

OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM.

Are the Minds of the Children Being Overtaxed With Study?

Interviews With Persons Who Are in a Position to Know Whereof They Speak.

Is the course of study at present followed in the public schools of Sacramento injurious to the pupils?

That is the question that is now agitating the members of the City Board of Education.

The RECORD-UNION has, during the past week, taken pains to gather considerable information on the subject, and now presents it for the consideration of its readers.

A reporter was detailed to visit the various schools, interview the teachers, as well as some of the pupils, and ascertain exactly what the condition of affairs is.

The result of the investigation was somewhat alarming disclosures.

WHERE THE TROUBLE LIES. The requirements of the course are, it is claimed, entirely too severe upon the children, both in the grammar schools and high school, considering the time in which the work has to be accomplished.

The number of studies that must be mastered in the limited school term is being increased from year to year—the minds of the children are being cramped more and more.

Competent authorities have been heard to declare frequently that the rising generation in this part of the continent is not up to the standard of the previous generation.

Why is it? The answer will be quite clear to any one who will take the trouble to inquire into what the course of study is in the high school and grammar schools of Sacramento.

There are two remedies: Either the school terms in these two institutions must be extended at least a year in each, or some of the studies will have to be eliminated.

Which course will be decided on, is, of course, only a matter of conjecture, and rests entirely with the authorities, but one or the other will have to be adopted.

With a four-year term in the High School and a five-year term in the Grammar Schools, it is claimed that the studies now required could be accomplished without injury to the child, provided no more are added.

Even one of the School Directors complained loudly a few evenings ago because he never saw his daughter at home that she was not pouring over her books.

Naturally these demands for excessive study work more harm to the girls than to the boys. The girls are by nature more studious than the male sex, and besides, the boys will invariably desert their studies entirely for a lesson game or other amusement, preferring to fail at school and the records will show that they succeed admirably in this respect as a rule.

The evil effects of cramming the minds of the students is more noticeable in the high school than in the grammar schools, although at the latter the same evil may be seen.

But as facts and figures are more valuable than mere assertions, the RECORD-UNION herewith publishes some of the information it has gathered.

Superintendent Hart for Reform. City Superintendent Albert Hart, although he is compelled by reason of his position to see that the system now in vogue is adhered to by the teachers and carried out to the letter, is radically and irretrievably opposed to it.

"The school," he said, "in Sacramento," said he to the RECORD-UNION representative, "will have to be completely overhauled. We are straining our children's minds, but it is not to their benefit. We are really breaking them down physically and mentally by compelling them to accomplish too much in too short a time. Take the case of the grammar school. The students there are being cramped with study almost to the bursting point, and it is ridiculous for anybody to argue that even a single game can stand under the strain. In order to keep up with the studies and recitations demanded, the student is obliged to study for hours and hours after school. The pace is too fast for their brains, and if they do manage to get through it is at the cost of their health and energy. So many studies cannot be digested in the high school in three years. You are right when you say that another year is needed there. I believe, and have been for a long time, I would favor an additional year in the high school and an additional year in the grammar school—that is if the present course of study is adhered to. If a number of the technical, and, I might say, useless studies were eliminated.

AN ADDITIONAL YEAR. Would not be necessary, but to eliminate anything that is included in the present course of study would be unfair to those pupils who intend to enter the university. A student who enters the State Institution is presumed to have been given a fair start in these technical branches—and there you are. The number of students who aspire to enter the university does not warrant subjecting the balance to the rigorous studies necessary.

"Now it is a fact," continued Superintendent Hart, "that 90 per cent. of the children who make advantage of a public school education, go to the grammar school, and a similar percentage of those who enter the high school do not go to the university—still those in the grammar schools are compelled to take the same courses as those who are preparing for the high school, and those in the high school must go through the same courses as those who aspire for a university education.

Now, as 90 per cent. of those who enter the schools do not go beyond the grammar school, I believe that the American flag and American institutions should be taught there, and less of the technical. Their reading should be better. Now 'Thanatopsis' is a pretty thing, but if a student has read it is a blank on their minds. If it were stories of the Revolution—the early struggles of our fathers that gave us this great and magnificent country—of the Indian wars, the War of 1812 and the Rebellion, the student would have something that he or she would remember and could remember, and something that would do them some good.

PRIMARIES WRONG, TOO.

"My objection to the present school system," resumed Mr. Hart, "extends even down to the primary grades. I don't oppose the course of study there as much as I do the way it is applied by inexperienced teachers. The lowest grade in the primary school is by far the most important one and the one that needs the most attention. Yet you will notice that the teachers of these grades are not the highest salaried in the department. When a vacancy occurs a teacher is selected from the substitute class—a girl who has had no experience at all, and in consequence the very worst selection that could be made. As soon as she becomes competent she demands, and rightly so, promotion to one of the higher grades, where she can command more salary. When she is promoted, another green substitute is put in, and the children are the sufferers. If I had the say, I would pay those low-grade teachers the highest salaries in the primary school, and I would see that they were thoroughly competent and not removed from those grades. I would see, too, that they were mothers, who had raised children, and had thereby acquired the patience and gentleness so necessary in handling children at that age."

