

ESSEX COUNTY.

M. H. C. Vail, Superintendent.

To Hon. A. B. Poland, Ph.D., State Superintendent:

Sir—On assuming the duties of County Superintendent I found myself in a field which, if not entirely new to me, was one that had lain fallow, so far as I was personally concerned, for nearly a quarter of a century. It became quite necessary for me, therefore, to enter upon the work, which I had been informed was difficult, with caution and with still greater care, since no landmarks for my guidance had been left in view. But as time went on the task grew easier. The courtesy of Superintendents Barringer, of Newark, and Cutts, of Orange, was kindly extended me. The supreme pleasure of the work, though, was not felt in its fullness until I had made the acquaintance of the school officials, trustees and clerks of the county, all of whom rallied to my support with one accord. But what made my induction into office especially grateful was the warm welcome extended by the teachers. The good work which I am happy to report they have one and all accomplished, is abundantly manifest in their fulfillment to the letter, of their pledge of fidelity to their new Superintendent, the cause of education and the instruction of the young.

Schools in a Flourishing Condition.—It is a very pleasant duty for me to be able to report the schools throughout the county as in a very flourishing condition. They show a very marked change in some, while all over the county the spirit of progress is at work in the schools. The trustees, clerks and teachers are vying with each other in their efforts to push on the good work. They all aim at the accomplishment of a practical and progressive education of all the children in the county whose parents or guardians are disposed to accept the golden opportunities offered.

The State money so liberally bestowed has been wisely and judiciously expended; moreover, the people and taxpayers have exhibited such cheerfulness in supplementing the same to the meeting of every necessity, that I have not a single instance of illiberality on their part to report.

New Buildings and Improvements.—Wherever I have found it my duty to make recommendations for what I considered necessary changes, in order to obtain increased facilities by the enlargement of old buildings, or the construction of new ones for the greater comfort or accommodation of pupils and teachers, immediate action has been taken and the work pushed vigorously forward to an early completion. I am thus enabled to report two new school buildings constructed during the year. Several old ones were overhauled and new additions built thereto, and several completed that were under way.

In East Orange the Board of Trustees have finished their new High School building at an expense of nearly \$100,000. This building will compare favorably with any public school building in the State. They have also constructed a new Grammar School edifice in one of their rapidly-growing outlying sections.

Montclair is also engaged in erecting a new High School building of such dimensions as will give a seating capacity of five hundred in the assembly-room alone. It is being built on an extensive and beautiful plot of ground, including that formerly occupied by the Episcopal Church

and on what might be termed the foot-hills of the Orange Mountain. When completed this building will compare most favorably with any house erected for school purposes in the State or United States, and will entail an expense of not less than \$125,000 and perhaps more.

In Irvington great improvements are being made and many needed additions to their already large building are being rapidly pushed to an early completion in order that the much-needed accommodations for the children of their rapidly-increasing community may be provided at an early day.

It will not do to pass over the good work done in White Oak Ridge District, No. 24, where a new building has been constructed. It has taken the place of a long since obsolete building occupied for years, because it was formerly believed anything was good enough for a school-house. With the departure of the old and the dedication of the new was opened up a new era of educational prosperity and neighborly good feeling for the district.

With the promised demolition during the vacation term next year of the old stone jug at Lyons Farms will have passed from Essex county the last vestige of the old notion mentioned above—that anything is good enough for a school-house. This little stone structure, which a stranger would decide had been erected in the early days of the Republic by some well-to-do farmer as a smoke-house, it is expected will be photographed for the Columbian Exhibition at Chicago next year, as the last connecting link between the old era and the new.

Consolidation of School Districts.—Early in my official incumbency the people of Millburn came forward with petitions so numerous signed and with arguments so strong I did not long delay consolidation of Districts 25, 26 and part of 27, in order that much-needed and better schools and school facilities might be secured for Millburn and vicinity. Some objections to the project being raised in No. 25, the district known as Short Hills, an appeal was taken, but overruled by your predecessor. Next year a building large enough to meet the present and prospective school wants of this growing suburb will be erected.

Female School Trustee.—Few, indeed, have been the changes in district clerks or trustees, the major part proving themselves the right men in the right places and becoming their own successors. In Clinton District, No. 16, I have the pleasant duty of reporting the election of a lady trustee, Miss Burnette, who accepted the trust and is now filling the place acceptably and doing her work resolutely and effectively.

School Attendance.—In all the districts the attendance upon the schools has been remarkably good, and the cases of persistent tardiness or absence have been few. Yet there is a singular laxity displayed on the parts of some parents and guardians in seeing to it that their children are in the school-rooms and receiving the benefits of the education held out to them so generously and with such a liberal hand. The percentage of those children who do not attend school at all is entirely too large. For this deplorable state of affairs there ought to be some effective remedy. Since my advent into office there has been nothing which has led to more serious thought, and it does seem that some plan should be devised to bring a much larger number of this class of children into the school-room and under the benign influences of education. They are now

growing up in our midst in ignorance, which as surely leads on the way to destitution and crime as night follows day.

All the remedies thus far applied proving only palliative, it seems that permanent relief or cure can only be reached by the adoption of heroic means.

Some plans I have in view may be so far matured during the year as to be worthy of presentation in my next report.

County Institute.—The Teachers' Institute of last year, while it presented many features of excellence, did not come fully up to our expectations, nor did it create among the teachers such an amount of enthusiasm as was devoutly to be wished. Much of the shortcoming may be rightly attributed to our own inexperience; if so, then we promise that no effort for its remedy in the next shall be spared, in order that there shall be no reason for question or complaint in the future.

Board of Examiners.—My peculiar good fortune in the selection of Principals Dunbar, of Bloomfield, Sherman, of South Orange, and W. H. Winslow, of St. Marks, as Assistants in the Board of Examiners for teachers, I take pleasure in noting, and their work has proven so satisfactory in the past year that I have decided, without hesitancy, to re-appoint them. The examinations have been regularly held according to law, and I am happy in reporting that the teachers taking them, with very few exceptions, reached a high order of excellence. So far, those who received the award of certificates have fortunately received appointments, and are proving first-class teachers.

Manual Training and Kindergarten.—So far as manual training and kindergarten work has been introduced, it has been found to work splendidly, and with results so encouraging as to give full warrant for the utility of its introduction everywhere possible. In some, places the work consummated is worthy of the very highest commendation. Notably is this so in South Orange, Bloomfield, East Orange and Belleville. The skeptical in regard to the value of manual training as an educational factor have only to step into the machine shops of the schools at Montclair and witness the exhibitions of skill in progress, by the pupils, male and female, of that village, in their manipulations of wood, steel and iron, to be convinced of the value of this kind of training. So also a visit to the culinary department, where the young misses are being instructed in the theory and practice of housekeeping and in taking practical lessons in high-art cookery, in preparation for the delicate future task of tickling the palates of the “Lords of Creation,” would satisfy all skeptics of the high utility of this species of school education.