

DEFECTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

EXCELLENT as the results of the Free School system have been in a new and unsettled country, there are not wanting symptoms that it is losing its popularity in the older and more populous States of the Union. This is a fact of very great significance to us, now that we are about to adopt a Free School system of elementary education. From the last report of the Commissioner of Education in the States, which has only recently been published, although it is for the year ending June, 1888, we learn that there is going on in the older and more cultured States a gradual transfer of pupils from the public to the private schools. American citizens in those States are withdrawing their children from the Free Schools and sending them to schools in which fees must be paid. This is not to be attributed to any decline of efficiency in the public schools, as the Commissioner states that they are supplied with "better teachers and better material appliances for education than ever before, and more money is expended upon them." The facts and figures by which he supports his inference as to the retrograde movement in public schools, and the advance in private schools, are these: He finds, in the first place, that the increase in the enrolment of scholars for the year under review does not keep pace with the increase of population of school age. In the year 1886-7, 20.38 per cent. of the total population was enrolled in the public schools; whereas in 1887-8 the percentage was only 20.10. Another interesting and relevant fact is that during the decade ending 1887 there was a decrease in the enrolment in the public schools of all the States, except those of the South Atlantic sea-board and the south cen-

tral area. And even in these States the Commissioner tells us that growth has been now arrested, "after having reached a point in its development considerably below that occupied by the Northern States." The Commissioner next inquires if the decline of numbers in the public schools is compensated by an equivalent advance in the numbers attending private schools. On this point he finds that in fourteen States and territories the average increase of the private school enrolment was 6.98 per cent, a percentage much higher than the public school increase in the same States. "The most complete and trustworthy data," says the Commissioner, "upon this head are furnished by a group of States comprising Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey." In these five States the public enrolment increased in the year by 4,938, or 0.28 per cent.; whilst the private school enrolment increased in the year by 12,956, or 0.73 per cent. That these figures are approximately correct is confirmed by the fact that their sum almost exactly corresponds to the increase for the year of the population of school age in those States. The conclusion at which the Commissioner arrives from these facts is, "that in these States, and presumably elsewhere, there is going on a transfer of pupils from public to private schools," and he adds, what is undoubtedly true, that "the circumstance is of the greatest significance, and demands the greatest consideration." The explanation he gives of this social revolution, public school retrogression, or whatever other designation may apply to the group of facts we have been considering, is probably the true one. He thinks it is to be found "in connection with