VI.

DISCUSSIONS.

CO-EDUCATION OF THE SEXES IN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Girls were first admitted to the public schools of Boston in 1790. They were on an equal footing with boys in all classes until 1830, when a separation was established in four out of the nine schools then carried on. This separation has widened, until now there are fifteen schools for boys alone; fifteen for girls alone; seventy-four classes in mixed schools, of which thirty-nine are of boys alone and thirty-five of girls alone; leaving only about thirty-six per cent. of all the public school pupils who are really co-educated.

The subject of co-education had not been discussed in the school board since 1830 until March, 1890, when it was introduced by Mr. Winship, a progressive member of the school committee, who with Mrs. Fifield and Dr. Green, was appointed to consider and report upon the question "with special reference to future school-buildings."

In September last this sub-committee presented a majority and a minority report. The majority report was very exhaustive, giving not only the opinions and arguments of the committee, but those of a long list of teachers, school superintendents, physicians, and clergymen; the great majority of whom were in favor of co-education. Dr. Green, who signed the minority report, quoted no authorities, but based his argument, which he reiterated personally before the school committee, on the moral dangers for either sex and the physical danger for girls, as well as the moral shock to the community of a movement for co-education. Other arguments on the same side were as follows: the necessity of specific mental and moral adaptation of instruction and treatment according to sex; the difficulty of adapting the manual training and the physical training of the schools to the needs of a mixed class; the detrimental effect upon attention to study, of the personal preference of boys and girls associated together; the trouble
of finding teachers suited to mixed classes; the chances of social intercourse which would not be sanctioned by parents; the inconvenience of reconstructing school-houses to meet the demands of co-education, and especially the great expenditure necessary to such reconstruction; the ill-timed and uncalled-for occasion of the proposition for co-education; and finally, the urgent need of appropriations of money in other and more important directions of school work.

The arguments in favor of co-education presented in the majority report, and urged in the discussion before the school committee, were mainly as follows: the sexes are brought together in the home and in the community, at the beginning and end of school life, and are therefore intended by nature to be educated together and should be trained for life together; as they are destined for marriage, they should know each other well during youth and hold natural and unconscious, rather than artificial and clandestine, relations with each other; the sexes being complementary by nature they need each other's companionship at one period of life as well as another, at school as well as at home; boys need the refining influence of girls, and girls the strengthening influence of boys during their school life; early and more or less intimate acquaintance with the thoughts, habits, and feelings of the opposite sex will lead to nobler character, earlier and happier marriages, and save from temptation and vice; the stimulus, too, of emulation between the sexes is a healthy one, tending to correct the faults of either; co-education corrects the morbid tendencies of puberty; the earlier intellectual maturity of girls and slower mental development of boys balance and correct each other; the steady conscientiousness of girls and the robust activity of boys are mutually helpful; the occasional relaxation desirable for girls is more than made up by their greater ambition and thoroughness; the association of the sexes gives a healthy animation to recitation; it tends to put either sex under the instruction of the opposite sex, which always works to advantage; it is the best system for the teacher, giving him more breadth of treatment and more variety of outlook; the views of life which pupils obtain from a teacher of both boys and girls will not be partial and unreal, but stereoscopic and complete; discipline will be much easier in mixed classes than in boys' classes; all the trend of the higher civilization is in the direction of associating the sexes in all the activities of life;
as the equality of educational privilege is more widely granted, the association of the sexes in educational opportunity will be more fully admitted.

After an earnest discussion of the whole matter, action was indefinitely postponed, the advocates of co-education yielding to the financial and prudential argument for the present, but in no degree yielding their belief in the doctrine, and the persuasion of its resuscitation at no distant day. The press and progressive expression everywhere indorsed the majority report of the committee. As one of the Board of Supervisors I responded by letter to the appeal of the sub-committee, giving my unqualified assent to co-education as one of the essential conditions of a well-founded and harmonious education for both boys and girls, from childhood to maturity, in school, college, and professional study.

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