

REPRINTS.

THE SCHOOLS OF INDIANAPOLIS—II.

BY PROFESSOR A. C. SHORTRIDGE.

The Establishment of the High School and Passing of Private Schools—A Marked Advance in Eleven Years—The First Principles. Origin of the City Library; a Circumstantial and Accurate Statement. Weakness of the Old Law and Difficulties To Be Met—Origin of a Better Law.

As stated before, there were a number of excellent schools designed to provide for secondary education, but about all of these surrendered and closed their doors before the onward march of the high school. The first to go was the Indianapolis Female College, the next McLean Female Seminary, then the private school taught by Messrs. Charles and Mendenhall, and lastly the Baptist Female Institute.

To be sure, these statements compared with what can be said to-day as to the educational advantages afforded our children including the wonderful growth and present condition of our two great high schools, would seem to represent the days of small things. Certainly it does seem so, but when we are told that in 1863 there were only a few hundred children in the public schools, housed in buildings almost wholly unfit for use, the whole valued at \$88,500; with no books nor furniture; with appliances most uncomfortable, and inadequate; and then are told that at the end of eleven years there were enrolled in the schools more than ten times as many children; that the school property had increased more than \$600,000; that we had a high school of 380 pupils; that already more than 800 colored children were receiving the same school advantages as the white children; that we had a public library as a part of the public school system, with already nearly 13,000 volumes, it would seem really that during that period we had made some progress.

When the Indianapolis High School was organized there were probably not one hundred high schools in the United States supported at public expense. The records on file at the seat of government in 1860 place the number of free public high schools at forty. The commissioner of education at Washington City places the number of high schools in 1870 at 160; in 1880 at 800; in 1890 at 2,526; in 1900 at 6,005; in 1904 at 7,230, with an attendance of 635,808 students.

From the organization of the high school to the close of the school year in 1874 there had been four principals—W. A. Bell, Pleasant Bond, W. I. Squire and George P. Brown. In June, 1870, Mr. Bell resigned, having purchased the *Indiana School Journal*, organ of the State Teachers' Association and of the superintendents of public instruction, and to this new and important work he gave his time for the next twenty-eight years.

George P. Brown was elected principal in the spring of 1871, and managed the school until the end of the school year in 1874, when, on the resignation of Mr. Shortridge, he was elected superintendent of the city schools. After the resignation of Mr. Bell and before the choice of Mr. Brown, the school was under the direction of two of its leading instructors, Miss Eliza C. Cannel, afterward Mrs. W. A. Bell, and Professor Harvey W. Wiley, now of Washington City.

It is to the law approved March 3, 1871, that I wish to direct particular attention. This law gave to the city a much larger school board, with increased authority, and led to the establishment of the public library. The results have shown that it has brought larger benefits to the citizens of Indianapolis than any other school legislation passed by the Legislature of Indiana. It remained on the statute books for twenty-eight years and was succeeded by the law passed in 1899 providing for our present organization.

There are reasons for which I wish to describe as accurately as possible some of the things which led up to the passage of this law. Sometimes in speaking of the organization of the public library, statements in the newspapers and by public speakers as

to how these things came about have been misleading. Now and then it has been said, as leading citizens have passed away, that they had something to do with the establishment of the public library. Again, it has been said that the sermons and addresses of certain ministers had something to do with it, but as a matter of fact, there is no foundation for any of these statements.

I think I can give, with entire accuracy, the councils and deliberations which led to the enactment of this law, and I do so now for the reason that a very few of the men who were concerned with me in these deliberations are still alive to bear witness to the truth of my statement.

The demand for more money to purchase ground, buy furniture and other needed supplies, and for the general betterment of conditions all around, was so pressing by the fall of 1870 that it seemed imperative that at least an effort should be made to improve conditions, opening up new possibilities. The Legislature was soon to assemble and, naturally enough, it was only to the law-makers we could look for relief. Some questions as to the proper way of making our wants known to members of the Assembly were fully considered. Were our needs really what they were represented to be? Again, how to enlist the active support of good citizens and of the public in general in passing the enactment.

