is impaired, and many children are deprived of educational advantages, because their parents dare not expose them to such risks. The appropriations for new school-houses are too small to permit of the erection of proper buildings, and the superintendent regrets that the classrooms in most new buildings are not large enough to allow sufficient

space outside the desks for persons to move about the room, and that there is not room enough in front of the desks for the placing of blackboards, maps, and other necessary apparatus for teaching.

In addition to the foregoing facts, Baltimore is, I believe, unique among cities of its size in that it possesses no training-school where its teachers may be equipped for their work. Surely the educated men and women of Baltimore must be ignorant of this condition of affairs, or they would make such a stir as would force even the City Council to provide proper schools.

Chicago labors under exceptional difficulties. There is probably no other city in the world where such an annual increase of population has to be provided for. The city is growing at the rate of 65,000 yearly, and 13,000 of this number are children of school age. Fifteen new buildings are imperatively required to accommodate this increase, and fourteen more for the nearly equal number of children now housed in rented rooms. But, fortunately for Chicago, her Board of Education does not have to cope with this tremendous problem with the feeble means that are at the disposal of too many other cities. They are not dependent on councils for school funds in Chicago, but have been empowered by the legislature to make a five-per-cent levy on real estate in the city, two-fifths of which may be used for salaries, and three-fifths for building purposes,—“a sum amply sufficient to provide wholesome and comfortable accommodation for every child of school age in the city.” The advantage of a fixed school tax on real estate is, that the increase in the value of real property is in direct ratio with the increase in population, so that the School Board always has adequate means to meet additional demands without having to appeal for funds to an ignorant city council. It is to be hoped that such a tax will be introduced into cities like Brooklyn and Boston. In Chicago, during the year ending June, 1895, no fewer than 16 new school buildings were opened and 21 begun (14 since January, 1895), and it was thought that before December 6 or 8 more buildings would be in process of construction; while for the year 1896 the magnificent sum of \$2,660,000 has been assigned for ground and buildings, with which it is expected that from 20 to 25 well-built and commodious school-houses will be erected. In addition to this all the school buildings in the city are reported to be in thoroughly good condition.

The energy and liberality with which difficulties are met in Chicago give us a gratifying instance of what Western business ability can accomplish when well directed, and we are confident that the 17,545

children who are now attending in half-day divisions will soon be properly accommodated. They have the right spirit in Chicago, and feel that "nothing should be left undone which modern science can suggest, or money secure, to make ample provision for the temperature, light, ventilation, and sanitation of our school buildings. Anything short of the best is without excuse; for, when it is considered that the schools are the abiding-places of our children for so large a part of each day and year, it is little less than criminal to neglect these provisions so essential to their welfare." Would that there were more cities where such manly and liberal sentiments were the spirit of the community.

That the city councils and not the school authorities are responsible for most of the defects of our school system I have already intimated; but I have never seen the responsibility for parsimonious appropriations more forcibly put where it belongs than in the following extract from the report of the President of the Board of Education of Omaha, Nebraska, for June, 1894:—

"The condition of our treasury is such as to occasion grave concern. We have been able to continue the schools during the year without interruption, but end the fiscal year with a deficit. This condition is not owing in any degree to extravagance or mismanagement on the part of the Board, but wholly to the refusal of the City Council to do its plain duty in the matter of levying such a tax as it has been advised by the Board of Education was necessary to support the schools.

"For example, for the fiscal year ending July 1, 1894, the City Council came \$33,580 short of providing the amount of money which it was informed would be required to carry on the schools for the year. It had the presumption, without warrant of law, and without any adequate knowledge of the situation, to arbitrarily reduce the amount asked for by that amount, without knowing or appearing to care whether the sum actually provided would enable us to keep the 16,000 children of this district in school or not; for the Council has nothing whatever to do with the schools, and knows nothing of their condition or needs. In fact, I venture the assertion that not a member of that body could have told at the time such action was taken, even approximately, the number of children enrolled, or even the number of schools in operation. Moreover, it is clearly the duty of the City Council, under the Constitution and laws of the State, to raise for the support of the schools such an amount of money as the Board of Education deems necessary.

"The time has come for plain speaking, and while we do not desire any controversy with that branch of the city government, it is only just that the citizens of this city should be advised of the facts; and should this unwarranted policy be continued by the Council until our schools are crippled, the responsibility should be laid—where it justly belongs—at the door of the City Council."

There is altogether too much anxiety to guard against possible extravagance on the part of our boards of education. We cannot hope

to introduce effective municipal reforms until our citizens are educated up to them; and while false economy cramps and impedes the public schools, as the foregoing examples and many others that might be cited show that it is doing, the progress of the entire state is retarded. Let the educated and public-spirited men and women of the community be brought as a class into close contact with the public schools, and it will then become apparent that there is no investment which can be made that pays for itself so many times over as the money honestly spent for school purposes.

Finally I would suggest, in view of the great diversity of opinion that exists with regard to the facts that should be embodied in a superintendent's report, that the National Association of Superintendents might very properly consider at an early session what subjects should enter into the construction of the ideal report, and how such a report may be made most useful to the community.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCULPTURE IN AMERICA.

"No matter what its possibilities may be, no matter what seeds of thought or virtue, what germs of genius or of art, lie latent in its breast, until the appropriate environment presents itself the correspondence is denied, the development discouraged, the most splendid possibilities of life remain unrealized, and thought and virtue, genius and art, are dead."

So writes Henry Drummond in his "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," and every earnest thinker must agree with him. In this country we are inclined to force our arts as we do exotics, in the atmosphere of the hothouse,—or to attempt to do so. At first this process may seem plausible and possible, but on second thought the serious man or serious people will discover that an art can only be as the life of the individual or nation that creates it. Art is not invention, but evolution. In considering, therefore, the development of art in America, we must first of all consider the environment; we must ascertain what are the conditions that have produced great art in the past, and, comparing such conditions with those under which we live, we shall soon be able to find what place the American people hold in the world of art, and what outlook is before us for a great and lasting school of sculpture.

In reviewing the history of those nations which have produced noble works in the field of sculpture, one very quickly finds that a great development in this art has come only with a serious and fervid patriotism: countries whose patriotism has been tame and vacillating have produced no great works of sculpture. Coleridge emphasizes this thought when he says of the Greeks:—

"Reflect a moment on the history of this wonderful people. What were they while they remained free and independent,—when Greece resembled a collection of mirrors set in a single frame, each having its own focus of patriotism, yet all capable, as at Marathon and Platea, of verging to one point and of consuming a common foe? What were they then? The fountains of light and civilization, of truth and of beauty, to all mankind. . . . They lost their independence—and with their independence their patriotism—and became the cosmopolites of antiquity. . . . While they were intense patriots they were the benefactors of all mankind."