

REPORT

RELATIVE TO THE

MECHANICS' SOCIETY'S SCHOOL.

PRESENTED MARCH 3D, 1858.

THE committee to whom was referred the address of the President, after a free interchange of opinions on the general aspects of the several matters treated of therein, became convinced that the practicability of any plans they might think proper to propose in relation to most of those matters, must depend mainly, if not entirely, on the decision at which the Society might arrive in relation to the school; and consequently, that their deliberations in arranging the details of such plans, while that point remained unsettled, must necessarily be embarrassed by doubt and uncertainty, and their labors might ultimately prove to have been entirely useless. They therefore determined to commence the discharge of the duties imposed upon them by the investigation of that portion of the matters so referred, and now respectfully submit the following considerations in relation thereto:

The special report of the School Committee, presented to the Society in January last, exhibits the following facts: "The whole number of pupils reported on register, at the close of the year 1854, was 504;* the present number, 274; showing a loss of 230 within a period of less than four years."

* The annual report of the Finance Committee says 506, but the difference is immaterial.

The Annual General Reports of the Finance Committee state the whole number of pupils, in 1854, to have been 506; in 1855, 466; in 1856, 406; the last annual report of the School Committee states the number, in 1857, to have been 274.

From these figures it appears that there has been, during the last three years, a continued and rapidly increasing diminution in the number of pupils, viz., 38 in 1855, 60 in 1856, and 132 in 1857; in addition to which, there are not, so far as your committee are informed, any circumstances calculated to afford reasonable ground of hope that it may be otherwise in the future.

The reports referred to do not state the number of pupils who were children of members of the Society previous to 1856, when it was 136, about one-third of the whole number. In 1857 it was in about the same proportion.

The financial condition of the school, as presented in the special report before referred to, is as follows:

“The expense of conducting the school cannot, under the most rigid system of economy, be reduced in the ratio of the decline of pupils. Thus, the expenses of the year 1854 were \$12,042, while the present expenses are \$8,720, showing a reduction of 27 per cent., as compared with 44 per cent. in the number of pupils. It will be manifest, that if the school in its prosperity did not produce but little more than revenue sufficient to meet its expenses and losses in the collection of bills, then, at present, with the large diminution in the number of its pupils, not only no surplus revenue will be realized, but, financially speaking, a considerable loss. The committee have estimated the present revenues of the school, and the present expenses, based upon the number of pupils at this time under engagement in the two departments of the school. By this estimate it appears that the present revenue is \$8,500, and the present expenses, including losses in the collection of school bills, \$9,350, leaving a deficit of \$850. This estimate, though by no means flattering, is far from being so large as has generally been supposed by members of the Society.”

That report also states that the number of children gratuitously taught in the school is 18, and that their education, at the usual rates charged, would cost \$500. The number of children of members taught is 100, and the saving to their parents, at the usual rates in other schools, is \$600.

An abstract of the last annual report of the treasurer of the School Committee, furnishes the following particulars :

The actual expenditures of the school, as compared with its earnings, during the past year, have been as follows :

Expenditures.

Amount of teachers' salaries,.....	\$8,924 28
“ Sundry bills of expenses,.....	898 44
“ Interest on money from bank,.....	7 38
“ To supply committee,.....	225 00
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	\$10,055 10

Receipts.

Am't rec'd from tuition bills,.....	\$8,175 97
“ “ Board of Education,..	163 88
“ “ Book Committee,....	200 00
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	8,539 85

Deficit,..... \$1,515 25

The report represents the balance in the hands of the treasurer of the committee to be \$1,484 29, which arises as follows :

Balance in hand at commencement of year,.....	\$499 54
Receipts, as shown above,.....	8,375 97
Received from Board of Education,.....	163 88
“ “ Treasurer of Society,.....	2,500 00
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	\$11,539 39
Deduct expenditures,.....	10,055 10
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	\$1,484 29

The foregoing statements, it is believed, furnish all the facts and figures that have any practical bearing on the subject under consideration, as viewed in relation to its financial condition and prospects, and from them we find, that to educate 118 pupils, whose education ought to have cost \$1,100, we have, during the past year, paid in cash, \$1,515 25. In addition to this, we have furnished rooms which, at a moderate estimate, it is thought would let for \$2,500 per annum, together with all the necessary furniture, fixtures, &c., re-

quired for the use of the school, and employed thirteen of our most zealous and useful members, who have devoted no inconsiderable portion of their time to this object. This, it cannot be denied, is a very inadequate return for so much expense and labor, and it would evidently, in a pecuniary point of view, be far better to pay for their education in the best schools of the city. Your committee, therefore, though with great reluctance, have been constrained to adopt the conclusion that, as at present conducted, the school cannot be continued without much greater expense to the Society annually, than is at all commensurate to the advantages derived from it.

The special report before referred to adds, however, "that there are collateral advantages which may fairly be considered as offsets to the deficiency mentioned." These may be briefly stated as follows:

1. The gratuitous education of the children of poor or deceased members.
2. The saving of expense to those members of the Society whose children are taught in the school.
3. The inducements afforded by the school to persons to become members of the Society.
4. That to discontinue the school will diminish the vitality and destroy the unity of the Society.

In relation to the first of these advantages, the report furnishes the following facts: The present number of such pupils is stated as 18, and the cost of their education, at the average price charged in the school, would be \$500, and "should the school be sustained for these alone, it would be much greater."

In relation to the second, the report states the number of children of members who are taught in the school was 100, and the saving to their parents, estimated at the ordinary rates charged in other schools, would be \$600.