To pass on these questions, I determined to call a conference of a few leading citizens who would be likely to advise wisely. Accordingly, invitations were sent in December to nine or ten men, asking them to meet in an upper room of the Martindale block, opposite the old postoffice, at Market and Pennsylvania streets. Of the number invited, seven responded to the call. Two men whose advice was often sought and always helpful, were, for some reason, unable to attend. These were W. A. Bell and Clemens Vonnegut. The names of the men who attended this first conference were E. B. Martindale, John Caven, Addison L. Roach, Austin H. Brown, Simon Yandes, Thomas B. Elliott and H. G. Cary.

The object of the meeting, it was explained, was to be ad-

vised as to some plan or method by which the good of the schools might be promoted. And the advice was desired from citizens who knew much of conditions, but who had nothing to do at the time with the organization and management of the schools.

After being told of the lessons learned from four or five years of former experience by those in control, it was hoped that the advice would be cheerfully given. Figures were given as evidence of the overcrowded condition of buildings and the small number of seats for the accommodation of children, compared with the large number in the city of school age as shown by the enumeration. Added to all this it could be said there was always insufficient provision made by the city authorities for the construction of houses and the payment of teachers' salaries.

This information was given the gentlemen, hoping it might prepare their minds for the real work of the evening, the real purpose for which they were asked to meet, namely, to consider certain suggestions as a means of relief—suggestions which, could they be enacted into law, would amply supply the city's needs. These suggestions were for a larger school board, composed of at least three or four times as many members as at present, elected by a vote of the people on a day and at a time at which no other officers were to be chosen, for the term of three years, one-third of them to retire annually and give place to their successors, all to serve without compensation; the board of education to be authorized to district the city for school purposes, to examine and license at will all persons who might apply for positions as teachers, to levy all taxes needful for the construction of buildings, the payment of teachers, the purchase of furniture and other supplies and to pay incidental expenses; and finally, the board to be authorized to establish and maintain a public library.

The larger board would bring more and wiser counsels, admit of standing committees and, when chosen thus, the people would feel more fully their responsibility for the management of the schools. To place the election on a day and time when no other offices were to be filled would lessen the ever-present tendency

to run things into politics, and to minimize as much as possible the baleful influences that follow in the trail of the ward politician.

The provision that no compensation should be paid to them would strengthen the probabilities of finding honest, dignified, capable men—men who would accept it for the good they might do and who would not want it for what they could get out of it—men who could be trusted to discharge any duty that might devolve upon them. To retire one-third of the board each year would leave always an experienced two-thirds. To give the board authority to license teachers was to relieve of that duty an officer who had no relation whatever to the city schools and to place the responsibility where it belonged. To authorize the board to levy the necessary taxes was to place the responsibility where it should be—upon men who, by careful investigation, could really know the wants of the city as no one else could.

A searching and painstaking examination by the school trustees of what revenues were needed to operate the schools always went unheeded by the city councils under the old law. There was now and then a semblance of interest shown by a so-called committee on education, but it was always a source of mischief. This committee was generally troublesome and noisy, as they were ignorant of necessities.

To give the board authority to levy a tax for library purposes would be followed by most beneficial results. There was a constant and growing demand for reference books. This demand came both from the teachers and the pupils of the high and grammar schools, and well selected books for general reading would be of great service to them as well as to the public at large.

