

* Special Papers. *

THE PRESENT STATUS OF EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY WM. T. HARRIS, LL.D., NATIONAL COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION.

THE educational question which at present excites most attention among the people of the United States relates either to the extension of the public elementary Schools, or to the adjustment of the colleges and the universities to the preparatory schools. In those States where the Public School systems are newest it is quite natural that the chief educational interest concentrates on the problem of extending the free schools in such a manner as to provide by public taxation for longer School sessions, better teachers, better school buildings, increased attendance upon school. In the older and richer States of the North Atlantic there is much thought and discussion going on regarding the future place and function of the small colleges, and regarding the relation which college work holds to university work.

The friends of education who live in the Northern States behold the spectacle of the establishment of the free common school system in the Southern States with a feeling of pride. Looking over the whole country we remark that in public and private schools 22½ per cent. of the population is enrolled in schools,—13,726,574 pupils of all grades for the year 1889. The proportion in private schools varies with the grade of work. In the elementary grades it is 9 per cent; in the secondary it is three times as large, or 27 per cent; in the superior instruction it is 73 per cent. The total amount expended for education in 1889 was \$172,000,000, counting the amount for private institutions at \$35,000,000.

In the Schools of the United States there prevail two different ideas of the course of study; the one originating with the directors of higher education, and the other a growth from the common elementary school. These two ideals clash in quite important particulars. The common school course of study as it appears in the elementary school and in the Public High School which gives secondary instruction, does not shape itself so as to fit the pupils for entrance to the colleges. The older colleges built their course of study on mathematics, Latin and Greek. They accordingly demanded of the Preparatory Schools a preliminary training or preparation along these lines and neglected all else. But within the past 300 years there has arisen a modern tributary stream of human learning, and it has some time since begun its demand for recognition in the course of study.

The demands of the sciences and of the literature of modern languages to a share in the course of study was met in one way by the college and in another way by the common school. The directors of higher education affirm that Latin, Greek, and mathematics furnished the truly disciplinary studies fit for the foundation of all liberal education. Modern literature and the sciences were not and could not become culture studies, although they might be useful in the way of accomplishments in practical life. Accordingly the colleges pro-

ceeded to recognize the moderns by admitting them into the course of study only at the end. But the college did not discourage the introduction of modern literature and natural science into the preparatory school. Consequently the pupil who left school during his preparatory course, or before the senior year of college, found himself ignorant of these two great and rapidly growing provinces of human learning.

The Public School system has taken a different direction in the matter. It has been under the supervision and management of less highly educated men,—of men less thoroughly instructed in the forms of the past, and as a result less conservative. When the moderns appealed for a place in the course of study, some concession was made at once to the demand. A tendency has been established to recognize the moderns throughout the course of study. First, modern literature was admitted in the shape of a graded series of School readers containing many of the gems of English and American literature, and much, too, that was written in mere colloquial English, and much that was trashy in its style and thought. In the geographical text-book there was an attempt at a survey of the physical world in its relation to man,—the world in its mathematical features, in its physical aspects of interacting forces of light, heat moisture, and gravitation, and finally in its biological aspects of the plant life, animal life, and the races of men. This geographical text-book also drew on the social sciences and introduced scraps of information regarding political economy, the occupations of men, and also the political institutions, the laws and customs and religion. Geography has therefore developed from the beginning into a sort of compend, affording the pupil a survey of the results of the modern sciences, both in the physical and social world.

Having conceded the demands of the moderns in the Elementary School in these respects, and in the introduction of a history of the fatherland, it remains next to emphasize this tendency still more in the secondary Public School, and to make the High School course of study a more thorough work upon English literature, universal history, three or four selected sciences like geology, astronomy, physiology, and chemistry, in addition to the mathematics and some modern or ancient language.

It might be claimed that the graduate of the High School had a broad education. His education, under good teachers, might even be thorough, but certainly in his preparation in Latin and Greek the amount was not sufficient to give the High School pupil a fair chance by the side of the graduate of the special preparatory school. The directors of the common schools have therefore been compelled to establish a double course, a classical and an English course in the Public High School, a procedure so foreign to the spirit of the entire common school course of study that it has only partially succeeded.

Twenty-five years ago the requirements for admission to respectable colleges were much lower than at present. It was then possible for the High School graduate to enter college with a good standing. He knew nearly as much Latin and Greek as the average student from the private prepar-

atory school, and he knew far more science and history and modern literature. These moderns gave him a decided advantage. But there has been a widespread feeling among college men that the standard for admission ought to be raised until the degree of bachelor of arts should represent more learning and greater maturity of mind and body. The bold action of some of the ablest college presidents set into more rapid motion this increase in the demand for more work in the preparatory schools, and the consequence has been the general elevation of the standard college by one and one half to two years. The results of this change have become slowly apparent. There has followed a wider separation of the higher education from the Public School education. The preparatory school has been forced to fill the place that the college formerly held. The difficulty has been increased by the rapid multiplication of Public High Schools, which now number some 4,000. The smaller colleges, which are very numerous, having given up a year or more of their work to the great preparatory schools, felt very keenly the loss of students.

Inasmuch as the larger colleges have developed into universities, there is evidently to be a crusade against the small college that will force it to do the work of secondary education and renounce that of the higher institutions. This procedure will perhaps force itself upon them if the present high standard for admission is retained. But there are very strong reasons against this course. It is possible that there may be a change that will return the college to its old place in the educational system and this will save all the small colleges for the useful work which they have so long and so faithfully accomplished. This same move would likewise restore the college to a harmonious relation to the Public High School. Indeed it would bring about a better adjustment than has ever been before. For the elevation of the standard for admission to college has been accompanied to some extent by requirements of preparation in moderns,—some modern literature and French or German, together with some acquaintance with science is demanded. Hence a slight approximation of preparatory courses of study to that of the High School has been effected. If this tendency is preserved and accentuated in the change of requirements for admission, there may come about a complete adjustment of the higher education with the common school education and an inestimable advantage accrue to the people.

The old college did not know how to manage the years of post-graduate study. The fellowship endowments were paid to brilliant students who had carried off the honors, but who had worked rather for those same honors than for the sake of learning and insight. A reform of the greatest importance was inaugurated by organizing post-graduates into classes for the work of original investigation in the form of laboratory work and seminaria, wherein critical research was taught and learned. At once there sprang up a new and superior order of professors, which has been superseding step by step the type of college professor that formerly prevailed. The new university-trained professor has a very much improved method of