1851 Bridgewater School Committee Report

The Town of Bridgewater

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REPORT

OF THE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

OF THE

TOWN OF BRIDGEWATER,

FOR THE YEAR

1851–52.

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY J. B. CHISHOLM, NO. 5 WATER STREET.
1852.
REPORT,

In accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth, the School Committee present their annual Report concerning the several Schools in town, together with such suggestions as have occurred to their minds.

DISTRICT No. 1.—This school has been well taught through the year, and has made good improvement. Miss Charlotte M. Gardner, teacher in the higher department during the summer term, labored with untiring zeal, fidelity and success, and to our entire satisfaction. Miss Elizabeth G. Leach has had charge of this department during the winter term. She has given equal satisfaction to the Committee, and, we believe, to parents and pupils, with her predecessor.

The Primary department, through the entire season, has been taught by Miss Susan H. Christian, who has in a remarkable measure the affection and respect of her pupils. As a result to be expected, the school has been characterized by good order, and pleasing progress in all the elementary studies pursued in the school.

The Committee regret to say, that these schools have been not a little incommoded and interrupted by some evil minded person, or persons, who, with a malignity and meanness, which few are sufficiently depraved to be guilty of, have repeatedly broken into the school-rooms in the night, injuring the furniture, destroying and defacing books, and committing other acts of a low and dirty character too base to be mentioned. It is to be hoped that these mischief-makers, whoever they may be, will yet be detected and punished according to their deserts.

DISTRICT No. 2.—The Summer School was kept by Miss Julia H. H. Hooper, who is well qualified as to literary attainments, gentleness of manners and purity of affection for her pupils; but through the want of decision and energy, fails to secure that good order, which is essential to success in her work.

The Winter term was kept by the Rev. Thomas P. Rodman, who is eminently qualified to teach any school; yet for
the lack of maintaining good discipline, or for some other cause, he failed to secure that respect and obedience of the pupils, which are necessary to a successful issue in school-keeping; and of which he is himself sensible, as he has recorded in his Register. “The school,” says he, “was visited at the close by the School Committee. A little improvement in all respects was apparent; but the admonition to increased obedience given by the Committee was very much needed.”

DISTRICT No. 3.—The Summer School was taught by Miss Sarah Leach, who has had much experience in this kind of labor, and who is a faithful, laborious and, as we think, good teacher of the old stamp; and under her care the children made good improvement.

The Winter School has been taught by Mr. Thompson B. Caldwell, who has labored faithfully, successfully and satisfactorily. Under his care the pupils have manifested a respect and reverence which are truly delightful.

The house in which this school is kept is altogether inadequate for the children of the district. It is not only old and inconvenient in structure for any school, but measures on the inside of the school-room only seventeen and one-half by seventeen and one-half feet and about seven feet high. Into this hole have been crammed the winter past over sixty children. Whenever the Committee have visited the school, we have found it necessary to throw open the door, in order to breathe; and our great wonder is, how the children and teacher have survived in such a noxious and contaminated atmosphere. A new house is much needed, and if the district, or other districts which also need better houses, are unable to provide for themselves good and convenient houses for the schooling of their children, let them apply to the town for help, and we are confident they will have all needed assistance. We hope, indeed, the time is not far distant when the town will own all the school-houses, and then every district will have a good house,—one as good as another.

DISTRICT No. 4.—The Summer School was taught by Miss Mary S. Sturtevant, an experienced and successful teacher. Her manner was mild yet decided, and under her instruction the pupils made commendable improvement in manners and learning. Some of them were not absent from school a single day during her term of three months.

The Winter term was kept by Mr. Charles Cushman, who is also an experienced teacher; and yet the pupils seem to have made but little improvement under his tuition.

This house is too contracted and inconveniently seated. There is not sufficient room for black-boards and other appa-
ratus, nor for the children to stand or sit during recitation. The same may, indeed, be said of several other school-houses in town.

DISTRICT No. 5.—The Summer school was kept by Miss Huldah Capen, who was greatly wanting in energy and decision; and consequently the scholars failed in making much improvement.

