

THE GREAT ECONOMY AND ADVANTAGES OF FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION.

Extract from the Address of Robert Kelly, Esquire, on his re-election as President of the Board of Education for the City of New-York—1849.

Although expenditures for public education in this city amount in the aggregate to a large sum, it may be said, with the strictest regard to truth, that the tax is moderate in proportion to the value of the property. The Secretary of State, in his report to the Legislature as, Superintendent of Common Schools, dated January 2nd, 1849, has introduced a table, showing the ratio of taxation upon property, for educational purposes, in the various towns in the State where a free school system is established. This table is based upon the exact returns of the previous year, and exhibits a fact which will appear surprising to many of our tax-payers, that the citizens of New York are really lightly taxed for the purpose of education. The Report of this Board furnished to the Secretary shows the amount of the expenditure for this city. It is the entire aggregate for all objects that have been taken into the account. The table shows the following results :

| RATE OF TAX UPON \$100 VALUATION. | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------|------------------|------|--------|
| Dols. | Cts. | Mills. | Dols. | Cts. | Mills. |
| Flushing..... | 0 | 05 | 0 | 15 | 6 |
| Brooklyn..... | 0 | 06 | 7 | 19 | 8 |
| Albany..... | 0 | 07 | 6 | 21 | 2 |
| New-York..... | 0 | 10 | 4 | 23 | 8 |
| Poughkeepsie.... | 0 | 12 | 0 | 25 | 8 |
| Bushwick..... | 0 | 14 | 0 | 30 | 0 |
| | | | Newton..... | 0 | 15 |
| | | | Rochester..... | 0 | 19 |
| | | | Buffalo..... | 0 | 21 |
| | | | Williamsburgh... | 0 | 23 |
| | | | Utica..... | 0 | 25 |
| | | | Hudson..... | 0 | 30 |

The rate of taxation for this city is somewhat larger for the year just closed, but I have not the means of showing how it compares with that of the other towns.

The Secretary of State makes the following remarks in relation to the expenditure for the city of New-York :

"With this table, any one can tell what would be his tax for the support of schools in either of the places named.

"If he is a resident of New York, and is assessed \$4,000, he pays a tax of \$4 16. If assessed for \$100,000, he pays \$104. The sum raised in New-York for school purposes appears to be very large, but when it is proportioned among the tax payers, according to their property, it is a very light tax. And it would be light even if it were doubled. If the common schools were what they should be, and a system of high schools were engrafted among them, every child could be educated, the poor gratuitously, and the rich at a less expense than at private schools."

Here is indicated the true solution of the question of economy. This is the consummation aimed at by the ardent friends of popular education throughout the land, to make the free schools and academies so elevated in their character, so complete in their processes, so perfect in all their arrangements, and so replete with all good influences, that they shall become the pure, the chosen, and the common fountains of knowledge for the whole people.

All citizens whether they have children or not, are immediately interested in the support of a proper educational system. Those who have children to educate, and do not choose to avail themselves of the advantages provided in the public system, voluntarily impose upon themselves the additional burden of paying for their instruction in private institutions. It is not merely the right of citizens to send their children to the common school, but they deserve commendation who do so, however able they may be to pay the most expensive charges of private school education. They are probably doing the greatest service they can render to their own children. They are lending their influence to dissipate prejudices, and are setting an example to those who are disposed to neglect and despise the privilege of a free education for their children.

The expediency of a common education is not yet universally recognized. It is, perhaps, natural, that doubts should exist in the minds of parents anxious for the safe passage of their children through the training period of life, and ignorant of the condition of our common schools and the character of the children who attend them. They must be satisfied as to the value of the education dispensed, its effects upon the character, and its moral influences. They must be convinced that there are no evils, no disadvantages, no dangers peculiar to the common schools, from which private schools are free. An intimate examination of the subjects would probably dispel any doubts that may exist upon these points.

There are dangers to which a child is exposed, whether he be educated at home or abroad, in common schools or in private schools, in society or in solitude, for there is no escape from that constant probation which is the condition of human existence. The danger of evil communications is, I suppose, the prominent one in every parent's mind. It appears to me, that there, is no more risk of immoral associations to a child, in attending a well disciplined common school, than in attending one frequented only by the children of the wealthy. The great danger to which the boy is exposed, who has been nurtured in a home of affluence, is his being contaminated by intimacy, with the spoiled children of indulgence. He will not be likely to seek the companionship of the children of neglect and vicious poverty, if such there should be in the schools; and it is to be hoped that they will always be found there, if they are in the community, for they need above all others, for their own good and that of society, the elevating and reforming influences of education. In the large numbers and miscellaneous composition of the common school, there is much less inducement to indiscriminate social intimacies, than in the closer intercourse of the private schools.

The common school appears to offer peculiar advantages, in some particulars. The independent position of the teacher removes all temptation to a relaxation of discipline, and he cannot conduct his school at all except by maintaining rigid order, and pursuing a uniform system, that can admit no irregularities and show no respect to persons. This is the sort of restraint that is of special value to a youth. The habit of obedience and self-control, acquired in his subjection, in the society of his fellows, to an inexorable rule of order, or to some reasonable requisition of duty, is an important process in his preparation for self-denials, the disappointments, and the labors of life. There is something, too, of a training for the intercourse of the world, in the attendance upon a common school, made up of children from the whole people. It is a little world in itself, and "its daily lessons," to use a happy expression of Horace Mann, "are the preludes and recitals of the great duties of life." It promotes a spirit of self-relying independence, which is the great principle of a manly character. The child soon apprehends that talent, energy, and virtue, are distinctions of real value, more lasting than the gifts of fortune, and, in no way connected with them, and that they constitute the true dignity of man. He sees that the heritage of wealth is of no avail in securing the honours of the school, and learns the lesson that merit and industry are the elements of success in every situation. It is a peculiarly valuable discipline to our children, in view of the extraordinary changes that occur in society with us, where every day the last in the social scale is becoming first and the first becoming last.

The habit of general intercourse and sympathy in the youth of the people, will be productive of a generous mutual confidence and harmony of all classes of society. The prevalence of this sentiment seems to be essential to the permanence of our institutions, and the security of society as here constituted. The absence of it, in other countries, the great obstacle to the realization of the schemes of patriotic minds, in the visions they form of a golden age of "liberty, equality and fraternity."

There are so many considerations of advantage connected with the subject of a common education for the whole people, both as to the community and as to the schools, that every effort should be made to bring about so desirable a result. Public sentiment is rapidly tending toward it. The attendance in our common schools is much more general from all classes of the community than it was a few years ago. A rapid advance in the right direction is now going on, and the advantages of higher education, recently opened in connection with the common school system, will give an important stimulus to the movement. We may all, by our influence, do something towards it—spread information as to the character of the schools—persuade parents to make the experiment of sending their children there—induce others to visit them, examine the arrangements, and condition of the buildings, observe the appearance and behaviour of the children attending, and judge for themselves as to the manner in which the schools are conducted, the progress made in knowledge, and the ability of the teachers. If the schools are not yet conducted in a way to satisfy such inquiries, they ought to be made so. This is the point towards which the strenuous efforts of the friends of education, of all teachers and school officers, should be directed. Let us do our part. Let us exert such powers as we