The foregoing suggestions as to what the proposed law should provide for were most cordially received, and it was gratifying to the author to know that not one of them was rejected. There was some question as to whether the rate of the tax for library purposes had better be left to the Assembly or allowed to be fixed by the school board. One or two thought it would be advisable to put the library clause in a separate bill, as it might lessen the

chances for passing the main one, but, in response to an earnest appeal by Judge Roach, it was decided not only to put the library clause, but also the rate of the levy into the body of the bill to be offered. The conference adjourned in a very hopeful state of mind, after appointing a committee consisting of Austin H. Brown, Judge Roach, and the writer, to prepare a bill embodying the suggestions made in the memoranda. The committee after adjournment talked of the matter and agreed that Mr. Brown should take the memoranda and prepare the bill, after which another conference should be called to hear the committee's report. Several things were not agreed upon, either by the committee or the meeting of the citizens. These of his own accord Mr. Brown inserted:

1. The designation of the board, the Board of School Commissioners.
2. The rate of the tax levy, one-fifth of a mill on the hundred dollars' worth of taxable property.
3. The special day on which the election should be held, the second Saturday of June each year.

After two days of hard work the chairman reported the bill ready for the inspection of the committee. A meeting was called at once. The bill was approved by the committee and another conference of citizens was called. To this second conference, all who attended the first were invited. In addition the four members of the House of Representatives, the three members of the school board and a few other prominent citizens were present. I cannot certainly call to mind, but I think most of the persons invited to the meeting responded to the invitation. The bill as prepared by the committee was read and every section of it carefully scrutinized by those who were present.

There were no objections whatever to any of its provisions, everybody thinking that it as nearly met our needs as it was possible to make it. After a pledge by all who were present, including the members of the General Assembly, and Messrs. E. B. Martindale, John Caven, James H. Ruddle, Fielding Beeler, Edward King and Oliver M. Wilson, that every proper effort should

be put forth to secure its passage, the meeting adjourned at once.

I had the clerk of the school board prepare a duplicate copy, and, after a comparison to see that the two copies were alike, I took them to the capitol, where the Legislature was already in session, and the bills were at once introduced, read and referred to committees, one bill in either branch of the Assembly.

The measure in the Senate, under the guidance of Messrs. Martindale and Caven, had comparatively easy sailing, but the one in the other branch met many obstacles. In the House the management of the bill was intrusted to Mr. Ruddle, a bright young attorney of this county, who championed the bill with marked ability.

In due time the measure was passed, and on the 3d day of March, 1871, was approved by the Governor. It provided wisely, as results have shown, for the organization and management of the schools for twenty-eight years, three or four times as long as any other measure for the same purpose, and for the establishment of the public library, an institution so highly prized by all our citizens.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BEECHER.

[A letter from Mrs. Jane Merrill Ketcham in *The Indianapolis News*, April 22, 1908.]

The story in one of the late March numbers of *The Indianapolis News*, told by Mr. Norwood of General John Coburn (as a lad) remembering Mr. Beecher's good time on a raft, opened the floodgates of memory. I can tell the story of that raft. It was in 1845. Indianapolitans then, as now, were from every State in the Union, and then, as now, were noted for sociability and hospitality. The Legislature, the Supreme Court and conventions from everywhere met in Indianapolis. My father's house was large and hospitable, set on a hill with large grounds, on the corner of New Jersey and Merrill streets where now stands the Catharine Merrill public school. Before the severe weather set

in it was decided to have a grand social reunion. Colonel Samuel Merrill, then a lad of thirteen or fourteen, was to drive straight up New Jersey street, first to Mr. Beecher's, with invitations. On the alley east in Market street were two small cottages, occupied by Henry Vance and Charles Beecher, where the Jewish synagogue afterward stood. Our dog Ben had the supervision of the Merrill and Ketcham families. He was a medium size, perfectly black, with a stump of a tail, like a Manx cat. His delight was to be always in evidence quietly, so he ensconced himself under the carriage. The banks of Fall creek had been giving away, causing a deluge to come down, making a large bayou in Market street, between New Jersey and East streets. Samuel drove, ignorant that Ben was under the carriage. Getting into deep water, Ben found himself in a quandary, as he could not or would not swim out. He betook himself to an old board fence in the middle of the flood, upon which he clambered. Finding the fence would not carry him beyond the water, he set up a piteous howl.