The Winter term has been kept by Mr. Simeon D. Wilbur, who, under his circumstances, succeeded as well as was anticipated. By obtaining higher literary qualifications, and exercising a little more confidence in himself, he may make a useful teacher.

DISTRICT No. 6.—The Summer school was taught by Miss Elizabeth H. Leach, who was eminently devoted to her work, and for her first essay, was quite successful.

The Winter school was taught by Miss Narcissa Y. Chase, an experienced, faithful and successful teacher. In manner mild, firm and consistent, in labor abundant, in affection sincere, she cannot fail to secure the respect and love of her pupils.

DISTRICT No. 7.—The Summer school was taught by Miss Maritte B Crocker, whose manner was gentle, kind, affectionate and firm; whose method of instruction was plain and thorough; and whose whole management was entirely satisfactory; and who was (as one of the Committee now absent, said,) A GOOD TEACHER.

The Winter term is now being kept by Rev. Thomas P. Rodman.

DISTRICT No. 8.—This school was taught during the Summer term by Miss Jennette Pitkin. Although the discipline of this school was not of that high character for which it has generally been distinguished, yet it was not in this respect specially defective. Miss Pitkin labored faithfully in the performance of her duties, and secured a general and commendable improvement in her school.

Mr. Lucian C. Tucker, who taught this school during the winter term of 1850—51, was at the end of his term engaged to teach it the past winter. We consider Mr. Tucker as above mediocrity in his profession. The school has done well under his care. The Prudential Committee showed good judgment in retaining the services of a tried and successful teacher. The importance of permanent teachers is not sufficiently regarded by the Prudential Committee. It is unfortunate that they are generally inclined to make frequent changes. The progress of our schools is greatly retarded in this way. A moment's reflection will show every one, that it must be so;
and if our Prudential Committees would visit those schools in the town in which the same teacher has been employed for several consecutive terms, they would be convinced of the advantage of retaining a good teacher as long as possible, even at a higher price than would secure a new one.

DISTRICT No. 9.—The Summer term was under the care of Miss Julia F. Bartlett, who is eminently qualified for a teacher as to her literary attainments, and whose reputation has stood high; yet in this school where others have found it difficult to give satisfaction, though many of the scholars under her tuition made good improvement, she still failed to secure the love of all her pupils, and the good will of all the parents.

Rev. Lorenzo O. Lovell had charge of this school during the Winter term. Under his instruction the discipline of the school was in a much better state than previously; a marked improvement was noticed in the style of reading,—in distinctness of enunciation, accent, emphasis, and inflection, which we should rejoice to see in all our schools. The pupils also excelled in spelling. The Committee think that there is, as a general thing, by no means sufficient attention given to these elementary branches of instruction in our common schools. Mr. Lovell's school closed sooner than was expected, of which the Committee had no notice. We cannot, perhaps, say all respecting this school, which we might have said, had there been an examination at its close.

DISTRICT No. 10.—This school has been taught during both the Summer and Winter terms by Miss Lucretia Hayward. It retains its high standing among our schools for good order, thoroughness of instruction, and general improvement in its studies. Six of the pupils were not absent a single day.

DISTRICT No. 11.—This school for the Summer and the last few weeks of the Winter term, has been taught by Miss Abby Ann Keith;—for ten weeks of the Winter term by Mr. Thomas R. Freeman. These teachers have succeeded in imparting something of interest and life into the school, which are greatly needed. The pupils here are more backward than they ought to be, considering the advantages which they have enjoyed. They have had good teachers, and yet but little proficiency has been made, especially by the larger scholars. Much remains to be done before the school takes the high standing it is capable of reaching.

DISTRICT No. 12.—The summer school was taught by Miss Caroline E. Weston, who may justly be called a good teacher.

The Winter term was kept by Mr. Harrison Staples, under whose tuition the scholars manifested but little improvement.
DISTRICT No. 13.—This is a hard case. Both the Summer and Winter terms were kept by Miss Harriette A. Leach, who is not wanting in natural talents or literary acquirements. Neither is she wanting in warmth of affection, kindness of feeling, or desire to be useful. We esteem her, indeed, as a young lady of high excellence. Yet through the want of energy, zeal, or devotion to her work, she failed to secure the love, respect and obedience of her pupils, which are essential to success and usefulness in school-keeping.

