

GAINS.

MORE PRACTICAL SUPERINTENDENCY.

During the year, the regular biennial election placed the Superintendency again in the hands of one of the most experienced practical teachers upon the Coast, who was still further qualified for the office by two previous terms in the same capacity. Superintendent Denman signalized his return to office by procuring the immediate and much-needed discipline of several careless teachers who decidedly needed official admonition. With the aid of his able Deputy, Prof. Leggett, he has already initiated more minute, practical, and helpful supervision of the methods of instruction throughout the different grades.

The present Board of Education, which came into office December 1, 1873, is the first elected under the new law, which provides for the choice of School Directors from the city at large, instead of one from each ward, as had previously been the case. As an almost necessary consequence, the personal character and general ability of its members are generally considered a decided gain upon those of previous years last past. Their principal deficiencies are those which time and experience alone can remove, as two or three of their more prominent official acts have already partially demonstrated.

NEEDS.

The most important needs of the School Department, as specified in our issue of last year, remain substantially unchanged. As an agitation of nearly ten years has resulted in securing the choice of Directors from the city at large, it is to be hoped that in less than as many years longer, the public mind may be brought to perceive not only the permissibility and the propriety, but the absolute necessity of making it illegal to place any but educated citizens in charge of public educational interests.

I.—FREE BOOKS.

Many claim that the Public School is not, and can not be, really and wholly a *free* school until the State provides free books as well as free teachers, houses, furniture, stationery, and necessary apparatus; in fact, that the very phrase "necessary apparatus," must, first of all, include the requisite school books, as an indispensable part of the apparatus necessary to successful study and auxiliary to profitable teaching. Without attempting a decision or even a discussion which would be wholly gratuitous in a country where each man generally insists on his inalienable right to bring in his own verdict whether he has heard the evidence or not, and zealously forms and forces his own opinion whether he understands the matter or not, or even venturing upon any discussion, it is certainly pertinent and should be profitable to inquire what advantages have followed the free-book system in those cities which, by actual experiment, have taken the question out of the domain of theory, assertion, and argument, into that of actual performance, proof, and demonstration.

Among these advantages, are:

1st. The immediate saving of from one quarter to one third of the original cost of all school books. As is well known, the ordinary bookseller, buying in comparatively limited quantities, receives a discount of from twenty-five to thirty-three and one third per cent. The city or the State, buying in immensely larger quantities, could obtain even greater discount.

In San Francisco alone, with its present number of public school children, the saving from this single source would amount to nearly forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) a year, or quite enough to build two excellent school houses annually, amply accommodating from eight hundred to one thousand of those pupils now inconveniently quartered in rented rooms. If the parents and taxpayers choose to continue paying this, and an even greater sum annually to the retail booksellers instead of saving it toward the payment of their other taxes, it is, of course, their own affair. And it may appear, and will appear, in this paper, if time and space permit, that in spite of the immediate loss to the retail bookseller which, it might at first seem, would result from the adoption of this plan, its carrying out would involve results which might partially if not wholly compensate him.

This, however, is a question of universal public good rather than of the gain or loss of any small clique of men doing business solely for their own pecuniary profit.

2d. With the provisions hereafter noted, it would save fully one half the wear and tear and loss of books, and thereby cause them to last at least twice as long. This would be equivalent to an annual cash saving of fifty per cent.

Our Public Schools have an average membership, upon the lowest calculation, of twenty-four thousand. Fully one half of these, probably a larger part, go home to lunch and return, thus passing over the distance between the home and the school four times a day. Assuming that the average distance between the school and the home is only one quarter of a mile—which is below the fact—ten thousand children traveling this distance twice a day, and another ten thousand going over it *four* times a day, give us a distance of fifteen thousand miles a day, seventy-five thousand miles a week, three hundred thousand miles a month, and three million three hundred thousand miles a year, over which these twenty thousand school children carry, drag, swing, tote, or lug their frequently-falling packets and bundles of poorly-bound school books; battering them by frequent collision and dropping, straining and breaking them by over-strapping, and often losing them altogether.

As the plan of furnishing free books, at public expense, generally includes the provision or requirement that, as public property, the books must not be taken from the school room, an additional and even greater saving would result from thus cutting off the wear and tear of frequent and generally careless street transportation.

Should any ask when and where the pupils *can* learn their lessons if not allowed to carry the text-books home, the answer is the simple and obvious one, "*in school*." This can be effected in two ways: By devoting less time to recitation and more to instruction and study. Nearly twice as much time is now consumed in recitation as needs be or would be if teachers, generally, knew how to conduct recitations in a business-like way, and pupils were properly instructed how to study, prepare lessons, and make recitations. Also, by adding one hour to the present school time, and devoting this hour wholly to instruction and study. As shown elsewhere, even *with* the proposed addition of one hour, the actual time spent in school work in the school room, exclusive of intermission, recesses, opening and closing exercises, etc., would still be but a small fraction over five hours. And of this time never more than an hour and a half at one time are the pupils kept continuously in their rooms, even in the highest grades, while in the lower grades, and especially in the primary classes, more frequent recesses, or times of physical exercise, make the longest continuous confinement even shorter.

If any ask what the teacher would be doing while the class is studying, the answer is: She should be correcting papers, assisting more backward pupils, or hearing one division of the class recite while the other studies.

3d. It would also save the expenses of satchels, bags, knapsacks, book-holders, and straps, which, including their unavoidable wear and tear and frequent loss, make quite a considerable item every year, especially in a family having three or four school-going members.

4th. It would improve the figure and gait or carriage of the children.

Any one who has observed the shuffling, hampered, drooping, round-shouldered, swinging, or rolling gait of the average book-laden pupils needs no proof of this. An obvious cause, or a cause which becomes obvious by the merest statement, is this: The child carries, we will say, but two pounds' weight of books, suspended or slung in a bag, sachel, or strap, so as to hang or dangle from six inches to a foot and a half below the hand, and constantly swinging against or hindering the free motion of the lower leg, ankle, or foot, or even hitting and scraping the ground. To say nothing of the droop in the upper extremities, how is a child to walk freely and gracefully with such a constant impediment. Little wonder that our dancing and drill-masters complain of the extreme difficulty of teaching the average boy or girl an upright, easy, and graceful gait. And less wonder that parents complain of the frequent loss of many books

NETINA INS. CO. of Hartford has a Paid-up Capital of \$3,000,000, and Cash Assets of nearly \$6,000,000, GEO. C. BOARDMAN, Manager.