THE GETTYSBURG STAR & REPUBLICAN BANNER.

☞Devoted to Politics, Foreign and Domestic Intelligence, Literature, Science, Agriculture, the Mechanic Arts, Internal Improvement, and General Miscellany.☜

LEGISLATIVE.

FROM THE HARRISBURG REPORTER.

REMARKS OF MR. STEVENS ON THE SCHOOL BILL.

Mr. SPEAKER—I will briefly give you the reasons why I shall oppose the repeal of the school law. For it was passed at the last session of the legislature with unexampled unanimity, but one member of this house voting against it. It has not yet come into operation, and none of its effects have been tested by experience in Pennsylvania. The passage of such a law is enjoined by the constitution, and has been recommended by every governor since its adoption. Much to his credit, it has been warmly urged by the present executive in all his annual messages delivered at the opening of the legislature. To repeal it now, before its practical effects have been discovered, would argue that it contained some glaring and pernicious defect; and that the last legislature acted under some strong and fatal delusion, which blinded every man of them, to the interests of the commonwealth. I will attempt to show, that the law is salutary, useful and important; and that consequently, the last legislature acted wisely in passing, and the present would act unwisely in repealing it. That instead of being oppressive to the people, it will lighten their burthens, while it elevates them in the scale of human society.

It would seem to be humiliating to be under the necessity, in the nineteenth century, of entering into a formal argument to prove the utility, and to free governments, the absolute necessity of education. More than two thousand years ago the Deity who presided over intellectual endowments, ranked highest for dignity, chastity and virtue, among the goddesses worshipped by cultivated pagans. And I would ask this House or our constituents by supposing any course of reasoning necessary to convince them of its high importance. Such necessity would be degrading to a Christain age and a free republic!

If then, education be of admitted importance to the people under all forms of government, and of indispensable necessity when they govern themselves, it follows, of course, that its cultivation and diffusion is a matter of public concern; and a duty which government owes to its people. In accordance with this principle, the ancient republics, who were most renowned for their wisdom and success, considered every child born subject to their control, as the property of the state, so far as education was concerned; and during the proper period of instruction, they were withdrawn from the control of their parents, and placed under the superintendanship of the commonwealth. There all were instructed at the public schools, all were placed on perfect equality, the rich and poor man's sons, for all were deemed children of the same common parent—of the commonwealth. Indeed, where all have the means of knowledge placed within their reach, and meet at common schools on equal terms, the *forms* of government seem of less importance to the happiness of the people than is generally supposed; or rather, such a people are seldom in danger of having their rights invaded by their rulers. They would not long submit to such impunity. Prussia, whose form of government is absolute monarchy, extends the blessing of free schools into every corner of the kingdom,—to the lowest and poorest of the people. With a population equal to our whole Union, she has not more than 20,000 children who do not enjoy its advantages. And the consequence is, that Prussia, although governed by an absolute monarch, enjoys more happiness and the rights of the people are better respected than in any other government in Europe.

If an elective republic is to endure for any great length of time, *every* elector must have sufficient information, not only to accumulate wealth, and take care of his pecuniary concerns, but to direct wisely the legislatures, the ambassadors, and the executive of the nation—for *some* agency in approving or "disapproving of them, falls to every freeman. If then, the permanency of our government depends upon such knowledge, it is the duty of government to see that the means of information be diffused to every citizen. This is a sufficient answer to those who deem education a private and not a public duty—who argue that they are willing to educate their *own* children, but not their *neighbour's* children.

But while but few are found ignorant and shameless enough to deny the advantages of general education, many are alarmed at its supposed burthensome operation. A little judicious reflection, or a single year's experience, would show that education, under the free school system will cost more than one half less, and afford better and permanent instruction than the present disgraceful plan pursued by pennsylvania. Take a township of six miles square and make the estimate—such townships, on an average, will contain about 200 children to be schooled. The present rate of tuition generally (in the country) is 1 dollar per quarter. If the children attend school two quarters each year, such township would pay $800 per annum. Take the free school system—divide the township off into districts three miles square; the farthest scholars would then have one mile and a half to go, which would not be too far. It would require four schools. These will be taught 4 months, as in other states, three months in the winter by male, and three months in the summer by female teachers; good male teachers can be had at from sixteen to eighteen dollars per month and board themselves; females at nine dollars per month—Take the highest price, eighteen dollars for three months, would be $54 00

And then for females at $9 for three months, 27 00

Each school would cost per year in a township, 81 00

Four schools, 4

324 00

The price now paid for the same is $00 00

Saving for each township of six miles square, $76 00 per annum.

