

THE FUNCTION OF THE HIGH SCHOOL.

THE development and growth of our High School system is one of the most prominent features in our whole system of education. The High School is found from one end of the Province to the other, not as an isolated, special appendage to the system of national education, but as an essential and vital part of it. All, however, have not come to recognize that fact. Too frequently, from some quarter or other, comes a voice attacking this part of our system, decrying its usefulness as a public institution, or attacking it on the ground that it is not general and national in character and usefulness, but special and sectional. It is evident with the establishment of every new High School that it is the product of a system, that it is not created for the benefit only of a certain few or a particular class, but to satisfy the popular demand of a section of our people. The site is not a matter of chance or of individual wish, but of well-considered circumstances, and of public need. The course of studies prescribed for the High School course, similarly, is based on conceptions of national need and national growth, and intended for the upbuilding of the body politic. Such are the interests the High School system is intended to subserve. There are some who doubt if it realizes the objects for which it is instituted. Are there not classes of the commonwealth who do not get from the High School benefits proportionate to their numbers and importance? Is it within the reach of all, or are there conditions of entrance which exclude the many? Does it combine breadth of culture with practical utility? Is its training at all necessary for the vast majority of the members of the state? Does it exist for all or the few? These are some of the questions we frequently hear asked in connection with our High School. First, let us observe broadly, that its usefulness is of a twofold character, direct and indirect. Its indirect benefits are far greater than its direct benefits. They are the result of the reflex influence of those who are directly benefited by it. It is because its usefulness is not apparent on the surface that the existence of it is doubted. The High School is a vital part of our educational system. It is the connecting link between the Public School and the University. Our educational system is one grand system of irrigation, and our High Schools are the main feeders that carry the waters from their main fountain head at the University to the streams that irrigate and fertilize every part and parcel of the national domain. Our educational system is a grand system of circulation, and the High Schools are a vital and necessary part. Its mission and its work lie in this direction, and we have reason to conclude that it is a success. The advancement of our Public Schools in efficiency has been proportionate to the advancement of the High School in efficiency. It is from it they derive their inspiration, and their power. The graduation of a small number of our citizens each year from the universities is a matter of small moment if the work of the university ends with them, but it is a matter of

great moment if through these channels the thought of the university, the intellectual life of the nation, circulate through the whole body politic. All citizens cannot and need not be university graduates, yet no one will question the absolute necessity of a national university to the intellectual existence and proper development of the state. It is little fruit from our High School, if the training of the students goes not beyond the circle of the students themselves; but it is of the highest national value if these students go forth into every walk of life with minds armed with reason and clothed with power, and communicate to their fellow-citizens some portion of their intellectual vitality—if to our manufacturing establishments, to our marts of trade, to our farming communities, to every centre of activity, some citizen goes who is able to elevate and refine his fellows. We wish our grand army of artisans and workmen to be fitted for, and to delight in talking of other subjects than wheels, and wood, and iron. We wish our men of the shop to eat with, and walk with, and sleep with other and more ennobling companions in thought than bales and bones. We would have those whose hands make and fashion the implements and articles of trade and manufacture endowed with minds competent to understand, not merely the principle underlying the making of these, but to read and think with intelligence and comprehension. When the battle of life is coming to a close, and old age, so far as this world is concerned, is feeding on the achievements and movements of the past rather than on the prospects for the future, we wish everyone to have the comforts and consolations of mental power, and mental discipline, and the recollections which are the fruit of these.

The principles that determine our curriculum are those of general training for the mind. Our present curriculum, with its bonds and its "shall," may be considered all that is desirable as a basis of education, while its options and its "may" allow scope for individual talent and preference. There must be certain primary and fundamental subjects which should be taken up by all. Solidity should combine with elasticity—general culture with practical utility. Should the options be increased? There appear to be two directions in which the principle of options is being carried, and might be carried farther with good results and gratification to large classes of the people. These are in the direction of agriculture and technology. Already the first seeds of this movement have been sown, and there is good ground to hope that agriculture and mechanical science will become limbs of our educational body as soon as the science of education has produced treatise on these subjects which will give a mental training, instead of the mere communication of facts. Any subject taught should conduce to mental growth, as well as practical equipment for work. A work on agriculture, setting forth the general principles of the science, should be as suitable for a school, and as beneficial to the professions and trades, as other of our subjects of study, and a laboratory showing the practical application of the principles of mechanical science