

an act was passed by the General Assembly of Maryland, establishing free schools in the several counties of the State. These schools continued in operation with partial success in many of the counties, until the present system of primary schools was established. At a more recent period, the public mind seemed to be awakened to the importance of establishing a more efficient system of public instruction, and in 1825, a law was passed establishing a system of primary schools throughout the State. This law, though it was rejected at the time by many of the counties, forms the basis of the system which we find at present in operation in the State.

After the lapse of a quarter of a century, since the present system of public schools was established in our midst, we might reasonably expect that the practical operation of the system was thoroughly developed; that the blessings which it was intended to bestow, had reached the utmost bounds of the State. But alas! is this the case? Has the light of knowledge increased with our prosperity? Has the march of the mind, kept pace with our gigantic schemes of speculations? with our works of internal improvement? No; such is not the case; but with the blush of shame upon our cheek, we are compelled to acknowledge the fact, that while we exult in our prosperity and glory in our wealth, while we are affording every facility for the developing the treasure of our mines, and of giving increased fertility to our soil, we are neglecting the education of our children! According to the census of 1840, there were in the State of Maryland at that time, eleven thousand eight hundred and seventeen white persons, over twenty years of age unable to read or write, while the census of 1850 discloses the discreditable fact, that at that period there were in the State, upwards of twenty thousand white persons over twenty years of age, who could neither read nor write. The treasury of the State is thrown open and thousands of dollars are expended for the support of private Academies; thousands and tens of thousands are annually paid out for the support of our public schools, and still thousands of our children are permitted to grow up in ignorance, to reach the period of manhood without having received the first rudiments of an English education. These facts speak to us in forcible accents. They tell us in language that cannot be denied, that with all our efforts in the cause of education, the march of ignorance is rapidly on the advance, that thousands of the sons and the fair daughters of Maryland are growing up to manhood and womanhood with minds incapable of appreciating the blessings that flow from the free and happy institutions under which they live; with minds incapable of teaching their children to place a proper estimate upon these time honored institutions; with minds incapable of enjoying the favors of fortune, or the blessings which nature has so abundantly cast around them; with minds which must forever re-