TEXT-BOOK TEACHING. Mr. Hart is also opposed to the too strict adherence by teachers to the text-book system. In his own words, he said, "I have found the pernicious effect of the text-book system pervading to a great extent in the views presented. The aim of our school system is in the adherence to the text-book. The teacher becomes an automaton. As a teacher she is taught to travel on one path. When the role of teacher is assumed, unless she is possessed of a will-power, backed by intellect strong enough to break the shackles in which she has been bound, she continues to follow the old and beaten track, becoming a child herself when new ideas are presented to her. I am not denying the usefulness of a good text-book, but do say that too many teachers rely upon them, and the result is that the text-book is called upon to do more than it is called upon to do, and the result is that it will all end.

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teachers at the high school agree with Professor Pond in his views on this important question.

WHAT IT AMOUNTS TO. In order to give a fair idea of what the course of study is at present at the high school, a list is herewith given of the works that have to be mastered there by the pupils:

English—"American Poems" (Houghton, Mifflin, & Co.), Hale's "Longer English Poems" (McMillan & Co.), "Merchant of Venice," "Julius Caesar," "Milton's 'Comus,'" Bulfinch's "Age of Fable," "The Lady of the Lake" and "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," "The Newcomes," "Sir Roger de Coverley," "Bark" (Vol. I), Payne and Genung's "Historic."

History—Myers' "Medieval and Modern," Myers or Smith's "History of Greece and Rome," Macey's "Civil Government," Wats' "United States History."

Mathematics—Fish's "Problems in Arithmetic," Wentworth's algebra and Venables' "Plane and Solid Geometry," Science—Appleton's Physical Geography, Rattan's "California Flora," Mead's "Chemical Primer and Appleton's Physics," Latin—Gradation, Elementary & Kingdon's, Harkness' Latin Grammar, Collier's "New Practical Latin Composition," Cicero (four books), Cicero (six orations), Virg. course books.

Greek—White's "First Lessons," Jones' Composition, Goodwin's Grammar, Goodwin's "Amatias," "Keep's" Homer, French—Kestell's Elementary & French Grammar, Worman's first French book, Chardanal's French exercises, "Le Roman d'un jeune Homme Pauvre," "Classical French Plays."

It is a notorious fact that the pupils, in order to keep up with these studies, are compelled to devote many hours to study out of school, and it takes a bright one to keep up with them. A glance over the above list is sufficient to convince anyone that a boy or girl who undertakes the course has little time for music or other accomplishments which he or she might desire to learn, beside their regular schooling.

In the Grammar Schools. The Grammar Schools form the second division in the system of the public schools. To enter the second division requires on the part of the pupil an ability to read intelligently the second Reader and selections of similar grade; to spell words of common use in the primary grades; to write a legible hand; to perform with whole numbers the four fundamental operations of arithmetic, including the correct use of the signs of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Pupils should also possess such knowledge of the signs of aggregation as to enable them to apply the parenthesis or the vinculum to the corresponding operations.

Four years are required to finish the course of study in the grammar schools—being divided off into four grades, the lowest being the first grade. The course at present in use is as follows:

Fourth Grade—Written arithmetic, State series, pp. 15 to 17; intensive mental arithmetic, taken in connection with topics in written arithmetic; reading, Third Reader, State series, to page 116, selections from other books and from papers; spelling, Speller, State series, pp. 44 to 88, inclusive, words in common use and words from other studies; writing, P. D. and S's Copy-books, Nos. 3 and 4; drawing, Bartholomew's, Nos. 4 and 5; geography, State series, when issued; grammar, primary State series; composition, sentences and letter-writing; physiology, Smith's Primer of Physiology and Hygiene; object lessons; music.

Third Grade—Written arithmetic, State series, pp. 128 to 172; applications of square and cubic measures, and of longitude and time; mental arithmetic, taken in connection with topics in written arithmetic; reading, Third Reader (State series), from page 116 to page 223; selections from other books and from papers; spelling, Speller (State series), from page 88 to page 116; words from other studies; writing, P. D. and S's Copy-books, Nos. 3 and 5; drawing, Bartholomew's, Nos. 6 and 7; geography, State series, when issued; grammar, State series, to page 31; composition, letter-writing, etc.; physiology, Smith's Primer of Physiology and Hygiene, completed; object lessons; music.

Second Grade—Written arithmetic, State series, pp. 128 to 188, and pp. 214 to 244, omitting metric system, partnership and proportion; mental arithmetic, taken in connection with the topics in written arithmetic; reading, Third Reader (State series), pp. 223 to 352; writing, P. D. and S's Copy-books, No. 8; drawing, Bartholomew's, Nos. 8 and 9; grammar, State series, pp. 81 to 152; geography, during first term (State series, when issued); review, with special reference to physical features, history, during second term (State series), to Revolutionary War; composition, continuation of the third grade work; spelling, Speller (State series), pp. 116 to 152; physiology, Smith's Elementary Physiology and Hygiene; music.

