

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION
IN LARGE CITIES: THE LEGAL
STATUS OF THE PUBLIC
SCHOOLS. ADDRESSES**

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School Administration in Large Cities: The Legal Status of the Public Schools. Addresses by
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School Administration in Large Cities.
The Legal Status of the Public Schools.

ADDRESSES

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK STATE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION,

Academy of Music, Brooklyn, N. Y., July 3, 1889,

AND THE

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION,

At Nashville, Tenn., July 17, 1889,

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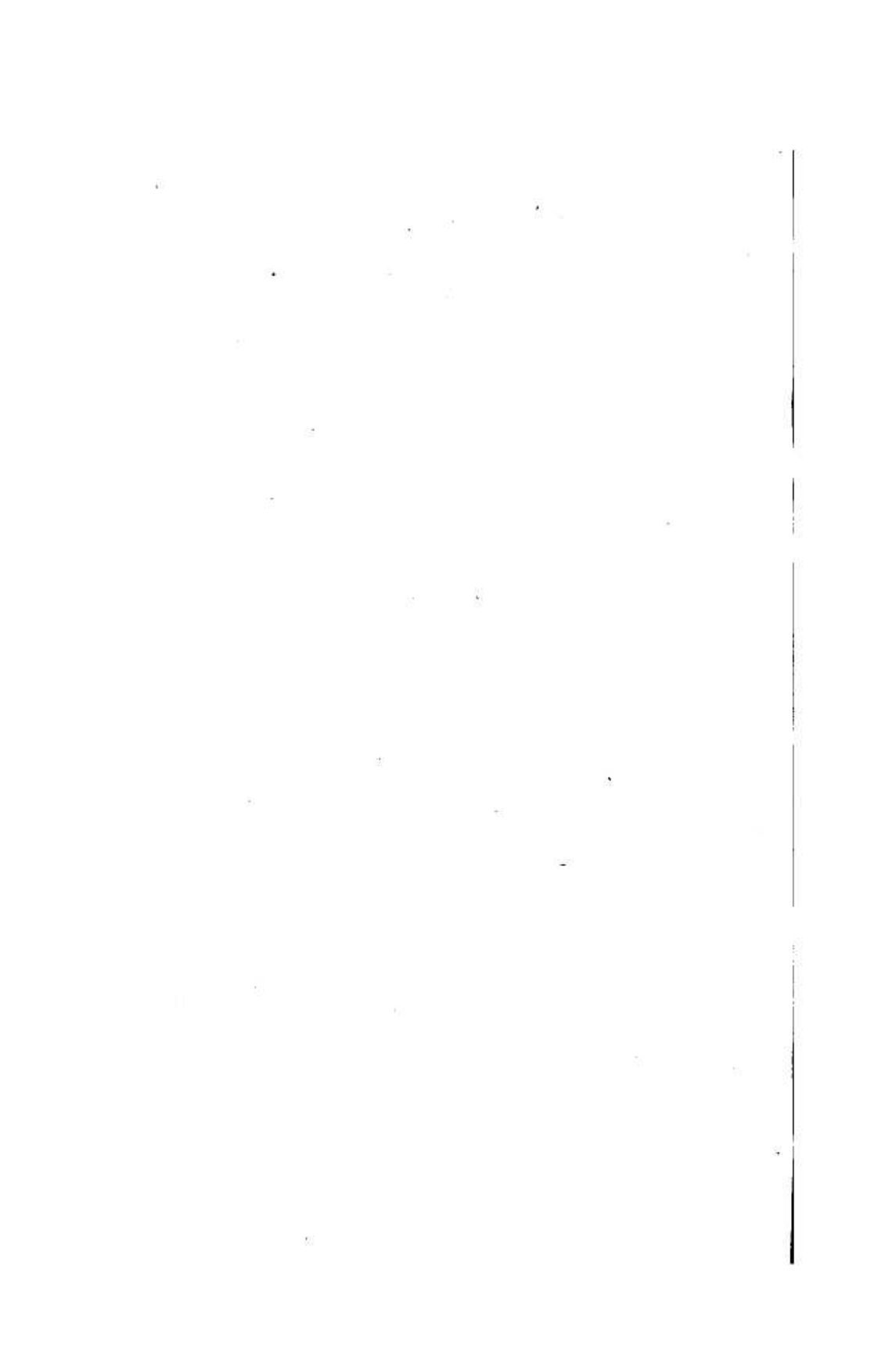
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN LARGE CITIES.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

NEW YORK STATE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION,

Academy of Music, Brooklyn, N. Y., July 3, 1889.



ADDRESS.*

MR. PRESIDENT AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

In his life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Dr. Holmes tells us that during the last days of the philosopher and poet, when so feeble in body and mind that the light of life flickered in its socket and he was scarcely able to recognize friends or things about him, they walked together in the garden one bright summer morning. Mr. Emerson passed the glorious June roses in silence and apparently without observing them, until coming upon one more luxuriant in its perfume and beauty than all the rest, he stopped before it and, with the momentary return of the true poetic spirit and impulse, removed his hat in chivalric fashion, saying, "I feel that I must take off my hat to it."