This school has, indeed, in former as well as the last year, been peculiarly distinguished for irregularity of attendance. The whole number attending school the winter past, was 25; average attendance, 14. Some parents seem to forget, or not to understand, that one object in attending school, is to form habits of diligence, punctuality and good conduct. They seem to think that if by an occasional attendance, their children can learn to read and write, and obtain a little smattering of other knowledge, every object of the common school is answered. But if this were all, we might dispense with many, if not all, of our schools, for such knowledge might be picked up at home, or almost anywhere.

Early habits rightly formed, matured and strengthened, are essential to success in life; and one of the great and primary objects of our common schools, is to form and mature these habits. But it must be seen by every reflecting mind, that these habits can only be formed by regular and punctual attendance. Occasional attendance is sometimes worse than no attendance at all. It does little good to the individual himself, and is a great injury to the school. It serves to break in upon the order and discipline of a school, to disturb the mind and studies of other scholars, and lays the foundation for habits of disorder and irregularity in all the concerns of life. And the parent who keeps his child from school without good and sufficient reason, or who through prejudice or a miff towards the teacher, takes his child from school, ought to remember, that he is so far exerting his influence to destroy those habits of mental discipline and moral conduct, which it is the great design of our school-system to establish.

Truancy is one of the prevailing evils of our day. And whenever our Legislature shall manifest wisdom enough to devise a law for the punishment, or correction of this evil, they will manifest more wisdom than they have done in any change of the school laws of the Commonwealth during the last ten years.
The establishment of a High School demands the consideration of the town. More than one year and a half ago the School Committee were directed to establish one; but as no appropriation of money was made for the object, nothing could be done. One year since a plan for such a school was proposed to the town, but rejected. Since then nothing more has been done than to make some inquiries whether it may not be connected with the Academy; but nothing definite is yet ascertained. The time has arrived when it seems necessary that something should be actually done. Not only is the town exposed to a heavy fine; but the want of a High School for our older children becomes every day more important. It is, therefore, recommended that the amount of school money be raised from two thousand to twenty-six hundred dollars, with the understanding that six hundred dollars of it shall be appropriated for sustaining a High School. When this is done, most of the other schools in town may be kept both summer and winter by females, and thus the amount of schooling will be very materially increased. It is found from experiment, that when females of the right qualifications are employed, they can teach and manage the winter schools as successfully as males, and the number who are thus employed, is every year increasing. And it is but justice to say, that two of the best managed schools in this town, during the past winter, have been taught by females.

What shall be done with regard to the government and discipline of schools? is a question on every body's tongue, and is one of deep and vital interest. In our younger days, and in those of our fathers, the rod and ferule were used with summary vengeance. That they were often used in vain and without consideration, there can be no doubt; and many were the evils resulting from too great severity. That the effect was salutary in many cases, is equally evident. But so great were the evils in many cases, that the public mind has veered to the other extreme; and so much has been said, written and published against corporal punishment, that many parents, and especially youth, consider the least use of the rod as only a relic of barbarous times,—and that children are to be persuaded and cajoled to do right, or left to do as they please.

That some schools can be governed without the use of corporal punishment, is certain. Many teachers succeed year after year, in different schools, to maintain the most perfect order without striking a blow. Whether the faculty, which they so eminently possess, of managing a school, is innate and exists independently of all study and pains-taking, is worthy of serious inquiry. If a certain portion of the human race possess it naturally, and others cannot obtain it by the most diligent
study, and the rod and ferule are to be laid aside, then it is altogether useless to educate the latter for school teachers; but the former should be diligently sought out and trained for the work.

