

prefer to wait until the Commission shall find a way of preserving voluntary schools under a free system. The prospect offers little inducement to a country that, like our own, is free from such entanglements to venture into them as certain doctrinaries every now and then propose.

The remaining questions that will come up before the Commission have chiefly to do with the conditions of efficiency in the schools themselves. This part of the inquiry will be followed by us with unusual interest, as our schools furnished for a while the strongest arguments to the opponents of free education. Even among the friends of the system there seems to be a disposition to regard American schools as superficial, excepting in a few cities; notably Boston and St. Louis. As we have no uniform standards, and pass examinations, by which we schedule the attainments of our elementary schools, the showings of our average attendance have been accepted as evidence against a free system. For a while it seemed as if the cause could not rally from the effects of such an exhibit; but some sage observer, having called attention to the fact that in Switzerland free schools maintain an average attendance of ninety-five per cent. of the school children, the argument from our schools gave way to a general hope that whatever happened, England might be saved from the American system.

There are methods and methods of computing average attendance, and causes and causes of irregularity, and if all were candidly taken into account it might send us quite high up in the scale. At any rate it seems hardly reasonable to compare a densely populated country having a homogeneous people and compulsory laws, with a country like our own, in which for twenty-six states out of thirty-eight and for nine territories out of ten the density of population ranges from twenty-one hundredths (.21) to forty-one and twenty-two hundredths (41.22) to the equal mile, to say nothing of the freedmen of the South, the emigrants of the North, and compulsory laws yet in the future. It is not, however, so important for us to defend ourselves as to learn as much as possible of what is going on elsewhere, that we may have models for imitation, or examples for avoidance. Space forbids a detailed examination of the conditions of average attendance under the English system, but the facts may be indicated by a few general statements.