If the instruction of 200 scholars will save by the free school law $476, the 500, 000 children in Pennsylvania will save 1,- 190,000! Very few men are aware of the immense amount of money which the present expensive and partial mode of education costs the people. Pennsylvania has half a million of children who either do, or ought to go to school one month in the year. If they *do* go, at two dollars per quarter, their schooling costs two millions of dollars per annum! If they do *not* go when they are able, their parents deserve to be held in disgrace. Where they are unable, if the state does not furnish the means, she is criminally negligent. But by the free school law, that same amount of education, which would now cost two millions of dollars, could be supplied at less than one third of this amount. The amendment which is now proposed as a substitute for the school law of last session, is, in my opinion, of a most hateful and degrading character. It is a re-enactment of the pauper law of 1809. It proposes that the assessors shall take a census, and make a return of the poor. This will be revised, and a new record made by the county commissioners, so that the names of those who have the misfortune to be poor men's children shall be forever preserved, as a distinct class in the archives of the county! The teacher, too, is to keep in his school a *pauper* book, and register the names and attendance of poor scholars. Thus pointing out and recording their poverty in the midst of their companions. Sir, hereditary distinctions of rank are sufficiently odious; but that which is founded on poverty is infinitely more so. The law should be entitled "an act for branding and marking the poor, so that they may be known from the rich and proud." Many complain of this tax, not on the ground of its amount, as because it is for the benefit of others and not themselves. This is a mistake. It is *for their own* benefit, inasmuch as it perpetuates the government, and ensures the due administration of the laws under which they live, and by which their lives and property are protected. Why do they not urge the same objection against all other taxes? The township assessors, which former days a hereby county tax to support criminal courts, build jails, and pay sheriffs and jail keepers, and yet probably he never will have any direct personal use of either. He never gets the worth of his money by being tried for a crime before the court, allowed the privilege of the jail on conviction; or receiving an equivalent from the sheriff or his bangmen for the use of the gallows. Surely no tax which is necessary to support and punish convicts; but loudly complains of that which goes to prevent his fellow being from becoming convicts, and to obviate the necessity of those humiliating institutions.

This law is often objected to because its benefits are shared by the children of the profligate spendthrift equally with those of the most industrious and economical habits. It ought to be remembered, that the benefit is bestowed, not upon the erring parents, but the innocent children. Carry out this objection and you punish children for the crimes or misfortunes of their parents. You virtually establish casts and grades of society, similar to the hereditary distinctions so fatal to the happiness of Europe. Sir, it is a blessing—a glorious blessing that our institutions do not recognize such distinctions. Every man's son is encouraged by wise legislation, for outstrip and bear off the laurels from the less industrious heirs of wealth. Some of the ablest men of the present and past days never could have been educated except for that benevolent system. Not to mention any of the living, it is well known that that architect of an immortal name, who "plucked the lightnings from heaven, and the sceptre from tyrants," was the child of free schools. Why shall Pennsylvania now repudiate a system, which is calculated to elevate her to that rank in the intellectual, which, by the blessing of Providence, she holds in the natural world? first among her equals?" I am aware, sir, how difficult it is for the great mass of the people who have never seen it in operation, to understand its advantages. But is it not wise to let it go into full operation, and learn its results from experience? Then if it prove useless or burthensome, how easy to repeal it! I know how large a portion of community can scarcely feel any sympathy with, or understand the necessities of the poor; or appreciate the exquisite feelings which they enjoy when they see their children receiving the benefits of education, and rising in intellectual superiority above the clogs which hereditary poverty had cast upon them. It is not wonderful that men who have never been descended to from from father to son in unbroken succession, should never have become familiar with misery, and therefore should never have sought for the surest means of alleviating it. Nor should I reflect how apt hereditary wealth, hereditary influence, and perhaps as a consequence hereditary pride are to close the avenues and steel the heart against the claims and the rights of the poor. I am induced to thank my God sir, for having from early life, bestowed upon me the blessing of poverty. Sir, it is a blessing—for it there be any human sensation more ethereal and divine than all others, it is that which feelingly sympathises with misfortune.

