

## HOUSE....No. 83.

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### Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 10, 1849.

The Committee on Education, to whom were referred an order from the House, of January 18, 1849, in reference to the substitution, for the words "between the ages of four and sixteen years," of the words, "between the ages of five and fifteen years," with the corresponding requisite alterations in the two hundred and twenty-third chapter of the acts of the year eighteen hundred and forty-six; and, also, an order from the House, of February 23, 1849, in reference to the age at which children shall be admitted into the common schools—submit the following

### R E P O R T :

The Committee are of opinion that, for many reasons, the substitution of 5 and 15, in the place of 4 and 16, would be expedient. The period from 5 to 15 is, more truly, as will be shown in a subsequent portion of this Report, the age for school education, than from 4 to 16. The usage of all governments and learned societies, in taking a census, or in registering a people, is uniformly in favor of the numbers 5 and 15. They are the numbers employed, in taking the census, by authority of the United States. If the same should, in all cases, be em-

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ployed in taking the census, and the school-enumerations, of this State, the two would provide the means of verifying and correcting each other. In that event, perhaps, it would be found unnecessary to take an enumeration for school purposes, every year, or at all, in addition to the decennial State and United States census, or, at most, only on the intermediate fifth year. A great saving of expense to the towns, and of trouble to town-officers, would thus be made.

But, besides, and far above, all such considerations as these, the Committee are of opinion that very serious evils have arisen from having fixed from 4 to 16 years of age, as the period upon which the educational statistics of the Commonwealth are based. The late Secretary of the Board of Education, and other friends of the cause, have been disheartened, without reason, the public satisfaction and confidence in the system of our common schools have been unjustly depressed, the credit of the Commonwealth has been kept under a cloud, and its example has been deprived of the brightness and efficacy that deservedly belong to it.

In order that this may be understood, it is necessary to present a few statistical items. In the First Annual Report of the Board of Education, it is stated that the whole number of children, in 294 towns, between the ages of 4 and 16, was

	177,053
Whole number, of all ages, attending in winter,	141,837
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	35,216
Allowing for those over 16, and under 4, attending,	12,000
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Number, between 4 and 16, not attending at all,	47,216

In view of these figures, Mr. Mann expressed himself thus, in his First Report:—

“After making every possible allowance, the returns exhibit *frightful* evidence of the number of children, who either do not go to school at all, or go so little as not to be reckoned among the scholars.”—p. 38.

By the Tenth Report of the late Secretary, the whole number

between the ages of 4 and 16, in the Commonwealth, was found to be	203,877
Whole number, in all the schools, in winter,	174,270
Number over 16,	11,589
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Number, between 4 and 16, not attending at all,	41,196

By the Twelfth, and last Report of the late Secretary, the whole number in the Commonwealth, is found to be	214,436
Whole number, in all the schools, in winter,	185,000
Number over 16,	9,977
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Number, between 4 and 16, not attending at all,	39,413

Looking at the subject through the light of these figures, it has appeared to the late Secretary, and to others, that between *one fourth*, and *one fifth* of all the children in the Commonwealth do not go to school at all; and, although the relative non-attendance is reduced somewhat, it still, after all that has been done, does not seem to be essentially remedied. In his last report, the Secretary says, employing the very same adjective used by him eleven years ago:—

“It cannot be necessary to add another repulsive lineament to the deformities of a picture already so *frightful*. Indeed, one would naturally say beforehand, that such a likeness, copied year after year from a genuine and indisputable original, would prove too much to be borne by any one, did not experience demonstrate, that there must be about one quarter part of the parents in Massachusetts, whose nervous tissue, on this subject, can bear any thing.”—p. 25.

During the entire period of service of the late Secretary, embracing twelve years, he has evidently been suffering a continuous distress of mind, in the thought that some fifty thousand of the two hundred thousand children of Massachusetts were growing up in utter ignorance, and an entire abandonment of the privileges of education, provided for them, at such a cost and with so much labor!

Now, it is suggested, whether the disheartening results to which the late Secretary's statistics have, from the beginning to the end,

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so uniformly led him, are not, to a great extent, owing to his having adopted the wrong figures, as a measure of the school-going period of life? The number not attending school at all, especially in the interior towns, and rural districts, will perhaps be found, to a considerable extent, made up of children under 5, and, in the cities and large towns, of youth over 15 years of age.

There is undoubtedly a prevailing and spreading sentiment in the community, against sending children to school at a very early age. The first five years of life bring with them more than half the knowledge the most learned ever attain, but it flows into the mind through the spontaneous action and unconscious play of the senses; and, in those years, is to be secured the physical development of muscle and limb, upon which all subsequent health, happiness, and usefulness depend. For the accomplishment of neither of these ends, is the school-room a suitable sphere. Some parents still send their children to school during this infantile period, to get rid of them at home; but the practice is not only injurious to the children themselves, but to the schools and all pertaining to them. Remonstrances against children's being permitted, while so very young, to embarrass the schools, have been addressed to the committee by those who experience and suffer from the evil.

