

## JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

MONTREAL (LOWER CANADA), APRIL, 1865.

## Elementary Education in France. (I)

The report of the Minister of Public Instruction for 1863 on the state of elementary education in France, which the Government has just published, has been very generally commented upon in the Paris press and has provoked much opposition. Containing information of the greatest practical value, this document, of unusual interest besides, has been objected to on account of some recommendations which it contains, and which, if acted upon, would establish a system of gratuitous instruction and compulsory attendance at school.

Without stopping to examine the merits or demerits of these suggestions, which, the *Moniteur* explained, were published as expressing the personal opinion of the minister only, and not as indicating the policy of the government in the matter, we shall proceed to lay before our readers a short *résumé* of this very elaborate paper.

The number of children in attendance at the primary schools of France had risen from 1,935,624 in 1832 to 3,530,125 in 1847 and to 4,336,368 in 1863; showing an increased ratio of from 59 pupils in every 1000 inhabitants at the first mentioned period, to 116 pupils in a like number of inhabitants at the date of the report. The number of public schools opened since 1847 was 3,566, affording instruction to 806,233 children and representing an annual increase of 50,000 in the number of children attending school. (2)

818 communes only are reported as without schools, in most of which however the children attended school in the adjoining parishes.

Taking the children of school age as defined in the regulations (7 to 13 years), it would appear that of the 4,018,427 returned in the inspectors' census of 1863 for the whole of France, only 3,133,540 attended the primary schools, leaving 884,887 as the number of children of this class who did not attend. It is true that the university enumeration reduces this number to 692,678, but as the teachers who compile the statistics have no means of ascertaining how many children are permanently absent from school in the cities, these figures are believed to fall short of the truth. Whatever may be the actual balance in this case, it is not to be inferred that the whole number of these children are totally deprived of instruction; many in fact receive lessons at home or attend the junior classes in superior institutions, learning, while others enter school one or two years after they have reached the lowest age prescribed or leave before attaining the highest.

The period of school attendance is, in general, regulated by the requirements of religious instruction, few children remaining at school after these have been fulfilled. There was no means of ascertaining the exact number of boys between the ages of 8 and 11 who did not pass through the public schools in 1863; but from data obtained by the administration it was apparent that of this restricted class, the number of non-attendants could not exceed 200,000.

Of the whole number of children frequenting the primary schools, 34.6 per cent., or over one third, attended during a period of less than six months. Of 657,491 pupils who left the schools

in 1863, 395,393, or 60 per cent., could read, write and cipher, while 262,008, or 40 per cent., had totally or partially failed to acquire a knowledge of these elementary branches.

The rolls of the conscription and the registers of marriages furnish evidence pointing to the same conclusion. In 1862, 27.49 per cent., or nearly one third of the conscripts could neither read nor write; in 1830 the percentage was 43.73. Of the men who married in 1853, 33.70 per cent. could not sign their names; the percentage in 1862 being 28.54; of the women, the percentage was 54.75 and 42.26 during the same years respectively, giving an average of .7 and 35.90 per cent. for both sexes.

Thus it appears that nearly one third of the conscripts are unable to read or write; 36 per cent. of those who marry cannot sign their names; more than one fifth of the children of school age did not attend school in 1863, and that of the four fifths present the majority attended irregularly and only during a comparatively short time.

During the last sixteen years the number of illiterate conscripts diminished by 7½ per cent. only, a progress so slow that the Minister foresees that a considerable time must elapse before elementary education shall have become as widely diffused as in Germany, where the illiterate conscripts number but 2 or 3 per cent.

The statistics having reference to the criminal classes offer much that is suggestive of serious reflections. Of the 4,543 persons arrested for crimes in 1863, 1756 or 33 per cent. were quite illiterate, and 1964, or 43 per cent. could read or write but very imperfectly, thus showing that 81 per cent. of this unfortunate class had been deprived of the benefits of elementary instruction.

To effect the object which the Minister has in view, various suggestions of more or less importance are made, among which we find the improving of the methods of instruction followed in the schools, the promoting of the usefulness of teachers and the influence of school inspection, the stimulating of a healthy spirit of emulation in both teachers and pupils; financial reforms; the building of schoolhouses wherever they may be needed; adding to old schools as regards buildings, furniture and libraries; and last, though not least, the recommendations having reference to gratuitous instruction and enforced attendance, and which, as we have said above, were received with marks of disapprobation by a great part of the press.

These recommendations are supported by a detailed comparison of the French system with those pursued in other countries, but the opposition to which we have adverted above, caused the Government to hesitate before adopting them. A sort of compromise between the views of the Minister and public opinion will accordingly be found in the following propositions submitted by the Emperor to the Council of State. 1st. Teachers in independent elementary schools shall not be required to hold diplomas. 2nd. Communes whose population exceeds 500 shall be bound to maintain a girls' school. 3rd. Prizes for assiduity to be given to pupils attending the public schools regularly between the ages of 7 and 13. 4th. Female teachers to receive a minimum salary of 500 francs per annum. 5th. The stipends of male and female teachers acting conjointly to be elevated, and the appointment of such teachers entrusted to the Prefect. 6th. The right to establish free schools previously accorded to the communes to be rendered more effective in practice, for which purpose a tax shall be levied and, in cases of deficiency, grants from the Government shall be accorded. The male teachers in such schools to enjoy a fixed salary.

## Evening Classes of the Montreal Mechanics' Institute.

## PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES.

Last evening a public examination of the classes of the Mechanics' Institute, took place in the hall of that building, an interested auditory being present.

(1) The highly interesting report of M. Daray is being published in *étiruo* in our French Journal.

(2) These figures include the schools and pupils in the three annexed Departments. In Savoy and the County of Nice the public schools numbered 1,528, and the pupils attending the public and the independent schools, 86,812.