BETTER SCHOOL LAW

Dr. Park Strongly Favors the County District Plan.

AN UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT.

Most Important of All, Increased Efficiency Will Be Secured—But Simplicity and Economy Are Also Its Features.

The following address was delivered by Dr. John R. Park before the Salt Lake County Teachers' association on Saturday, January 13th, 1894:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:

Sovereignty in this country is held to abide in the people, and if so it behooves every citizen of the commonwealth constantly to remind himself that he is responsible in a measure for public institutions. He should require into their efficiency and know they are not assuming this merit only in form, and that they are progressive and not merely spontaneous growths springing up in the wake of institutions long passed their usefulness.

There is conceded in this Territory a school law that possesses many admirable features and so superior to what obtained some few years ago that it appears to some people a new creation and by contrast so good as to seem to them good enough. But it is a special that has been in vogue since the old school days and while it has done much good, as we all believe, that good has been accomplished at a fearful waste of energy and means, and at some sacrifice of the moral and mental growth. With this system prevailing in all the states from the first, there has ever been a vexed question attached to it namely, that is, how to secure gradation, or a progressive system of scholarship for country schools with such gradation as is already had in cities and towns. It is quite certain now that it cannot be reached under the district system as it prevails here and in many of the states. It should be understood here that education is no longer, or at all, held to be the mere collecting of facts or the storing of knowledge. As now better conceived, it is the development of character, the training of the mind and body to habits of thought and industry that when attended with proper subjects along definite lines to legitimate results, to such habit of thinking or skill can ever be bestowed upon a child by subjecting it to irrelevant, uncertain, incoherent, and slipshod work. From necessity, most of the school work done in the rural districts is of this character, and there has seemed no relief from the unfortunate condition that has compelled it. The great desideratum so long felt, as before said, is a system that will give to the country schools advantages for grading that people expect, or nearly equal to those possessed by cities and large towns. Over the matter of sufficient and regular attendance at school is derived and made general in the rural districts, the chief obstacle of gradation, to the employment of competent teachers, and in securing of efficient supervision, is removed. Now, I am glad to say that at last there is a plan of organization for country schools being extensively adopted in the East, to bring about these very desirable objects.

Last spring a meeting was called by the Territorial Commissioner of Schools, of the leading educators and school men of the Territory to convene in this city, to consider the advisability and method of immediately amending the school law now upon the statute books. At that meeting, the matter was to some extent discussed, but too work of thorough investigation was left to committees to which special portions of the law were assigned for study and report at a subsequent meeting. At this latter meeting, a general plan was adopted and referred to another committee for details. A bill thus devised will probably be submitted to the Legislature now in session, for enactment as a substitute for the present school law, and it is this bill, at least its most radical feature, that I am asked to consider here this evening.

I remember before that it was thought a plan had been devised by which the schools of the sparsely settled rural districts might obtain many of the privileges heretofore monopolized by cities and towns. The plan is known where it is in vogue in the East, as the Township Plan. It abolishes all existing districts, the township into special districts, and makes each township a single school district having its board of education and officers of administration similar in most respects to school organizations in cities. There seems to be no question of its efficacy in reaching the chief objects sought for. In states, where it has been adopted and put into execution, as in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, West Virginia, Alabama, Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Dakota, Michigan, Iowa and perhaps others, not only have the advantages that led to its adoption been realized, but in other directions it has proved a revelation of hidden valuables. If prejudices of system among those who are qualified to judge in any criterion, no sectional question is more positively settled than the superiority of this system over the old. In report of the New York department of public instruction for 1889 may be found all the extracts from state reports referring to this system that a careful search had been able to gather. There are 18 of these and every one is in favor. There are in it advocates such men as Henry Barnard, John Eaton, Wm. T. Harris, Stanley Hall, W. E. Sheldon, Lemon Romeyn, R. G. Northrup and many others of equal prominence, besides annual principals, state superintendents, city superintendents, and county superintendents galore. It has, therefore, passed successfully and triumphantly in educational times, the ordeal of the most expert, learned and wise and several best experience, and has not stood it even the experiment of its adoptive thirty.