Hearing the heartrending howls, Mr. Beecher dashed to the rescue. Discovering Ben's dilemma, he went back to his cottage, took one of his wife's tubs, and with a pole pushed it out into deep water till he reached Ben on the fence. Ben could not be persuaded to get into the tub. Mr. Beecher returned, and, getting another tub, bored holes in both and fastened them together firmly with a clothes line. Again he poled out to the dog. But Ben looked at the rig with disdain. After this failure Mr. Beecher made a raft, which met with Ben's approval. He accepted a place on the raft joyously, and ever after showed his gratitude when Mr. Beecher came to our house by placing his paws on Mr. Beecher's shoulders and wagging his stump of a tail vigorously.

Such a flood as that had never been seen in Indianapolis, but it did not deter our friends—the Bateses, Vances, Fletchers, Tomlinsons, Douglasses and others—from coming. Such a gay day and evening is delightful to remember.

In 1853 Mrs. L. M. Vance and I visited New York city. Mr.

and Mrs. Beecher came and took us over to their home on Columbia Heights for a visit. With them we saw Central Park—then just mud and rocks, now so lovely. Then he took us through a man-of-war, which had been around the world fifteen times. It was marvelously clean, down to the cistern of sparkling water, delicious to the taste. He showed us the wonders of the whole city. He also took us out to Greenwood, and, standing by the graves of little George and Kate, he waved his hands toward the ocean, beautifully blue in the distance, and said with much feeling: "I chose this spot." And he should rest there till the resurrection.

After a Sunday's service he asked me what I thought of the singing. "It had thrilled me. Never had I heard anything like it—three thousand singing together." But, I added, "as for music, it will not compare with what you had in Indianapolis." "I have never anywhere heard such," he said. Then, after a long pause: "I have never had any fun since." He surely remembered it all.

"OLE DAN TUCKER."

The once famous song, "Ole Dan Tucker," is said to have originated in North Carolina, and one who "knew it from her earliest youth" gives this information about it:

"'Ole Dan Tucker,'" she says, "was adjustable. You began singing it where you chose, and could play both ends against the middle, or sing it backward or forward, or improvise topical stanzas according to your mind and skill. It was a fine dancing tune, and the black fiddlers often sang it as they fiddled, the prompter meanwhile racking his wits to find new figures to keep the proper rhythms." The singing was commonly in negro dialect, but not invariably so. Roystering young blades riding home from a long dance around 5 o'clock in the morning did as they pleased with the song. There were lawless and high-colored versions, such as could not be given unexpurgated before ladies, but "the sedatest could take no offense at the authorized ballad, which, indeed, was often used as a lullaby," in part as follows:

Ole Dan'l Tucker clomb a tree,
His Lord and Marster for to see.
De limb hit broke and Dan got a fall—
Nuver got to see his Lord at all!

Git out o' the way, Ole Dan Tucker!
Git out o' the way, Ole Dan Tucker!
Git out o' the way, Ole Dan Tucker!
You're too late to git your supper.

Miss Tucker she went out one day
To ride with Dan in a one-horse sleigh.
De sleigh was broke, and de horse was blind—
Miss Tucker she got left behind.
Git out o' the way, etc.

As I come down de new-cut road
I spied de peckerwood and de toad,
And every time de toad would jump
De peckerwood hopped upon de stump.
Git out o' the way, etc.

And next upon de gravel road
I met Brer Tarrypin and Brer Toad,
And every time Brer Toad would sing
Brer Tarrypin cut de pigeon wing.
Git out o' the way, etc.

Ole Dan and me we did fall out,
And what d'ye reckon it was about?
He trod on my corn and I kicked him on the shins;
That's jest the way this row begins.
Git out o' the way, etc.

If Ole Dan he had co'n to buy,
He'd mo'ne and wipe his weepin' eye;
But when Ole Dan had co'n to sell,
He was as sassy as all hell.
Git out o' the way, etc.