

IS THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM A FAILURE ?

This query is suggested by an article by R. Grant White in the December number of the *North American Review*. He points out that the experiment of public education at public cost has been made in the United States under singularly favorable conditions. "The wealth of the country, its vast expanse of uncultivated, unoccupied land, a homestead in which can be acquired at an almost nominal price, the general intelligence of the people, their freedom from burdensome taxation, the absence of privileged classes and of an established religion supported by the state, make its people one upon which education, according to the assumed theory, should have the happiest, the most benign effects." The results, however, had proved most unsatisfactory. These fall under three heads. "According to independent and competent evidence from all quarters, the mass of the pupils of these public schools are unable to read intelligently, to spell correctly, to write legibly, to describe understandingly the geography of their own country, or to do anything that reasonably well-educated children should do with ease.....They can give rules glibly; they can recite from memory; they have some dry, disjointed knowledge of various ologies and osophies; they can, some of them, read a little French or German with a very bad accent." In short their education at the best is but "mere intellectual light without moral warmth." Meanwhile the state of efficiency of teachers who have passed through the Common and Normal Schools is most deplorable. While they have aimed at extensive knowledge they have failed at grasping the first principles. To this is added the evil of school-books, the writer having been informed by a publisher of such books that no department of his business was so profitable.

The writer points out that this Public School system is carried on at an enormous expense, to which all contribute their share. One man is taxed to educate the children of another; and the justification that has generally been alleged for this is, that ignorance is the mother of vice, and that such a system, as that in the United States, is the best "reformatory agent." Mr. Grant White then proceeds to show that the Public Schools have failed on this side also, proving by statistics that vice is most prevalent in the New England States where the public school system has had the longest life. "If ignorance be the mother of vice, and