We are not, however, prepared to say, that all those who manage their schools without the use of corporal punishment, are the most successful and useful teachers. There may be a kind of management which is very acceptable and pleasing to children, and to parents also who do not know the value of a correct and thorough course of discipline, but which is in the end, shallow and almost worthless. Children may be pleased and carry home a good report of their teacher, if they are amused and coaxed and caressed, when their feelings would be the very reverse, if they were compelled to study, and to attend to their own business. Compulsion, however, and restraint, and even a degree of severity must at times be used with most children, or they will not advance far either in knowledge or virtue. And in some cases, the rod must be used, and we can never safely dispense with it so long as folly is found in the heart of a child.

The right use of the rod, or we would rather say the right government of a school with mildness and authority, gaining the love and good will of the children, and at the same time making them respect and obey the teacher, is, in school matters, the great question of the day. We have said and done much to raise the literary qualifications of common school teachers. Many noble-hearted individuals, and our state through our representatives, with an almost perfect unanimity have bestowed their treasures to build and sustain seminaries, where our youth, who are so disposed, may obtain an education that shall qualify them in a special manner, to be teachers in our common schools. All necessary means and apparatus, and the most learned and eminent instructors have been provided for these seminaries. Many youth of both sexes have availed themselves of these privileges. And it is exceedingly desirable that all, who intend to be teachers of our common schools should attend some of the Normal schools to which we refer. Here the mind is more thoroughly disciplined, and a more thorough knowledge obtained of those sciences usually taught in our common schools, than in any other seminaries known to your committee. By means of these institutions, during the last ten or twelve years, the literary attainments of teachers have been greatly increased. There is now seldom any difficulty in finding a sufficient number of persons qualified as far as the law requires, to keep our summer and winter schools. But there is still great difficulty in obtaining those who, in the manner of teaching, in their rules and regulations, and in their general management, give entire satisfaction to their employers. Where the difficulty is, is, as we have already intimated, a grave question. That much
of the difficulty originates in the want, or entire neglect of family government, and oftentimes in a morbid sympathy with the evil doer, and a squeamish contempt, or at least, an unfounded disbelief of all punishment, there can be no doubt, as we have repeatedly said in former reports. That there is also some error, or neglect in the training of educated teachers on this subject, is possible. There are those, as we have said, who seem to need no instruction on this most important part of their duty. They come to it naturally, and as if fitted by their Creator, they enter into their work with entire ease, and perform it with the most satisfactory success. But the number of this class is comparatively small, and by no means sufficient to answer the wants of our four thousand schools. Others must be trained and qualified for the work. That some with all possible external advantages and appliances can never make school teachers, is no more strange, than that some persons can never become sculptors, or painters, or architects, or musicians. But that a large portion of our youth, at least a sufficient number to answer the desired end, can be qualified, admits of no doubt. If it be not so, if there cannot be raised up a sufficient number of school teachers, who shall so manage and teach our schools, that our children may improve in decorum and virtue as well as in knowledge, our condition and prospects are sad indeed. In vain shall we look for the entire reformation of the human race.

In the early establishment of Normal Schools, high hopes were entertained by many, that by connecting with each of them a Model school, this desirable faculty of rightly governing a school would be developed or acquired. By having a fair model of what a common school ought to be before their eyes, and by having the opportunity of witnessing from time to time its operations, and especially by having the privilege of putting their own hand to the work, and experimenting for themselves, as apprentices do in learning their usual trades, it was anticipated that the students of the Normal School would go forth prepared to perform their work with skill, fidelity and satisfaction. How far this plan has succeeded in other places we are not able to say. With us we know, as was foretold by some, it has entirely failed. That other, and more successful means will be adopted, is sincerely desired.

That something must be done for the better management and discipline of our schools, is too evident to need a moment's argument. Parents, teachers, and even children are continually talking of the want of good government in schools. Our ears are daily filled with complaints on this subject. Parents come to us with their demure faces and heavy hearts. "The teacher (say they) you have put into our school, does no good. He or
she (as the case may be) has no government,—is partial, is severe at times, whips my child and lets the others go free, neglects to hear all the lessons, keeps back the diligent because the idle ones will not keep up, has too much singing, or will not let them sing at all, &c., &c.† We go to the teacher and find him engaged to his utmost powers, in hearing recitations, answering questions, scolding, threatening, coaxing, persuading, caressing, and he complains that if he corrects the child of Mr. A, it will be forthwith taken out of school; if he restrains the little darling of Mrs. B, she comes over to the school house, not to see how things are actually managed, and to aid the teacher in his arduous work,—but to reprimand him for severity. He tells also of the difficulty he has with this boy and that girl, and is tired of his engagement, and seems to be anxiously looking forward to the time when he shall finish his school and pocket his money. And even the little children in the streets come to us with an account of the hardships they have to endure in school, as if we could assuage or remove their grievances.

