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DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED IN THE WORKING OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

From the Nineteenth Annual Report of the Rev. Dr. Sears, Secretary of the Board of Education for the State of Massachusetts.

It is no longer a question among us whether a universal system of free education shall be maintained, nor whether Christianity shall be recognized in the Schools. The advocates of private schools, as the means of popular education, or of secular schools in which religious influence shall have no place, or of sectarian schools in which the distinctive doctrines of particular creeds shall be taught, have mostly disappeared, having been driven from the field by a force of argument which it was not easy to resist.

The great principle of the necessity of a public system of education, which shall be free to all, may be regarded as theoretically established. The value of this principle is now to be tested by experiment on a very broad scale, no civilized state being willing to leave its subjects in ignorance while others are, by means of that experiment, advancing steadily in power and prosperity. Inasmuch as it is no longer necessary to advocate the theory, it is the more important to guard against mistakes in conducting the experiment.

Unreasonable hopes.—Public Examinations.

One of the most common and fatal mistakes made by ardent friends of education is the indulgence of unreasonable hopes,

and the maintenance of extravagant views as to what they can effect by means of it. It is often supposed that great results can be produced in a single term of twelve or fifteen weeks. Both teacher and committee aim at this rapid mode of manufacture. True education is that which aids the slow and healthy growth of the mind,—the incorporation into it of principles and the formation of tastes and habits, the full value of which will appear only after mature years have developed their tendencies. The highest and best parts of education are incapable of exhibition. The show made at the close of a term is well enough to amuse children and their fond parents, but it is often like that of newly dressed pleasure-grounds, adorned with trees and shrubs fresh from the nursery, having a show of vitality in the foliage, though as yet drawing no sap from the root. Such frostwork of the school-room is soon dissolved and generally passes away with the occasion. All attempts at such premature results of education are nearly useless, and yet our system of employing teachers by the term renders it almost necessary for a teacher who is ambitious of distinction, to lay his plans for that kind of superficial culture and mechanical drill which can be produced in a few weeks, and shown off as evidence of marvellous skill. An experienced educator or observer can, indeed, inspect the processes of education, and judge of their fitness, as an agriculturist can of the preparation of the soil, and of the quality of the seed. But most persons must wait for time to bring forth the fruits of education, before they can form a true judgment of its character. All expectations of triumphant success in the schools, founded upon such views of speedy results as those above alluded to, are destined to fail of their fulfilment. And when the people have been misled by these vain hopes, and find themselves in the end bitterly disappointed, the public schools will be in danger of languishing, bleeding from wounds inflicted by their own friends.

Limitations of the Teacher's Power.

There is, moreover, in the ardor of philanthropic enthusiasm, danger of overlooking the limitations of the teacher's power. While that power is great, when properly sustained by collateral influences, it has yet many limitations, partly from the nature of the human mind, and partly from peculiar circumstances. One of these limitations is to be found in the individuality of the pupil's mind. When it is said that the teacher has a power over the young, like that of the sculptor over the block of marble, some abatement is to be made for the rhetorical character of the statement. The marble is entirely