First Grade—Arithmetic (State series), composition, taxes, partial payments, true discount, bank discount, compound interest, ratio and proportion, partnership, involution, square and cube root, fire insurance, review problems, and metric system; Spelling, Speller (State series), to page 152; writing, P. D. and S's Copy-books, No. 7; drawing, Bartholomew's, Nos. 10 and 11; grammar, State series, pp. 152 to end; history, State series, completed; composition, weekly exercises, consisting of abstracts of the reading and history lessons, reports of oral lessons, and letter-writing, etc.; physiology, Cutter's Elementary, begun and completed; reading, Third Reader (State series), completed; music.

German forms an optional study in the city grammar schools, and is taught in all of the four grades.

WHAT IS NECESSARY. The question as to whether or not the children are being overworked in the grammar schools is one that is being argued on both sides.

Several of the principals believe that another year added to the course would be highly beneficial, while others are conservative, and still others think that the system now in vogue is good. The principal of the high school, who is in charge of the technical studies which are taken for the purpose of preparing the pupils for the high school.

Principal of the Sacramento Grammar, when seen said she was not prepared to say that an additional year in the grammar schools would not be a good thing, yet did not think the present course was so severe but that all pupils who studied their lessons could get through without difficulty and without injury to their health. She was quite confident that the children nowadays are not required to study any harder than when she was a scholar.

The first grade scholars, she said, are required to study at home about an hour and a half, the second grade an hour and the third and fourth grades from half to three-quarters of an hour. Pupils who do not learn rapidly, of course, had to devote more time to study.

The last year of school teachers were interviewed who believed that most of their scholars need more time in which to master their studies than they are now given.

Some Medical Testimony. Several prominent local physicians were called upon.

Dr. G. L. Simmons, Sr., did not care to be interviewed at length on the subject. He said the matter was a grave one and he did not feel inclined to give his views before being prepared with data. The latter had quite a talk with the young lady and learned that she had not discovered the cause of the trouble. He finally called Dr. Nichols in for consultation.

The doctor related an instance in which he had actual experience. Another physician had a daughter attending high school who began to fall rapidly in health. Try as he learned her father could not discover the cause of the trouble. He finally called Dr. Nichols in for consultation. The latter had quite a talk with the young lady and learned that she had not discovered the cause of the trouble. He finally called Dr. Nichols in for consultation.

eration is not turning out the hardy, rugged, bright and intelligent young folks that the previous generation did.

Of course nowadays our young gentlemen and ladies can talk to you a little in Latin, Greek and French or German, they can converse on physics, chemistry, entomology, physiology and a dozen other topics, but what good is all that going to do them unless they intend to be professors or teachers. The average of children going to school who intend to become professors or teachers does not amount to one per cent. of the whole, and now why should the other 99 per cent., who want good, practical, useful education, be forced to waste their time over a lot of technical knowledge. I do not deny that a technical education is a good thing to have, but a young man is not going to keep himself supplied with bread and butter by virtue of it. There is a young man residing in Sacramento right now who only recently started the State with his brightness at school, who cannot even get employment as a sixty-dollar-a-month clerk in any of our stores.

"It is almost a daily occurrence with me," continued the doctor, "to be called upon to treat some young lady, particularly those who are attending the high school, for general debility, brain trouble, headaches and the like—all due to the overtaxing of their minds at school. Of course I treat boys somewhat, but not so often as the girls. Invariably my prescription is to take them from school immediately, and keep them out until they should be better. My object is to cure them with medicines and permit them to continue in breaking down their constitutions with overstudy."

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In 1855 had an eruption come out on my skin, and while at first it did not amount to much, it grew to be very aggravating and at times unbearable. It was a red, itchy, hard, inflamed, and peeling, leaving an entire new skin, acting some way for weeks at a time.

Health Officer C. B. Nichols comes into contact daily with school children, and is in a position to know whereof he speaks regarding the system of education now in vogue.

He is emphatic in his condemnation of the cramming of children's minds with study, and says that to this may be attributed the deterioration in health of the rising generation. While it may seem strange to some, I know what I am talking about.

STUDY FOR THE CHILDREN. Of Sacramento, the climate—the California climate—should also be taken into consideration. The natural tendency, to say nothing of the demands of so-called society, is to be indolent, and indolent children cannot learn rapidly, study as they will. "I don't suppose, though," he said, "that a crusade against laziness can be effected. There is a feeling among people who consider themselves a little better than mechanics and laborers, that it is not genteel to indulge in any physical exercise. If the children could be given some exercises, I have no doubt that they would have the vigor and capacity to keep up with the studies imposed without any evil effects. But from what I am able to learn regarding the course of study now in vogue here, they don't have the time for physical exercise even if they felt disposed to take it. In order to keep up with the procession they must study for hours before and after they go to school. This comes harder on the girls than the boys. The girls as a rule are more disposed to be studious and sedentary, while the boys will let their books go, and go out for a game of baseball or marbles. The girls are relieved by one minute by the Cuticura Anti-Pain Plaster. Price, 25c.

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