Few persons, who have not held the office of Superintending Committee of schools, are aware of the complaints which have come to our ears. Some seem to imagine the office to be a sort of sinecure, and that the committee attend to their duties only just so far as to answer the demands of the law. To such imputation we give no answer. The remuneration received is a mere tithe of the trouble and vexation of spirit which are incurred. In the faithful discharge of duty we listen to all complaints, and endeavor to remove them so far as is possible. And in these our annual reports we tell you of some of the more prominent ones, that you also may assist in their removal and entire banishment.

The difficulty of sustaining good order in school we fully believe to be in ninety cases out of a hundred in the want of family government. That there is also, in some cases, a want of fidelity, zeal and devotion to the work, and of a faculty to govern, on the part of teachers, is undoubtedly true. And these remarks are made with plainness and the most entire good will for the benefit of the parents and teachers.

If a school is not as prosperous and successful as it ought to be, let parents calmly and dispassionately inquire where the difficulty is. Let them, for a few moments, divest themselves of that self-love and partiality to their own, which is so common to us, and take a fair view of the subject, and we think, they would soon see it to be as possible for their own children to err, as for others; and that their own must be restrained and governed;—or all order and discipline are at an end, and the whole purpose of the school is frustrated. And it should also
be remembered that the government of a school must be sustained, though we or ours may suffer wrongfully. The less must give place to the greater. So important are the good order and government of a school, that it must be an extreme case when any one can be justified in interfering with the regulations of an authorized teacher. Cases of unlawful or undue severity may occur, but they are at the present day so rare, that whenever one does occur, it excites universal surprise. On the other hand, the spirit of disrespect and insubordination is of universal observation. But let it be fixed in the mind that whoever tampers with sin in children, or suffers the wicked to pass unrebuked, or neglects to restrain their waywardness, may fear lest his own head come down with sorrow to the grave. ’’Whatever a man soweth, that also shall he reap.’’ There is an established connection between means and ends in the civil and moral, as well as in the natural world. The Great Governor of the world has connected the one with the other, and no human power can separate them. If a man sin wilfully and presumptuously, he must receive the wages of sin. If he suffers sin in others,—especially, in those whom he is bound by every law of heaven and earth, by the very sympathies and energies of his own nature, to counsel, rebuke, correct and restrain, he must reap the consequences; and they may be consequences which will make the ears of those who hear to tingle. We do, therefore, most fervently invoke the attention of parents and all guardians of youth to a due consideration of this subject. When our rest is disturbed by the nightly howlings of the profane and intemperate, when our institutions of learning are subject to injury and defilement, and when the person and property of our teachers are threatened with violence, is it not time to inquire whence these disorders come? When so much is done to advance the cause of education, to build and adorn school houses and furnish them with all suitable apparatus, and to raise the qualifications of teachers, let it not be found at last that our children have only become wise to do evil.

EBENEZER GAY, School Com.
DAVID BRIGHAM,

Bridgewater, March 1st, 1852.
### APPENDIX

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<th>NO. OF SCHOOL DISTRICT</th>
<th>No. of scholars between 5 and 15 years of age</th>
<th>Whole No. attending school in Summer</th>
<th>Average attendance in Summer</th>
<th>Whole No. attending school in Winter</th>
<th>Average attendance in Winter</th>
<th>Amount of School Money drawn by each District</th>
<th>Length of Summer School in months</th>
<th>Length of Winter School in months</th>
<th>Wages per month in Summer including board</th>
<th>Wages per month in Winter including board</th>
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