

1839

Qualified Teachers for the Lower Grades!

Henry Barnard, Secretary of the Board of Commissioners of Common School of Connecticut, Superintendent of Common Schools of Connecticut, *the first Secretary of Education* of the Department of Education when it was founded in 1867.

¹ From BARNARD'S *First Annual Report* as Secretary to the Board of Commissioners of Common Schools in Connecticut, pp. 54-57, 1839.

But after all, do what we may to enlist the general and generous interest of the public in promoting this cause—make the organization of our schools as perfect as wisdom and experience can devise, and we must still rely, under Providence, mainly on *one instrumentality*, that is, *good teachers*—well fitted for their work, and who will take a deep interest in it. How ineffectual will be the wisest system of common school instruction and management, school houses built on the best models, and with the most convenient internal arrangement, a uniform and adequate supply of books of the highest excellence, if teachers, who are to be the agents of carrying this machinery into operation, are not qualified for the task? On the contrary, defects in almost every other department could be in some measure supplied, if we but had good teachers. All admit that there is far from being a competent supply of such teachers. The deficiency is felt extensively, and a remedy loudly called for. How shall the remedy be found and applied? . . .

The officers of the school cannot encourage for a moment, the idea that a person who does not understand a subject thoroughly, can ever teach that subject well, . . .

. . . At any rate, I would urgently but respectfully repeat, let something be done to provide an adequate supply of well qualified teachers for our common schools. Without them I have no expectation that there will be any material improvement in the *quality* and *amount* of education given in them.

1855

Best Teachers for *Early* Grades!

Horace Mann's 18th Annual Report as the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education:

Shall we commit the guidance of such precious interests, for both worlds, to every college stripling who resorts to teaching, during his winter vacation, as a temporary and often very tedious expedient to replenish an empty pocket? or to any persons who can find nothing else to do in the interval of their summer labors? Shall those who despair of success in any employment, be allowed to take up school-keeping as an ultimate resource?

School Committees in Massachusetts have not unfrequently felt compelled to reject College students, who on examination were found decidedly inferior in spelling, arithmetic, grammar and geography, to many pupils in the schools they were engaged to teach.

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It may be thought by some that we have drawn too high a standard of qualifications, especially for the teachers in our Primary Schools. We are aware that it is a current opinion, that teachers of inferior attainments will answer for primary schools, and that almost anybody can teach small children. But this is a great mistake. It is all-important to start aright in study, to have skillful and thorough instruction in the very first and simplest rudiments. In education, that which comes earliest, transcends everything else in importance. Habits of study are very soon formed, and when once formed, it is almost impossible to change them. The bent and bias of pliant childhood will shape and direct the growth of maturer years.

Both Horace Mann, Barnard Henry were pioneers of *American Common School* movement which started in 1830s. Mann was appointed the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837. Under his leadership, many educational reforms were introduced.

1866

Instruction Begins; Examples Accomplished

portant though minor matter, we hope that none of our teachers will forget to enforce, by example as well as by precept, those small proprieties of manner, and that scrupulous regard for neatness in every particular which children are so prone to neglect.*

An important feature of the public school teacher is, to mould the habits and manners of the multitude of children who have few advantages of moral or intellectual culture outside the schoolroom, into harmony with what is pure and good and true.

The Daily Public School in the United States, 1866.

The Defects of School Teachers!!!

J. Orville Taylor, Prof., New York University

I KNOW of nothing in which this government is so deficient as it is in well qualified teachers for her elementary schools. The two great things which are wanting in this country, are, competent teachers, and a disposition on the part of parents to pay such teachers a suitable compensation. . . .

The people of the United States employ, annually, at least eighty thousand common-school instructors. There are in the twenty-four states not less than eighty thousand common schools, (we do not include the higher schools.)

Among these eighty thousand teachers, but a very few have made any preparation for their duties ; the most of them accidentally assume this office as a temporary employment. They seek it to fill up a vacant month or two, when they expect something else will offer far more lucrative and suitable to their wishes.

Many teach for a short time, that they may obtain a little money to assist them in a higher course of studies which they have commenced ;* others make the business a mere stepping-stone to something which they consider far more honourable; and some become schoolmasters because their health will not sustain an exposure to out-door weather, or, what is more frequently the case, because they suppose the labours of a teacher are not as rough and arduous as the winter-labours of a farm.

Having become teachers from motives like these, they have not thought of the responsibilities of their office ; they see not the fearful and momentous relations which they hold to the immortal souls committed to their care; and can they discharge their

.....
Many, many instructors also are ignorant of what they are expected to teach ; they became teachers that they might learn,—not to teach others. Many take this office that they may acquire that knowledge which they now begin to feel the want of, but which was regarded as useless when they idled away their school-days.

1866

Ignore the Basics -- A House Without A Foundation!

We might infer that cases of equal or greater deficiency are not rare now unless we misinterpret one of the reports of the School Committees:

The style of reading in most of our schools is below even respectability. It is utterly beneath the dignity and claims of such an exercise. It is difficult quietly to listen to the careless, senseless and stupid mutterings that are sometimes wrongly denominated reading.*

Would that normal schools or some other instrumentality might succeed in making good readers for religious assemblies, town meetings, or the fireside. As it is now, a good reader is almost as rare as an honest politician.

We trust the spirit of these strictures will not be misapprehended. We are aware of the difficulties which all reforms must encounter. We give full credit for all that is accomplished. But we cannot resist the conviction that a grade of instruction, far in advance of what the spirit of the law and public policy demand, engages the attention and the means of the Massachusetts Bureau of Education, and that while ten of the children and youth are favoured at public expense with superior advantages, the one hundred or the one thousand that are entitled to be thoroughly taught to read, write, cipher, and behave themselves, are left in the background. The last ought to have been done even though the other were left undone. Nor are we alone in this judgment:

We think it a fault quite too common that many of the pupils of the present day are passing superficially over the elementary branches, ambitious to take algebra, geometry and the other higher studies; thus slighting the most essential rudiments necessary for a good practical education, and to prepare a person to perform all common operations faithfully and well. Reading and spelling—subjects connected with the very foundation of our own Common School System, we deem of the first importance.*

There is a tendency in some of the schools to pursue the more advanced studies suited to the high school or academy to the neglect or *total exclusion* of those primary branches which our school system contemplates and which our statute law expressly requires.† The italics are in the report.

The Daily Public School in the United States, 1866.