But we are told this law is unpopular; that the people desire its repeal. Has it not always been so with every new reform in the condition of man? Old habits, and old prejudices are hard to be removed from the mind. Every new improvement, which has ever been introduced, in ameliorating man from the savage through the civilized up to a highly cultivated state, has required the most strenuous, and often perilous exertions of the wise and the good. But, sir, much of its unpopularity is charged upon the vile arts of unprincipled demagogues. Instead of attempting to remove the honest misapprehensions of the people, they cater to their prejudices, and take advantage of them, to gain low, dirty, temporary, local triumphs. I do not charge this on any particular part. Unfortunately, almost the only spot on which all parties seem to unite, is the ground of common infamy! I have seen the present chief magistrate of this commonwealth violently assailed as the projector and father of this law. I am not the eulogist of that gentleman; he has been guilty of many deep political sins. But he deserves the undying gratitude of the people, for the steady untiring zeal, which he has manifested in favor of common schools. I will not enter into exertions in that cause have covered all, but they have atoned for many of his errors. I trust the people of this state will never be called on to choose between a supporter and an opposer of free schools. But if it should come to that; if that should be made the turning point on which we are to cast our suffrages; if the opponent of education were by some latter process, to gain political friend; and the free school candidate my most obnoxious enemy, I should deem it my duty as a patriot, at this moment of our intellectual crisis, to forget all other considerations, and I should place myself unhesitatingly, and cordially, in the ranks of him whose banner streams in light. I would not prefer mere party success, to gain political victories, which however they might profit individuals, must prove disastrous to our country. Let it not be supposed from these remarks, that because I deem this a paramount object, that I think less highly than heretofore of those great, important cardinal principles, which for years past have controlled my political action. They are, and ever shall be, deeply cherished in my inmost heart. But I must be allowed to exercise my own judgment as to the best means of effectuating that & every other object which I think beneficial to community. And according to that judgment, the light of general information, will as surely counteract the pernicious influence of secret, oath-bound political associations, as the sun in heaven dispels the darkness and dank vapours of the night.

It is said that some gentlemen here owe their election to their hostility to general education. That it was placed distinctly on that ground, and that others lost their election by being in favor of it, and that they consented to supercede the regularly nominated candidates of their own party, who had voted for the law—it may be so. I believe that two highly respectable members of the last Legislature, from Union county, who voted for the school law, did fall of re-election on that ground only. They were summoned before a county meeting and requested to pledge themselves to vote for its repeal, as the price of their re-election. But they were too high-minded and honorable men to consent to such degradation. The people, incapable for the moment of appreciating their worth, dismissed them from their service. But I venture to predict that they have passed them by only for the moment. Those gentlemen have earned the approbation of all good and intelligent men more effectually by their retirement, than they could ever have Done by retaining popular favor at the expense of self-humiliation. Thus deviating a portion of their time to acquiring the means of subsistence, industrious habits are forced upon them, and their minds and bodies become disciplined to a regularity and energy which is seldom the lot of the rich. It is no uncommon occurrence to see the poor man's son, thus encouraged by wise legislation, far outstrip and bear off the laurels from the less industrious heirs of wealth. Some of the ablest men of the present and past days never could have been educated except for that benevolent system. Not to mention any of the living, it is well known that that architect of an immortal name, who "plucked the lightnings from heaven, and the sceptre from tyrants," was the child of free schools. Why shall Pennsylvania now repudiate a system, which is calculated to elevate her to that rank in the intellectual, which, by the blessing of Providence, she holds in the natural world? first among her equals?" I am aware, sir, how difficult it is for the great mass of the people who have never seen it in operation, to understand its advantages. But is it not wise to let it go into full operation, and learn its results from experience? Then if it prove useless or burthensome, how easy to repeal it! I know how large a portion of community can scarcely feel any sympathy with, or understand the necessities of the poor; or appreciate the exquisite feelings which they enjoy when they see their children receiving the benefits of education, and rising in intellectual superiority above the clogs which hereditary poverty had cast upon them. It is not wonderful that men who have never been descended to from from father to son in unbroken succession, should never have become familiar with misery, and therefore should never have sought for the surest means of alleviating it. Nor should I reflect how apt hereditary wealth, hereditary influence, and perhaps as a consequence hereditary pride are to close the avenues and steel the heart against the claims and the rights of the poor. I am induced to thank my God sir, for having from early life, bestowed upon me the blessing of poverty. Sir, it is a blessing—for it there be any human sensation more ethereal and divine than all others, it is that which feelingly sympathises with misfortune.

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