COMMON SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS' SEMINARIES

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Common Schools and Teachers' Seminaries by Calvin Ellis Stowe

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The first of the following pieces is a 'Report on Elementary Public Instruction in Europe, which was made to the General Assembly of Ohio, in December, 1837.' It was printed by the Legislature, and copies sent to every school district in the State. The Legislature of Pennsylvania also published it, both in English and German, and distributed it throughout that State. It was again printed, by the Legislature of Massachusetts, and it has also been published in Michigan, New York, and several other States. Notwithstanding this extensive supply, the demand for it still continues; and it is now accordingly reprinted, with corrections by the Author.

The second piece is an article originally published in the American Biblical Repository, for July, 1839. Its purpose is to promote the same great object that is contemplated in the first, and the Author hopes it may prove not less acceptable and useful.

REPORT

ON

ELEMENTARY PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

To his Excellency the Governor, and the Honorable the General Assembly, of the State of Ohio:

In March, 1836, just before I embarked for Europe, I received a communication from Governor Lucas, with the great seal of the State, enclosing the following resolves of the General Assembly, *to wit:*

"*Resolved, by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio,* That C. E. Stowe, Professor in one of the literary institutions of this State, be requested to collect, during the progress of his contemplated tour in Europe, such facts and information as he may deem useful to the State, in relation to the various systems of public instruction and education which have been adopted in the several countries through which he may pass, and make report thereof, with such practical observations as he may think proper, to the next General Assembly.

"*Resolved,* That his Excellency the Governor be requested to transmit a certified copy of the foregoing proceedings to Professor Stowe."

In pursuance of the above resolutions, I communicated the intention of the General Assembly to Honorable A. Stevenson, the American Minister near the British Court, and he very readily furnished me with the credentials necessary for the most satisfactory attainment of the object of my inquiries. I am also happy to remark, that the communication of Governor Lucas was a ready passport to my free admission to every public institution in

Europe to which I applied; and that my endeavors were seconded, in the most encouraging manner, by all the gentlemen connected with the educational establishments in the several countries through which I passed; and the warmest expressions of approbation were elicited, of the zeal manifested by so young a State as Ohio, in the great cause of general education. Particularly in some of the old communities of central Europe, where it happened to be known that I was born in the same year in which Ohio became a sovereign State, it seemed to be matter of amusement, as well as gratification, that a man, who was *just as old as the State in which he lived*, had come, with official authority, to inquire respecting the best mode of education for the growing population of his native land; and they remarked that our Governor and Legislators must be very enlightened and highly-cultivated men. When, in one instance, I informed them that our Governor was a plain farmer, and that a majority of our Legislators were of the same occupation, the well-known line which a Latin poet applies to husbandmen, was applied to us:—

"O fortunatos nimium, si sua bona norint!"
"O happy people, if they do but appreciate their own blessings!"

In the progress of my tour I visited England, Scotland, France, Prussia, and the different States of Germany; and had opportunity to see the celebrated Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paris, Berlin, Halle, Leipsic, Heidelberg, and some others; and I was every where received with the greatest kindness, and every desirable facility was afforded me for the prosecution of my inquiries. But, knowing that a solid foundation must be laid before a durable superstructure can be reared, and being aware that, on this principle, the chief attention of our Legislature is, and for the present must be, directed to our common schools, my investigation of the universities was comparatively brief—and the most of my time was spent in visiting the best district schools I could hear of, and also the high schools intended for

the business education of young men, and the institutions for the education of teachers.

Before I proceed to the result of my inquiries on these topics, I would call the attention of the Legislature to some facts of a more general nature, which strongly impressed themselves upon my mind during the progress of my tour; and which, it seems to me, have a very important bearing upon the successful maintenance, if not the very existence, of free institutions in our country. I allude particularly to the wonderful change which has taken place in the policy of monarchical governments in respect to the education of the people. Formerly it was supposed that despotism could be maintained only by a sovereign with an army devoted to his interests, and dependant only upon himself for subsistence; an aristocracy which should monopolize the wealth and the intellectual culture of the entire nation; and a mass of people held in entire ignorance of their rights and privileges as men, and condemned to drudge during life for a bare and precarious subsistence—the mere dependants and slaves of the higher orders. But what is the aspect which the sovereignties of Europe now present?—and what is the change which is forcing itself along, even into the despotisms of Asia and Africa? Ever since the revolution which separated this country from the British empire, the idea of popular rights has been working its way irresistibly throughout the civilized world; and sovereigns who have had the sagacity to see the unavoidable results, have adapted their measures to the new aspect of the times. A new era in the history of civilization has evidently commenced. A despotic king, of the Protestant faith, dreading the evils of an ignorant and unbridled democracy, such as was witnessed in the French Revolution, has now, for forty years, been pursuing a course of instruction for his whole people, more complete, better adapted to develope every faculty of the soul, and to bring into action every capability of every kind that may exist, even in the poorest cottage of the most obscure corner of his kingdom, than has ever before been imagined. Men of the highest order of intellect and most extensive attainments are encouraged

to devote themselves to the business of teaching; the best plans for the furtherance of this object are immediately received and generously rewarded; talent and industry, wherever they exist, are sought out and promoted; and nothing is left undone that can help forward this great design.

The introduction of this system was preceded by political changes, which, considered as emanating from the government itself, have scarcely a parallel in the history of nations. When Frederick William III. ascended the throne of Prussia, in 1797, the condition of the people was in many respects truly deplorable. But immediately upon his accession he set about reforming abuses, and introducing improvements. The odious religious edict was abolished;* the administration of justice was thoroughly reformed, and rigid economy introduced into the royal household. The exclusive privileges of the nobles were taken away, and their power so completely broken, that there is now no hereditary aristocracy which can interfere with the sovereign, or oppress the people.

In 1810 the peasantry, who before had no ownership in the soil which they cultivated, and consequently no independence of character, by a royal decree, became freeholders on the following terms, namely: those who held their lands on perpetual lease, by giving up one third, and those who held them on limited or life leases, by giving up one half, to the landlord, became the owners in fee-simple of the rest. The military is now so modelled, that every citizen between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one is in actual service in the standing army, where he is instructed in all that pertains to military life, and then returns to his peaceful occupations. Thus the army is made up entirely of citizens—and every citizen is a soldier; and there is no such thing as a standing army at the entire devotion of the sovereign, and independent of the people.

The Prime Minister, Hardenberg, in a circular pub-

* This edict required every clergyman of the established Church to swear adhesion to a minute creed, issued by royal authority, or abandon his calling.