During these late commencement days I have been passing through the most charming scenes of all the year. I fear, however, that I look upon them in a more mechanical way than I once did. The audiences are certainly as large and as radiant as ever; the general interest in commencements can never abate. The June roses have been so grandly luxuriant and so plentiful that I have feared I was losing my power to appreciate them. The essays and orations, always wise, have probably been even more deep and dense in their wisdom this year than ever. What Tennyson styles "the sweet girl graduate" has presumably budded and bloomed more sweetly and gloriously than ever; but I confess she does not arouse the same feelings in my bosom she did twenty years ago. [Laughter.] But no matter to what extent familiarity with these scenes shall beget indifference to them, I shall never pass through them and come to the meeting of the State Teachers' Association, the most interesting and fragrant of them all, without

* Stenographically reported by Frank D. Shea.

being brought to my senses, and feeling that I must take off my hat to it. [Applause.]

Your executive committee, with great courtesy to my official station, has again set aside an evening of the Association's time and invited me to occupy it. I undertake the task not without misgivings as to the wisdom of repeating this course each succeeding year — misgivings which I have expressed to the committee in all seriousness — but with a sincere appreciation of the opportunity which your courtesy affords me, as well, I hope, as with an adequate conception of the responsibility which it imposes upon me.

It is a great distinction and a lofty honor to be permitted to stand as the representative of the Empire State in any station, or to speak for her in any cause. But the distinction is overshadowed by the responsibility. That officer charged by our law with the general supervision of public schools for six millions of people, which employ more than thirty thousand teachers, and cost sixteen millions of dollars a year, should come to such a city as Brooklyn and into such a presence as this with something of interest, something of consequence and importance to say.

Having these considerations in mind, I have concluded, as last year, to again divide my time into two portions. The location of this session and the pressing and growing importance of the subject, have combined to lead me to discuss the scope and administration of public school work in great cities, in the first portion. In the other, I will endeavor briefly to recapitulate the facts and events which go to make up the sum of educational progress in our imperial commonwealth, during the school year just drawing to a close.

GROWTH OF GREAT CITIES.

We can scarcely appreciate the rapid growth of great communities in this country. In 1850, there were but nine cities in the United States having 50,000 inhabitants or more. In 1860, there were sixteen such cities. In 1870, there were twenty-five. In 1880, there were thirty-five cities having more than 50,000 inhabitants. It is more than likely that the official enumeration of 1890 will show fifty cities within our borders having a population of 50,000 or more. Fifty years ago, the urban population was about

six per cent of our entire population. In 1880, twenty-two and one-half per cent of all the people of the United States were living in the cities, and it is now undoubtedly within the fact to say that one-third of all the people of the country are living in thickly settled communities. The school statistics of this State, during the last school year for which they are available, show that one-half of all the children of school age are living in cities. Last year the average attendance upon the city schools of the State exceeded that upon the schools in the towns.

IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL WORK IN CITIES.

The importance of school work in these great cities is manifest without argument. They are the centers of the nation's thought, the inspiration of its most astonishing activities. They exert the strongest and the most far-reaching influence upon the moral well-being of the entire country, and they exert it promptly and swiftly. The metropolitan newspapers are scissored in pieces for the make-up of the provincial press. The city sermons are sometimes preached and re-preached to good advantage in the country. [Laughter.] That is emphatically true of some that are first preached in this goodly city of Brooklyn. [Applause.] The merchants of the great cities hold their hands upon the trade of the entire land. The skilled mechanic, with his implements and modern machinery, is at once the corner-stone and the sheet-anchor, the foundation and the hope of our material progress and development. The accumulation of money at the great centers is marvelous, and, in channels productive of power and influence, it flows freely. In a thousand ways, the opinions or the lack of opinions, the degree of intelligence, the moral tone of the middle and lower classes in our great cities, are quickly effective throughout the land. All this emphasizes the importance of the best public school work at these popular centers.

School administration is encompassed with the greatest difficulties in the larger places. There are difficulties incident to the classification, grading and progress of a thousand pupils in one school of which the rural teacher has no conception. But when there comes to be a hundred or two hundred schools, with a thousand pupils in each, and all under a single management, a school problem is presented with almost appalling proportions.

These children are of a more heterogeneous character than those in the rural schools. They will represent all classes of society, the very rich, the well-to-do, and the very poor. The moral and industrial conditions from which they come are most diverse. These things not only augment the difficulties of properly grading pupils and securing satisfactory progress, but they present questions concerning the health and cleanliness, the moral character and the discipline of the schools, which are scarcely heard of in the country. Moreover, there are quarters in every city, where human beings live in degradation, filth and crime, from which the children will not attend school except under police surveillance and constraint. But the public schools exist to protect against just such illiteracy as is found in its most revolting form in these foul places, and the school authorities fail in their duty if they disregard them.

The responsibility of organizing and maintaining an educational system for such vast numbers, in such circumstances, is one calling for the wisest statesmanship of the land. It is a responsibility which can not be appreciated by one who has not borne it and had experience in the work. I venture nothing here in expressing the belief that there is no class of public administrative work which, in consequence of its technical character, the embarrassment which surrounds it, and the intricacy of all its details, is so difficult and responsible as the management of the schools of a great city.

PUBLIC SENTIMENT CONCERNING SCHOOLS.

The difficulties inevitably surrounding the administration of the schools in the cities are augmented rather than lightened by the sentiment prevalent among the people. They fail to appreciate these perplexities. They are quite inclined to be censorious of, rather than sympathetic with, school management. Upon school officers, they are loth to confer authority requisite to the full discharge of their duties, or to confer it upon the same persons for a sufficient time to make it effective. They seem to assume that any novice, whether he can manage a business for himself successfully or not, can take charge of, and maintain properly and economically, school property valued at millions of dollars, and successfully manage a great public business, than which there is none more perplexing upon earth. They seem to think too, that