

household (for women serve, too), ought not to be required, and should not be permitted, to decide such questions for eighty thousand children—or for eighty children, for that matter. Of course it may be said that members of school committees are not obliged to perform these duties, or, at least, they may be wisely performed perfunctorily, by adopting the suggestions of the Board of Supervisors, which is supposed to be an advisory body. But, in my experience, this is just what a school committee will not do. It may, and often does, ask the supervisors to recommend a text-book, and to report upon some purely educational question, such, for example, as the so-called enrichment of the grammar course, departmental work, and the adoption of parallel courses. But it does not follow that the expert's recommendation must be accepted, or is even likely to be. I have frequently seen such advice disregarded and sometimes spurned. The Boston committee is composed of twenty-four members (elected at large and eight retiring each year), and as the Massachusetts statute requires a two-thirds vote of the full board for the adoption of any text-book, a clever text-book agent, if he cannot get his own wares adopted, may at least prevent any other book from going on the authorized list. Results that would be ludicrous, if they were not so serious, naturally follow. I recall a number of facts which, while they all belong to one case, illustrate more than one of the points I am trying to make. During my second year in office it was discovered that much dissatisfaction was being expressed by employers of juvenile "help" because of the ill-formed, cramped, and illegible handwriting of graduates of the grammar schools. It was found, also, that Chicago and several other large cities, besides many

smaller ones, both East and West, had adopted the vertical style of penmanship because it had been found that even the "hand" that was not good-looking had almost invariably the merit of being "plain." Hygienic questions were brought in, too, but these were somewhat abstruse, and subsequently the doctors in the Boston committee disagreed very learnedly upon them—as the lawyer members nearly always do on all debatable questions. The Boston board appointed a committee of five to inquire into the vertical system. This work was painstakingly and intelligently done, and the sub-committee's report, which became a public document, was unquestionably a meritorious, if a somewhat ambitious production. The introduction of the system, at least experimentally in a few schools, was recommended. The recommendation was adopted, after a hard fight, by a slender majority. Before the close of the session, when three of the yeas had retired, reconsideration was secured and the report of the sub-committee was rejected. The subject was then referred to the committee on examinations, which reported—only one member dissenting—in favor of the introduction of the system. This report was rejected, and the question was then referred to the Board of Supervisors, whither it should have gone in the first place. The experts made an exhaustive inquiry, summoning witnesses and corresponding with school authorities and other people far and near. At length they reported in favor of the vertical system. But even this report was rejected, almost contemptuously, and the superintendent was then directed by vote of the board to write to the grammar-school masters, asking them if they liked the vertical style and would be willing to try it in their classes. Several replied, expressing a willingness to experiment