

1864

The uneducated and in many instances the grossly ignorant condition of a large portion of these masses gave to that influence a power it could never otherwise have acquired and the penalty of the neglect which tolerated that condition is now being fearfully paid. A reference to the last census returns in that section of the country discloses the startling fact that on an average about nineteen per centum or nearly one fifth of the whole white adult population of the States that embarked in this rebellion could not read or write (although our own proportion of such a class is not above half of this it is still far greater than it should be and compares unfavorably with that of other States who have taken this subject properly in hand.

We have it is true in the several counties of the State something in the shape of a public school system in scarcely any two of them however does the same system prevail. In some of them School Commissioners are elected by the people, in some they are appointed by the Orphan Court, in others by the County Commissioners and in others again these Courts or Commissioners perform such duties themselves. In some a stated annual amount is levied for school purposes in others a fixed per centum on the property of the County and in others again the tax payers themselves determine what ought to be levied. There is great reason to fear that beyond the receipt and distribution of the School Fund received from the State there is in many of the Counties but a very languid administration of this important interest. The very want of uniformity in the mode of that administration is not only in itself a most objectionable feature but betokens as it seems to me an erroneous principle at the base of the system in implying as it does that each County is alone interested in the educational condition of its own community.

Whilst the management of its subordinate details should be properly left to the local communities, the State herself should exercise such a general control over the subject, by some efficient and uniform system as will protect the public interest from the consequences of any neglect on the part of any subordinate member.

I will only venture to suggest an outline for such a system which however I feel warranted in recommending to you after consultation with those who have given the subject their studious attention.

A General Superintendent should be appointed to assume the entire supervision of the schools of the State and of the subject of public education as such a salary as will secure the services of a proper individual who besides the general supervision it will be his duty to exercise, may acquire such a knowledge of the wants and practical working of any system in operation and impart such information to the Legislature at each session as will enable that body to improve and perfect it. The want of such an officer is seriously felt in the various parts of the State and his appointment should be secured whether the entire performance