

attempted but very imperfectly performed. Indeed when one considers the general public apathy and remembers how little practical, personal, and intelligent interest even parents themselves appear to cherish, either in the schools themselves, or in those men and women who devote their lives to them, and how frequently a suggestion or a criticism from some practical educator who *does* know, calls forth only the public censure or even the personal enmity of impractical Directors who do *not* know, it will plainly appear what it really is, almost always a thankless, and often a dangerous task, to offer hints, criticisms, and suggestions tending only to the improvement of that most vital public interest, which in Fourth of July orations, at least, and in political platforms, if nowhere else, is universally conceded to be the foundation and the palladium of American liberty.

CUTTING OFF EXTRA STUDIES.

The discontinuance of regular daily instruction in French, German, Vocal Music, Drawing, and Phonography, having taken place since January 1, 1874, more properly belongs to the school history of the current year than to that of 1873, which, alone, this article attempts to relate. As, however, it quickly became, and has since remained, a matter of unusual public interest, it may be proper to state that, early in January of this year, the new Board of Education, the first elected from the city at large, without the slightest previous official announcement, or even intimation of such intention, giving opportunity for discussion, calling for testimony from principals, and other educators as to how the matter was working, or taking any adequate pains whatever to ascertain the public will, suddenly abolished instruction in French or German from nearly four hundred classes, and summarily dismissed about fifty ladies and gentlemen previously employed as teachers of those languages.

ABRUPT DISCONTINUANCE.

Whatever may be the diversity of public opinion as to the general desirability, propriety, necessity, or legality of teaching modern languages in the free Public Schools of an English-speaking country, to the disproportionate extent to which they had unquestionably come to be taught in those of this city, public opinion was almost unanimous in condemning the remarkable precipitancy and absoluteness which characterized the unexpected act. It looked very much as if a controlling majority of the new Board, unduly exalted by new accession to unwonted power, and temporarily overcome by an infirmity which has beset and *overset* other minds almost equally great, in previous epochs of the summary and spasmodic legislation of this new State, had quite forgotten that the people had chosen them as their servants and not as their masters; and that, before decreeing so radical and sweeping a change it might have been wise, to say nothing of the modesty and courtesy of the act, to take some measures for learning the will of the people who had made them what they were and whose will they were bound to ascertain and execute. Even if the public will, or the will of a considerable majority of the school-patronizing public, had chosen the partial discontinuance, or the total abolition of free public instruction in French and German, it would have been better to announce such proposed discontinuance or abolition at least three months in advance.

It may be, however, that the new Directors, in the first flush of their fresh-blown wisdom, concluded that, like some surgical operations, the sharper, severer, and more quickly over, the amputation of the study of the modern languages could be made, the better would be the patients' chances of recovery from the sudden shock. It is but simple justice to state, however, that this most precipitate step ever taken by any Board of Education in this city, and the one which immediately worked so many and severe hardships, did not pass without the very strong opposition of a highly respectable minority mainly composed of the former and more experienced members, and so considerable in numbers that an addition of two would have made them the controlling majority. And, also, to add that present symptoms indicate not only that, if the vote were to be taken again, it would be wholly reversed, but that the Board contemplates an early restoration of instruction in

French and German, to at least four of the leading Grammar Schools of the city.

VOCAL MUSIC, DRAWING, AND PHONOGRAPHY.

The instruction in Vocal Music and Drawing, which had been so successfully given for several years by generally well-qualified teachers, was also discontinued early in January of this year.

Since the commencement of this article the Board has re-elected the best of the available Special Teachers in those branches and proposes to reestablish their respective departments. A similar fact is also true of Phonography, and, partially so, of French and German, as was anticipated.

SHOULD FOREIGN LANGUAGES BE TAUGHT IN FREE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND, IF SO, WHAT?

Pertinent to this matter of the sudden general exclusion and subsequent partial restoration of instruction in modern languages, and, more especially bearing upon the general question whether they should be taught at all in our free Public Schools, and, if so, what foreign language should be first introduced and to what extent, the following are a few among the many facts and arguments claiming a fair hearing, and worthy of due consideration.

1st. Of the native-born German and French speaking families for any considerable time resident in this city, or in America, hardly one in twenty uses its own native speech at the table, or generally, about the home.

2d. Of those same families hardly one member in a hundred intends any permanent return to, or final residence in, his native land.

3d. The German and French merchants and business men, with their bookkeepers, salesmen, and clerks, almost universally speak English, and habitually use it in nine tenths of their business transactions.

4th. English is fast becoming, if it has not already become, the almost universal language of commerce, in all the leading marts and ports of South America, Africa, India, China, and Japan.

5th. For English speaking youth generally to learn German and French, is going backward, *against* the current of commerce, immigration, and general progress, while for French and German speaking youth to learn English, is rowing themselves *forward* into the full strength of its onward sweeping tide.

THE MOST NECESSARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

6th. If the Public Schools of *this* city especially attempt to teach any foreign modern language, it should be, first of all, the Spanish, which, in our inevitable and fast-increasing relations with Mexico and South America, their present pupils are likely to find of far more immediate service and permanent value. An additional argument for this, is the fact that the youth of Spanish speaking countries have very few, if any, general facilities for learning English, compared with the similar facilities now quite generally extended to the youth of Germany and France. Hence, while the French and German youth can and do come to us on the ground of *our* own common speech, we must qualify *our* youth to approach the Mexican, the South American, and the Spaniard, on the ground, or through the medium of *his* common speech, if we expect profitable and satisfactory business, social, or political intercourse.

A complete colloquial mastery of French and German, if such could be imparted to every one of our Public School pupils to-day, would never prove of one tenth the social and business advantage to them which *would* accrue from a similar acquisition of the Spanish. And, still farther, the Spanish presents less difficulty and consequently can be much more thoroughly learned and far more serviceably used, in decidedly less time, than either the French or the German. (Much as certain parties may sneer at the suggestion, and scoff at the suggestor, it is, nevertheless, true that within the next twenty years an ordinary colloquial knowledge of the Chinese language will prove of far greater practical value to its fortunate possessor than an equal knowledge of all three of the other foreign languages already named.) As previously intimated these are but a few of the facts bearing upon this question, and any one of them might be much more strongly put, and, much farther expanded, did ability and opportunity permit. They may serve, however, as a contribution to that public