That the public opinion is setting in this direction, is evident from the reports of the Secretary of the Board of Education. By the tenth report, it appears that, two years ago, 6,018 children under 4 years of age, attended school, while, by the twelfth report, it is found that, during this last year, in an increased population, only 3,656 children under 4 years of age attended school. It is probable that, as more enlightened views—the same which the late Secretary himself has so eloquently and conclusively advocated—in reference to physical education, prevail, the difference between the whole number of children under 5 years, and those of that age attending school, will go on increasing, thus magnifying the result which the Secretary has looked upon as so frightful.

The committee indulge the hope, that the range of studies, pursued in the common schools, will gradually be extended, but if it should, for some time, retain its present limits, as the system of

instruction, under the stimulating influence we are endeavoring to impart, becomes efficient, the pupils will more speedily consummate the course, and boys and girls, having completed their studies, will, at an earlier age, yield to the demands of enterprise and industry, and pass from the school-room, into the active employments of life. In this way, the better the schools become, the greater will be the number of non-attendants after 15 years of age. That this effect is actually taking place—that, under the improvements, which, to so considerable a degree, are owing to the services of the late secretary,—the youth of the Commonwealth are accomplishing their education at an earlier age, than heretofore, appears from his own reports. According to the Tenth Report, there were, two years ago, 11,589 in the schools over 16 years of age. By the Twelfth Report, it is found, that this last year, in an increased population, only 9,977 were in the schools over 16 years of age. We are told that master mechanics much prefer to take apprentices at 15 years of age, than at a later period. Indeed, it is not to be doubted, that, as society advances, and business multiplies, and activity becomes more intense, the number will increase, of both sexes, who will be drawn from school, before reaching the age of 16, into occupations useful to themselves and others.

It scarcely needs to be observed, that the committee do not propose any restriction against going to school, no matter how young or staying there, no matter how long. Their object is merely to show that, in fact, the tendency of opinion and of custom,—and they think it a favorable one,—is to keep children out of school, until after 4 years of age, and, at the same time, to transfer them from school, to the occupations of life, in an increasing proportion of instances, before reaching 16 years of age, and that, for these reasons, from 4 to 16 years of age is an unsuitable and unjust measure of the school-going period of life.

It is, they presume, too obvious to need enforcement, that occasional absences, on the part of those sometimes attending, and whose names are registered as belonging to the schools, will be found, to a much greater extent, among children under 5, and boys and girls over 15 years of age, than in any equal in-

intermediate period of life. If the years 5 and 15 were adopted, in the enumerations and registrations required by the school law, it would show results, in reference to non-attendance upon school at all, and the occasional absences of those who do attend more or less, quite inconsiderable, compared with those exhibited on the basis of 4 and 16 years; so inconsiderable, as to be within the reach, and perhaps the remedy, of those whose duty it is, or may be, to enforce attendance upon the schools. The honor of the Commonwealth would be vindicated against a reproach which, as the committee think, unjustly, and through error, now rests upon it, and the whole people would be filled with new hope and encouragement, to uphold and carry onward, with redoubled energy and animation, the momentous cause of universal education.

The alteration, herein suggested, cannot be imagined to have any effect whatever upon the distribution of the income of the school fund.

The committee propose, by fixing the years that, most truly, include the educational age, to render the school registers and returns more exact tests of the degree to which the people of the Commonwealth appreciate, and avail themselves of their privileges, to ascertain, with greater correctness, from year to year, how our system of public instruction is working, and to present Massachusetts, in that aspect in which her glory and her hope are found, as, by effectually providing for the mental and moral culture of her children, the model State of the Union.

To carry their views into effect, they recommend the passage of the following act.

All which is respectfully submitted.

CHARLES W. UPHAM, *Chairman.*

## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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In the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty-Nine.

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### AN ACT

To amend “An Act relating to the Duties of School Committees, and the Distribution of the Income of the School Fund.”

*BE it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :*

1   SECT. 1. The school committees of the several  
2 cities and towns, instead of ascertaining the number  
3 of persons between the ages of four and sixteen years,  
4 belonging to such cities and towns respectively, as  
5 required by the second section of the act, of which  
6 this is an amendment, approved by the governor, on  
7 the fifteenth day of April, in the year one thousand  
8 eight hundred and forty-six, shall ascertain the num-  
9 ber of persons between the ages of five and fifteen  
10 years, and shall alter the form of the certificates re-  
11 quired from them, by the said section, accordingly.

1     SECT. 2. The income of the Massachusetts School  
2 Fund shall hereafter be apportioned to the several  
3 cities and towns according to the number of persons  
4 therein, between the ages of five and fifteen, instead of  
5 four and sixteen, as required by the fifth section of  
6 the aforesaid act of the fifteenth of April, in the year  
7 one thousand eight hundred and forty-six.

1     SECT. 3. The sum required to be raised by any city  
2 or town, as one of the conditions of receiving its por-  
3 tion of the income of the school fund, shall be, at least,  
4 equal to one dollar and fifty cents, instead of one dol-  
5 lar and twenty-five cents, as required by said act,  
6 of which this is an amendment, for each person be-  
7 tween the ages of five and fifteen years, belonging to  
8 said city or town.

1     SECT. 4. All acts, and parts of acts, and all re-  
2 solves, and parts of resolves, inconsistent with the pro-  
3 visions of this act, are hereby repealed.