

The principle of Free Schools, I believe, is a new principle introduced for the first time into our school system by the new School Act. The question we purpose to discuss on the present occasion is the Free School System, its advantages and adaptation to national or universal Education. It will be acceded by all, that it is the inalienable right of all men to have a sound and good education. This I conceive to be the case, as much as freedom of opinion or toleration in religion. And it appears to me equally plain, that as states are bound to protect their subjects in the privileges of liberty of conscience, so they are bound to see the youth in their realm receive such an education as will fit them to act their part as good citizens, and loyal, yet free subjects. And in the discussion of this subject, we would observe:—

1. That though this principle may be new in the Canada system of Education, yet it is an old and long tried system in some other states; and as these states, after a long trial, still perpetuate it, we argue from this consideration, that what has been found so suitable and advantageous in accomplishing general education among others, ought to be tried fairly among us. In Holland, as far back as the 16th century, we are informed, Free Schools were established; and the first Dutch settlers who came to the New World, brought with them this principle;—these at once built their Christian Churches and erected Free Schools.

The Pilgrim Fathers, also, who emigrated from England two centuries ago, commenced their national existence by incorporating Free Schools into their state system. These few pious men landed on the bleak shores of the New England States, amidst its dense forests, and began a settlement under great privations and much discouragement. Here they planted the tree of liberty, and determined on Free Education, as the inalienable privilege of every child. They had been only a few years in the country; their improvements were small, and their wants only partially supplied. They were exposed to the attacks of the uncivilized aborigines around them; yet in these circumstances they deemed it of immense importance that, under all these disadvantages, their children be educated. They did not raise useless objections about their temporal safety and sustenance; but they set to work to devise ways and means, in order to secure the proper training of the rising generation. This they deemed of such intense interest, as to require special effort that it be attained. See here, my friends, an example worthy of imitation. Many of our School Sections, in this part of Canada, are in many respects like these New Englanders. The population are scattered; they are poor; struggling with first difficulties. Would that all the people were equally in earnest about the schooling of their offspring! These settlers were few, and they were not well adapted for the country. They were surrounded with untamed Indians; they were struggling for even an existence; and yet they are deeply affected with the thoughts of the destitution of their children. This strongly contrasts with some of our Canada sections, where they have plenty of means, and live in perfect security; and yet there is a heartlessness and an apathy manifested in regard to education, which is chilling and painful. These New England settlers, voluntarily and unanimously agree that the property of all shall be taxed, in order to accomplish the education of the whole. There is a likelihood, that some of these Pilgrim Fathers had lived in exile in Holland, prior to their emigrating to America, and these may have seen the working of the system in that kingdom, and were thus prepared to recommend the system. Be this the case or not, such was the feeble starting point of the Free School system in Massachusetts, and for two centuries it appears to have wrought well. During all these years, nothing has occurred to lead them to swerve from their original purpose, so humble in its beginning. In 1648, these people erected their first schoolhouse, and the Teacher's salary was £20; and, in 1849, the City of Boston, itself, raised for school purposes, by taxation on property, \$232,800. Two centuries have thus passed away, under the Free School system, and which has done great things for this small State. The originators have long since passed away, and many generations besides; and during that period, all has been change and progress; yet these people have seen no substitute for the Free Schools which would answer better to provide means for the education of all. This small commonwealth, possessing only about 8000 square miles, of generally poor soil, and having a very bleak and backward climate, very little of which soil is very productive, and having no great resources of temporal wealth. And yet, notwithstanding these great

disadvantages, they have in all generations of their national existence, been rearing on the one hand their Christian churches, and on the other their Free Schools. They support and educate in this poor country one million of people. And there is, perhaps, not another million of men, situated as they are, who are equally educated. In 1849, there were in the state of Massachusetts, of children from 4 to 16 years of age, 215,000. Their attendance in school will show how much the inhabitants prize their children's education, and show how suitable their school system is, to accomplish what is wanted in every state. During summer, they had in their schools, 173,659 pupils; and in winter, these increased to 191,712. These statistics show how universal a Common School Education is in that State. A person once passing through this country, and seeing much rock and sand and sterility, made enquiry of one of its inhabitants:—What do you raise in this country? Meaning what crops were raised. The person replied—pointing to the church as it stood perched on a hill side, and the schoolhouse, near at hand—Sir, we raise men here. And give me a universally church-going people in Canada, and a well conducted Free School system, and we will raise men in Canada too. Men they will be, of high mental stature; men of gigantic intellect; men sublime in virtue. The argument we would deduce from these considerations is, that as the Free School system has wrought so admirably in raising an intelligent, industrious and generally virtuous people, that it is strongly encouraging to us, in Canada, to try it. It is an inducement of considerable importance, to lead us to adopt the same system. If they have succeeded so well and so long, why should not we succeed equally well? Let us be urged onward, in a similar course, by the success which has attended others. Let the whole population be taxed, according to their property. Let the schoolhouse and furniture, apparatus and teacher, become the property of the entire people. Let every child of school age be invited, and have a legal claim to the Common School Education. Let no fees be required from any child, while attending school, whether his parents be rich or poor. Let the Teacher be well qualified for his office, and well remunerated for his labour. Let men who follow teaching as a business be Teachers, and the school room comfortably furnished and cleaned and warmed, and under such a system, the men of Canada will also rise high in intellectuality. This, with religious and moral influences, of a high order, would make the wildernesses of Canada speedily blossom as the rose, and rejoice even with joy and singing. The schoolhouse would thus become a resort for all the children, and be generally filled with ardent and progressing scholars. Instead of six months each year, we would hope to have it generally throughout the whole year. And the education obtained, would not be that superficial scholarship, which so much abounds; but a thorough and practical education.

I will close this argument by a reference to the system of Education in New York State. For about thirty years this State had adopted what is called a famous system of Education. Their School Law, as in Canada, had undergone many changes; and yet a large proportion of the rural schools did not prosper. They erected a Normal seminary for the training of Teachers, supposing this would remove every defect; further trial, however, showed that something was still necessary. The Free School system had been very successfully wrought for some years in their cities, and was found to be necessary in the country also. This has been determined on by legal enactment, and we do not doubt but that it will succeed wherever adopted.

Seeing then, my Friends, that other people have long enjoyed this system with great success, we cannot doubt but that if we, as a people, would enter into it with equal zeal and generosity, with an ardour becoming such a noble enterprise, but that equal success would crown our efforts.

Children should be taught to use the left hand as well as the right.

Coarse bread is much better for children than fine.

Children should sleep in separate beds, and should not wear night-caps.

Children under seven years of age, should not be confined over six or seven hours in the house, and that should be broken by frequent recesses.

Children and young people must be made to hold their heads up and their shoulders back while sitting or walking.