Now, if we sincerely hope, in short to throw off our vexatious clothes of irrelevant vacuities and substitute for them the more simplified apparel of serviceable habiliments, it is solutions and improvements, in both social and physical sight, have and other as those you that permanent standard and Each arrangement that requires change of any kind or radically inconvenient and expensive; but with studious will some and those are that will of self reliance that organized everything that pertains to farms or society, and then increasing and changes will be made difficult. I, after, therefore, at this time that we seriously consider the advantages of this plan for our schools, to be known, as to the county, consisting entirely of the county in the law, not available with which for us. It is unquestionably the very system we need, and I believe the present is the most auspicious time for its adoption. There is a little or no time to be lost in reference to being prepared to submit to the Legislature now in session, for its enactment, which embodies the essential features of the proposed bill of county plan. The bill as prepared provides that the County Commissioners shall divide the County of the Territory into school districts, to be known as the Township Plan. That the bill shall select a Township, a township, and an executive committee. That the title to all school property in the district shall vest in the Township. That the bill shall now on the statutes as pertaining to cities of the first and second class is applied to the whole Territory, the county being the district, county of the school district. To organize the schools of the Territory as a whole, is by no means an revolution without precedent. The fact is that the system contained in the bill has for years been extended throughout Utah to the last last year. Where it has been applied, as in the cities of Salt Lake, Ogden and Logan, the results have been, it has worked marvels of improvement, and shown what exceptionally wise only by done for the schools of the Territory, and the system is the way of gradation and efficient supervision, if placed under a similar unified organization.

Let us consider some features of the two systems. The unit of organization in the common district system is the law, that is, the school district as it now exists is too limited in territory and school population and in the means for establishing anything the permanent gradation. Wherever has been attempted in this direction, even in the most desirous has met with but indifferent success, and in most a set with absolute failure. I may immediately say that in this respect the whole plan is in fact, and in the use of the cities to the same, Utah has no progressive system of instruction for her public schools. Some districts, small as it may be in territory or population, is independent of all others, and is its school work accordingly without purpose beyond its own limits. Its school work is nearly entirely for children of school age, for a short time each year in the capacity of a school. The school closes the attention of public lines that fails to be easy, and when this is exhausted the school adjourn with scarcely a record of the work done. In a multitude of such temporary and modified efforts to keep school there is nothing that merits the name of system. There can be neither aim nor ambition for pupil or teacher for something better beyond, for there is nothing one provided. The fact is, we are forced to contemplate in the present aspect of our schools, several hundred districts, frequently being composed in their elements and in their condition of possible territory, but with no bond of union to effect their movement and action. In all this there is matter for grave concern when one of the chief objects of all this machinery and mighty expense in maintaining our public schools, is never obtained. With the county, however, as a unit in organization and administration, all this will be remedied. The multitude of school officers will be reduced to a minimum, and this minimum will consist of the most practical and efficient persons for the position in the county. Schools and school houses will be located with reference to the greatest economy and convenience, and the children of the whole county classified according to their scholastic attainments. Here is a school in the basis of gradation, and carried right to the door of every citizen in the Territory. Here is the start for primary and intermediate schools in every county, and for high schools when the general of gradation shall be needed. The primary schools will be most numerous and will be located where they will be most easily accessible for those we attend them regardless of ordinary district lines. Intermediate schools will be for older pupils or higher attainments who may be required to travel further to reach their schools, which they can do. When High schools shall be necessary, they can be located at the most accessible and eligible parts which to most come can be reached daily by the pupils from homes but if the distance should prove too great to do this, there can be added the plan of cottage boarding, or living in cottages near the school during the week, with furniture and provisions supplied from home. This we would be from within the reach of every child in Utah a high school education, and that to be attained at home.

It may be objected that the rural population of the counties is too small to warrant the positive such a separation classification of the schools and attainments. I will say that I do not see the advantages to be expected for its peculiarities as a rule in grouping into close settlements as villages which give various facilities for primary and intermediate schools. And, further, most of these settlements are located in such proximity to each other that where one would be found in the report of the New York department of public instruction for 1889 may be found all the extracts from state reports referring to this system that a careful search had been able to gather. There are 18 of these and every one is in favor. There are in it advocates such men as Henry Barnard, John Eaton, Wm. T. Harris, Stanley Hall, W. E. Sheldon, Lemon Romeyn, R. G. Northrup and many others of equal prominence, besides annual principals, state superintendents, city superintendents, and county superintendents galore. It has, therefore, passed successfully and triumphantly in educational times, the ordeal of the most expert, learned and wise and several best experience, and has not stood it even the experiment of its adoptive thirty.

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