

## Resident Editor's Department

### NORMAL SCHOOLS.

We have frequently been surprised at the singular and erroneous views which have prevailed in the community in relation to Normal schools. Their existence, their object, the result of their establishment seem either to be strangely misunderstood or maliciously perverted. We often hear them spoken of as "experiments" and one of the Representatives to our General Assembly in the year A. D. 1856 gravely remarked to another member of the same body that the "experiment of a Normal school had been tried only in Connecticut and that here it had proved a perfect failure." Where this wiseacre was born, whence he came and whither he went, we know not. One thing we do know and that is that he knew less than he supposed. We often hear persons speaking against Normal schools, and condemning, in unmeasured terms, all their operations, but we have, almost invariably ascertained that these bitter opponents were men whose greatest sin was that of ignorance, - but whether of a nature to "be winked at" we care not to say. In nine cases out of ten they are men who never entered a Normal school and who have no true knowledge of the design of such an institution and know nothing of its practical operations or of its results. There is, however, another class of persons, and quite a large one, who are always ready to cooperate in any good work as soon as it is fairly commended to their understanding. With the hope of imparting some light to this class, - but with no hope of affecting the "incorrigibly guilty," who are willfully blind, we propose to answer a few questions relating to Normal schools.

#### 1. What is a Normal School ?

We answer, it is a school in which persons are taught the art of teaching, - or, in other words an institution whose members are trained with special reference to the great and important business of teaching and training youth. It was established by men who entertained the idea that the education of our youth was one of the most important concerns of life, - and we rejoice to know that the number of those who entertain similar ideas is daily increasing. The Normal school is to the teacher, what the Divinity school is to the clergy, - the Medical school to the physician, - the Law school to the lawyer.

#### 2. Are Normal Schools an Experiment?

Yes, of nearly 20 years trial in this country and in all cases they have proved to be successful experiments. The first was established in Massachusetts in 1839 and the results of its establishment were so satisfactory that there are now four in the old Bay State in successful operation, supported by the state, one supported by the city of Boston, and one by private tuition, - making in all six Normal schools in Massachusetts. They evidently like such experiments in our sister state, - and they are pretty shrewd calculators.

The same "experiment" has been most successfully tried in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri, - and it will be pretty hard work to stop the experiment now. Even Illinois has recently appropriated the sum of \$10,000 annually for the support of a Normal school. In Upper Canada, at Toronto, an excellent one has been in operation many years and in the Lower Province they are just organizing more than one.

#### 3. Do Normal Schools make superior teachers of all who attend them?

Certainly not. Their most ardent friends neither claim, nor look for, such a result. No institution can supply brains nor create tact. All that Normal schools profess to accomplish is to awaken thought, enlighten the mind, develop latent talent, and direct the understanding. One may attend a Normal School for a whole week, month, year, or life time and yet fail of becoming a successful teacher. But, as a whole, it is contended, and must be admitted, that good Normal schools have greatly elevated and improved the character and influence of the teachers' profession. The only danger is that of expecting too much from them. When every graduate of a Divinity school shall excel as a preacher of the gospel, every graduate of a Law school become a successful practitioner at the bar, and every graduate of a Medical school become skilful and eminent as a physician, - then, - but not till then, - will it be right to expect that all who graduate from our Normal schools will, as a matter of course, become superior teachers.

We have never enjoyed the benefit of a Normal school training, having been born all too early for that, but we do rejoice and will rejoice that others are enjoying privileges which came too late for us. We are fully convinced that such privileges are of incalculable value, and though some may excel as teachers, without enjoying Normal school advantages might they not do so in a higher degree with them ? But it is too late to require arguments in favor of these institutions. Our attention was called to the subject at this time by learning that an attempt had been made by some of the members of one of the oldest Teachers Associations in the country to bring Normal schools into disrepute. The same principle carried out, as advocated by these gentlemen would abolish Theological, Law and Medical schools. We grieve to learn that the venerable "Essex (Mass.) County Teachers Association," - from whose exercises we have so often profited in years gone by, - an association among whose members have been such men as David P. Page, Wm. H. Wells, Eben S. Stearns, and Richard Edwards, all now, or formerly, eminent principals of Normal schools, - we grieve that such an association should at one of its meetings make an attack so unwise on Normal schools and Normal teachers.

It would be foolish, indeed, to say that no one could become an efficient and successful instructor unless he had attended a Normal School. Equally foolish would it be to expect a high degree of excellence from all graduates of such an institution. While, therefore, we guard against the danger of expecting too much of Normal Schools ; let us be equally careful to guard against a feeling that they are use- less institutions. They are far enough from perfection. Their warmest friends see many things in them which may be improved ; but we can not believe that any candid, considerate person will take, and ad- here to, the position that Normal Schools are doing no good. We welcome them, with all their defects, as most valuable auxiliaries in the cause of popular education, and we hope to see the day when they will both merit and assume a much higher position in the public mind, than they now occupy. That time will surely come.