

for all alike, and as far as possible to aim, in all, at the production of equal results, because any partiality or favoritism will be rebuked at the ballot-box. In undistricted towns, therefore, the grand conditions of a prosperous school, viz., a good house, a good teacher, and vigilant superintendence, are secured by motives which do not operate, or operate to a very limited extent, in districted towns. Under the non-districting system, it is obvious that each section of a town will demand at least an equal degree of accommodation in the house, of talent in the teacher, and of attention in the committee; and should any selfish feeling be indulged, it is some consolation to reflect that they too will be harnessed in the car of improvement.

"I consider the law of 1789, authorizing towns to divide themselves into districts, the most unfortunate law, on the subject of common schools, ever enacted in the State. During the last few years, several towns have abolished their districts, and assumed the administration of their schools in the corporate capacity; and I learn, from the report of the school committees, and from other sources, that many other towns are contemplating the same reform."

In a recent report of the Secretary of the Board of Education for Massachusetts, the following important statement is found:—"A very considerable number of the townships have dropped the former mode of dividing the schools according to districts, and have placed the whole matter of their organization and distribution in the hands of the school committee of the township. This change has already been made in about sixty townships of the Commonwealth, and the subject is now more than ever before engaging the attention of other townships, so that the year to come is likely to show greater results than any previous year. The perceptible improvement of the schools in those places which have made the change, is an argument before which nothing can stand, and which is now acting upon the minds of the people at large, with silent but resistless power.

"The clear intelligence, steadiness, and sobriety with which the people are beginning to pursue their object, as contrasted with the adventurous and uncertain efforts in the same direction in former years, is one of the many pleasing indications that the days of turmoil and confusion in settling great questions of school policy are passing away, and a wise regard for the interests of posterity is becoming more and more controlling in the management of this branch of our public interests. It is hardly too much to say that, under the guidance of such lofty sentiments, all the townships of the State will, within a short period, be found adopting that policy in the management of their public school which experience shows to be the best.

"The gradual abandonment of the district system as here stated, results in small degree from its connection with another measure, which has been regarded by the people with great favour, namely, the gradation of the schools. The districts are known to stand directly in the way of this improvement, and receiving a judgment accordingly. It was not until somewhat recently that a subject so important,—so fundamental as that of establishing schools of different grades for pupils of different ages and attainments,—received much consideration from those who alone possessed the power to make the change. Distinguished men had written on the subject; and those who had studied the philosophy of education were generally agreed in respect to it. But it was known chiefly as a theory passing, in only a few instances except in the cities, from the closet to the school-room. By degrees the results of these few experiments became known. Measures were taken to communicate them to the people, the majority of whom were still without any definite information on the subject. From this time, a course of action commenced in the townships which were favourably situated, for trying the experiment, and has been followed up with increasing vigour ever since.

"But what particularly distinguishes the present state of education amongst us from that of former times, is the existence of so many free high schools. Until quite recently, such schools were found only in a few large towns. The idea of a free education did not generally extend beyond that given in the ordinary district schools. All higher education was supposed to be a privilege which each individual should purchase at his own expense. But at length the great idea of providing by law for the education of the people in a higher grade of public schools prevailed. The results have been most happy. High schools have sprung up rapidly in all parts of the Commonwealth; and within the last six years the number has increased from scarcely more than a dozen to about eighty.

"The effect of this change in the school system of this higher order of schools, in developing the intellect of the Commonwealth, in opening channels of free communication between all the more flourishing towns of the State and the colleges or schools of science, is just beginning to be observed. They discover the treasures of native intellect that lie hidden among the people; making men of superior minds conscious of their powers; bringing [those who are

by nature destined to public service, to institutions suited to foster their talents; giving new impulse to the colleges, not only by swelling the number of their students, but by raising the standard of excellence in them; and, finally, giving to the public, with all the advantages of education, men who otherwise might have remained in obscurity, or have acted their part struggling with embarrassments and difficulties."

[The trial of both plans in Massachusetts, and the return to the town system, may be considered decisive of the whole question, because in that State, if anywhere in the Union, the single district plan would be likely to answer the needs of public education, in consequence of the general density, wealth, and intelligence of the population. The whole State is now working under the town system, and with the happiest results.—Ed.]

THE SYSTEM IN CONNECTICUT.

A similar change from the old system to the new is slowly progressing in Connecticut. Referring to an enactment authorizing and facilitating this change, the Superintendent, in a recent report, remarks: "Among the objects proposed to be accomplished by this Act are, to simplify the machinery of the system, by committing to the hands of one board of school officers what is now divided between three; to equalize the advantages of the schools, by abolishing the present district lines, and placing all the schools under one committee, thereby also facilitating the gradation of schools and the proper classification of scholars, and the establishment of schools of a higher grade in towns containing a sparse population, and substituting a simpler and more efficient organization."

IN PENNSYLVANIA.

The Hon. Henry C. Hickcock, the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Pennsylvania, remarked to me in conversation: "The crowning glory of the Pennsylvania school system, in addition to its county superintendency, is its new township plan of government, and the consequent avoidance of the ensmalling of districts."

[In this State, the expedient of sub-districts was tried for a while, but its inconveniences and evils caused it to be abandoned, and it is regarded there as "the only backward step" taken in developing a public educational system. One of the present features of the town system in Pennsylvania, is providing for regular "Town Institutes," or meetings of the teachers for instruction, consultation, and improvement.—Ed.]

IN OHIO.

The Hon. H. H. Barney, in his Report of 1855, as Commissioner of Common Schools of Ohio, gives the following Synopsis of the able argument of Dr. Sears, in favour of the township system, and the evils incident to the old district plan. After explaining at great length the nature of these evils, he sums up the whole matter by saying that the schools ordinarily maintained in the districts into which they are divided, are no longer capable of giving the education required by the character of the times; that they preclude the introduction of a system of proper gradation in the schools; that the classification of the pupils is necessarily imperfect, and the number of classes altogether too great for thorough instruction by a single teacher; the fact that the district schools, without any of the advantages of gradation, once answered their purpose very well, does not prove that we need nothing better now; that the old system is much more expensive in proportion to what it accomplishes than the other; that by means of it, hundreds of schools are kept in operation which would otherwise be abandoned, as they ought to be; that in 1849, there were in Massachusetts 25 schools, whose highest average attendance was only five pupils; 205, whose highest average attendance was only ten; 546, in which it was only fifteen; 1,000, where it was only twenty; and 1,456, where it was only twenty-five. That most of these schools were of so low an order as not to deserve the name, and that the impression which they made upon the agents of the Board of Education, while visiting them, was, that the money of the districts and the time of the teachers and pupils, were little better than wasted; that while some schools thus gradually dwindled into comparative insignificance and worthlessness, others became too large for suitable instruction by one teacher; that another evil almost invariably resulting from the division of the townships into independent school districts, was the unjust distinction which it occasioned in the character of the schools and in the distribution of the school money; that when there was no responsible township school committee authorized to act in the name of the township, there could not be that equality in the schools which the law contemplated; that the inhabitants of one district, being more intelligent and public-spirited than those of another, would have better school-houses—more competent, zealous, and devoted schools; that the smaller and more retired districts, which stood in greatest need of good common schools, because entirely dependent on them, were more likely to languish for want of