

nations, to which we sometimes apply the term *despotic*, have decided this question in the affirmative—have assumed and exercised the right to establish schools at the public expense and to compel the children to attend them, we establish the schools, and then permit a few *rude scholars* and *sensitive parents* to manage them, greatly to the detriment of those who desire to have their children properly instructed. In this way the vitality of the school is destroyed, and a large portion of the public money is annually squandered. This engenders prejudice against the whole system, and furnishes a pretext for the opposition of its covert enemies. It is gratifying however to know that the present is an age of progress, and the energetic measures of the people of the Bay-State for securing the prompt and regular attendance of pupils, furnish abundant evidence that the public mind is advancing in this important branch of school government. While we concede that the time and services of the child rightfully belong to the parent, we believe that parents should not be permitted to appropriate for secular purposes the precious moments allotted for the education of their children, especially when the means of instruction have been provided by the State; nor should they be allowed to encourage truancy by needless indulgence.

The City of Boston has an admirable system of juvenile government, the best perhaps in the United States. The principle upon which it is founded is, that the city authorities are responsible for the government of the child while he is in the streets and public thoroughfares. If, for instance, boys engage in any riotous or improper conduct in the streets or public grounds, they are promptly arrested by the police and taken to a place of confinement, provided expressly for the purpose, where they remain until they are released upon the application of the parent or guardian. If they have no parent or guardian, they are turned over to the proper authorities and a home is provided for them. The prison (for such it really is, though not in the general acceptance of the term) is under the charge of the necessary wardens and matrons, and is elegantly fitted up and supplied with every convenience for the comfort of the children. So soon as the name and residence of the parent or guardian are known, he is notified of the arrest, and must appear in person, pay the necessary charges, and receive the child. If the parent really wishes to govern his child, this prompt co-operation of the city authorities enables him effectually to accomplish his purpose. If, on the other hand, he is indifferent about his government, then it is highly proper that the city should govern for him.

The following extract from the report of Hon. John D. Philbrick, Superintendent of the Public Schools of Boston, devoted exclusively to the subject of truancy or compulsory education, presents many interesting facts. It shows that much of the blame hitherto charged to the account of the pupil, really lies at the door of the parent. We shall quote copiously from this report, for the subject is one which demands the immediate and serious consideration of those who have charge of our public schools. In order that the reader may get a clear view of the subject, we propose to give the introduction in the present, and the conclusion in some future number. In introducing the subject the writer remarks:

"The object of this document is to furnish to the school officers, teachers, truant officers, and to the inhabitants of the city generally some account of the history and administration of the public acts, municipal ordinances, and school regulations, concerning truants and absentees from school.

It is not proposed to discuss at large the subject of attendance and non-attendance of children at school, in its various bearings, but to exhibit a view of what has been done, and the present mode of proceeding, in respect to compulsory education. The science of education is eminently experimental, its recognized principles and maxims having been deduced from the accumulated experience and observation of all ages. For its advancement, therefore, it is highly important to study the history of its progress, and to preserve faithful records of the experiments and efforts made for its promotion.

As the subject of compulsory education is one of much interest in its relations to the public welfare and to private rights, and since it is still but partially developed and perfected as an element of public instruction, it seems highly desirable that information respecting its progress from its beginning to this time, should be generally diffused to serve as a landmark and as an intelligent basis for future efforts.

The two essential elements of a system of universal popular education are:

1. Public provision for the support of schools for the education of all youth.
2. The instruction of all children in such schools, or by other means.

To secure universal education, it is not enough to provide schools at public expense; care must be taken that all children are taught in these schools, or elsewhere. It is a remarkable fact that both of

these fundamental principles of our American system of free schools, were adopted and embodied in legislative enactments, by the first settlers on the shores of New England. They held that it was the undoubted right and the bounden duty of government, to provide for the instruction of all youth; and, accordingly, by a law of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, passed as early as 1647, it was provided that an elementary school should be maintained in every neighbourhood where there were children enough to constitute a school. By this memorable law, the support of schools was made compulsory and education free.

This was the first general school law of the Colony, and indeed the first enacted on this continent; but already "divers free schools were erected, as at Roxbury and at Boston," by the voluntary action of towns, confirmed by the General Court. Thus early was the vital principle of our system of free schools recognized and established by our ancestors.

Still earlier by five years, in 1642, provision had been made by a public act for the exclusion of "barbarism" from every family, by enjoining upon the municipal authorities the duty of seeing that every child within their respective jurisdictions, should be educated and bred up in some honest, lawful calling, by his parent or guardian. Our existing laws concerning truancy, and the attendance of children at school, so obviously point back to this act with its terse preamble, as their original model and pattern, that it seems fitting to introduce the main points of it here.

"Forasmuch as the good education of children is of singular behoof and benefit to any Commonwealth; and whereas many parents and masters are too indulgent and negligent of their duty in this kind:

"It is therefore ordered by this Court and the authority thereof, That the Selectmen of every town, in the several precincts and quarters where they dwell, shall have a vigilant eye over their brethren and neighbours, to see, first, that none of them shall suffer so much barbarism in any of their families, as not to endeavour to teach, by themselves or others, their children and apprentices so much learning as may enable them perfectly to read the English tongue, and knowledge of the capital laws, upon penalty of twenty shillings for each neglect therein. . . . And further, that all parents and masters do breed and bring up their children and apprentices in some honest, lawful calling, labor, or employment, either in husbandry, or some other trade, profitable for themselves and the Commonwealth. If they will not nor cannot train them up in learning to fit for higher employments, and if any of the Selectmen, after admonition by them given to such masters of families, shall find them still negligent of their duty in the particulars aforementioned, whereby children and servants become rude, and unruly, the said Selectmen, with the help of the two magistrates, shall take such children or apprentices from them, and place them with some masters for years, boys till they become to twenty-one, and girls eighteen, years of age, complete, which will more strictly look unto and force them to submit unto government, according to the rules of this order, if by fair means and former instructions they will not be drawn unto it."

These early Colonial Statutes of 1642 and 1647, taken together, constitute a complete system of universal education, not only securing the means of instruction for all, by compelling the unwilling towns to set up schools, but by requiring all children, willing or unwilling, to be taught.

They embody the highest principles of political economy and of social well-being,—the prevention of ignorance and idleness, and the vice and crime which too often follow in their train. The infant State, with a population of only twenty thousand souls, furnishing an example for all States, during all time, admitted

"An obligation on her part, to teach  
Them who are born to serve her and obey;  
Binding herself by statute to secure,  
For all the children whom her soil maintains  
The rudiments of letters."

In the modern revival of education, the first efforts put forth by the friends of the cause, were directed mainly to the improvement of the means of instruction, in supplying better school houses, better teachers, and better text-books. As progress was made in this direction, it began to appear that many could not or would not avail themselves of the benefits and privileges which had been so liberally provided for them at the public expense. The Secretary of the Board of Education, in his Eighth Annual Report, after presenting a vivid picture of the evils resulting from the alarmingly low attendance in the common schools of the State, says, "Among our most patriotic and philanthropic citizens, the injury is becoming more and more frequent, whether a right to rear up children in a state of ignorance, with all its consequent degradation and dangers, is one of the inalienable rights of a republican?" In the Annual Report on the schools of this city, for the year 1845, it is stated that the schools were suffering severely from the inconstant attendance of the pupils, the absences each day being about one