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## The Educational Weekly

Edited by T. ARNOLD HAULTAIN, M.A.

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TORONTO, JULY 22, 1886.

ON the 17th ult., Sir Lyon Playfair made his speech in the Imperial Parliament on the Education Estimates of the year. Although the Irish question has all but monopolized the attention of the House of Commons during the greater part of its late short session, yet Sir Lyon Playfair found time to give his listeners much interesting information in regard to the progress made in the British educational system. By way of showing this progress he goes back to the time before the Education Act of 1870 was passed. In 1869, out of every hundred of the population there were only seven children at school. In 1886, the per-

centage has risen to 16.67, so that the improvement has been very marked. In this matter Sir Lyon Playfair compares English with American and with German results. England can, he shows, safely challenge comparison with either country. Germany, he says, has been held up as an example, but England is now not a little in advance of the German standard. Frankfort has at school 69 per 100 of the population. Berlin has 106.4. Cologne has 128. Hamburg has 9, and only in one town, in Elberfeld with 16.3, is there any approach to the present English percentage. If Sir Lyon Playfair's comparison had given different results, we might have protested against it as unfair to England. The German returns are taken from select town centres. The English include the agricultural districts as well as the towns. When we turn to America, we find that in Massachusetts, the leading State of the Union in education, the percentage of children on the register who are in actual attendance at school is less than the English percentage. There is room for improvement even so. The British Isles have 23.6 per cent. of absentees, truants for the most part, as against 27.5 per cent. in Massachusetts. In other words, out of 4,412,000 children on English school registers, there are 1,041,000 absent daily from school on the average of the year, and Sir Lyon Playfair is not satisfied with this, and he calls for further efforts to bring the stragglers within the school walls.

In regard to seating capacity also marked improvement is shown. Taking the country through, the provision of school seats needed in 1885 on the most liberal calculation was 4,583,175. The seats actually provided were 400,000 more than these. When we are told how far these seats were filled, the excess of provision becomes much more manifest. For every 100 children in every rank of school age there are 91 seats ready and waiting in public elementary schools, but there are only 80 children on the school registers, and only 62 in average daily attendance.

Sir Lyon Playfair, in the course of his speech, draws attention to matters of grave importance in the structure of the British

educational system. He finds it defective in several points, most of all in technical education and training. Foreign schools, he says, encourage attendance of the children up to 16 or 18 years of age. There are what are termed continuation and improvement schools, and the child passes to these from the elementary school at which he begins. In England there are no such schools, and the great mass of the working classes can only obtain such education as the elementary schools affords. If they are to have technical training given them, it must be by a due extension of the elementary school system, and instruction in the natural sciences and in manual training must be brought in to the ordinary school course. The demand for this has been met in some degree, but very imperfectly as yet, and the pressure for further progress is so great that Sir Lyon Playfair thinks it is irresistible, and that the House will soon be forced to comply with the growing demand. Sir Henry Roscoe and Mr. Mather, in the short debate which followed, spoke in the same sense. Sir Henry Holland, on the other hand, expressed his opinion that technical education in all its forms comes properly within the sphere of voluntary effort, and that it would be neither wise nor possible to saddle the taxpayer with the cost. Sir Lyon Playfair takes a middle course. He thinks that more may be done than is now done, but not much more. He finds that when children have passed the higher standards they are usually taken away from school, and that they would be likely to remain if they could get the kind of education which they need. He would, therefore, have technical education given to advanced classes of children and to children who have passed beyond the recognized school age. He has further and larger plans for the future, but he waits for an opportunity of discussing them at a time when there may be a better chance of their receiving the attention they require. When Parliament has declared its mind the Government will be ready to act, but at the present moment education is not the subject to which the mind of Parliament turns with chief interest.