In relation to the third, it is found, on examining the records, that the number of persons who became members of the Society during the last four years, and the amounts paid by them, have been as follows:

In 1854,	there were	29	persons,	and they paid	\$870.
In 1855,	"	17	"	"	510.
In 1856,	"	16	"	"	480.
In 1857,	"	14	"	"	420.

From this statement, taken in connection with the number of members' children taught in those years, as learned from other sources, it will be found that the whole amount in any one year was not sufficient to pay either the cost of their education to the Society, or the saving to their parents for that one year alone.

With regard to the effect of the discontinuance of the school on the unity and vitality of the Society, is it not apparent that since the school is no longer able to maintain a vigorous existence itself, in competition with others around us, its continuance cannot reasonably be supposed of vital importance to the Society?

Your committee, therefore, are of the opinion, that these advantages are, under present circumstances, far outweighed by the disparity between the cost and the results; and, moreover, that they may be much more effectually secured to the members themselves in other schools, and to the Society, by other measures similar to those suggested in the address of the President.

Other measures for sustaining the school have been suggested, both in the special report and elsewhere, which are entitled to consideration, and which have not been lost sight of by the committee. It is thought by some, that if the lecture room below were no longer occupied as it has been for several years past, or if the Society should remove to a different situation, the school would regain its former position.

Either of these measures, it will be evident, can be but an experiment, and in the nature of such things must be attended with expenditure even greater than has hitherto been incurred, while the success anticipated is by no means certain to ensue. On the contrary, there is great reason to suppose, (if it is not entirely certain,) that our school is but sharing the fate of other similar institutions, and can no longer be sustained in its present form, in the face of such competition as is arrayed against it.

There remains but one other point which seems to your committee to claim their attention. It is that some of our brothers desire for their children, and especially for their daughters, a more private and select school than those supported by the public authorities. These feelings command respect and sympathy; yet, in the opinion of your committee,

it cannot reasonably be claimed that they should outweigh the considerations that have been presented, and the more especially so, since the persons most likely to desire it are also generally those who are best able to pay for it.

Every fact or circumstance of any weight in connection with the subject, it is believed, has now been presented to the Society; and in conclusion, your committee would remark, that though in reviewing the financial condition and prospects of the school, and comparing them with the advantages to be hoped for from its continuance, they have been led to the conclusion that the latter bear a very undue proportion to the former, they have the satisfaction to believe, that by substituting in its place a school conducted on a plan more in accordance with the circumstances of the present times, and calculated to furnish to young mechanics and others the means of continuing their education, imperfect as it generally is when they leave the ordinary school, in the knowledge which is peculiarly needed in their several occupations, as well as in the duties of life, the ample means of the Society may be far more beneficially employed, both as regards the character and usefulness of the Society itself and the welfare of the community around us.

It is scarcely necessary for the committee to assure their brethren that it is only after mature deliberation on the important matters submitted for their consideration, that they have been reluctantly drawn to these conclusions, or rather, that these conclusions have been forced upon them. They know, and fully participate in, the high regard in which the school has been held for nearly forty years, both by the members of the Society and by the public, who have partaken of its benefits; and, with a just pride, bear witness to the high position it has ever maintained among the institutions of education with which our city abounds. But the fact cannot be concealed, that it is rapidly receding from that position. And why? The reason is plain and obvious. When this school was instituted by the Society it was loudly called for by the wants of the city, and especially of the mechanics of the city. It gave to their children an education equal, if not superior, to that of any other English school then in existence, at a much lower price than had before been known; and the children of our poor and deceased members, who would have felt it a degradation to be sent to the inferior charity schools of that day, received a gratuitous education, not inferior to that of the best pay schools. The school was eminently suc-

cessful, precisely because just such a school was greatly needed. It has supplied a great want, both to the members of the Society and to the city. It has thus far been sustained, to the honor of the Society,—to whose reputation and prosperity it has contributed in no small degree,—though not without much pecuniary cost and much devoted labor by those of its members who have so freely given their time and valuable services to promote its success.

The circumstances by which the school was surrounded have changed. The public schools have greatly increased in number and improved in character. Many of them are now superior, or at least equal, to the best private schools. Parents no longer feel it derogatory to their children to participate in the advantages of those free institutions, which they are so largely taxed to maintain. The Mechanics' School is no more a necessity; it has fulfilled its mission—*its work is done*. For nearly forty years we have cherished and sustained it—an honor to the Society—a blessing to its members and their children, as well as a most important public benefit. But we are now constrained to say, that we prefer to abandon it at this time, rather than to prolong its feeble existence, at constantly increasing cost, until it shall die upon our hands, an object only of our pity and regret.

Let us survey our position, and observe the signs of the times. Let us ascertain whether the combined wisdom of the members of this Society, with the ample resources at their control, cannot discover how they may now occupy a new field of usefulness, similar to that formerly occupied by them, and again supply another great want of the mechanics of New-York.

The fruits of the Apprentices' Library, as those of the school, have been abundant and most beneficent. Let it be increased and enlarged, with sufficient accommodations for the apprentices, who nightly fill the rooms appropriated for their use to the extent of their capacity. Let us endeavor again to establish a school of a higher character, in close connection with the Library. Let us give full and free instruction to the apprentices and young mechanics of our city, in those branches of art and science by means of which their success and usefulness in life are to be attained. Thus, it is not to be doubted, we may again occupy similar ground to that we occupied in former years, conferring again important benefits on our fellow mechanics and fellow citizens; and placing the Society in the direct road to that high position in the public estimation, which both its means and its character entitle it to hold.

In view of what has thus been presented, and in order to obtain the expression of the Society, your committee would respectfully submit the following resolution:

Resolved, That the School Committee are hereby instructed to discontinue the school of the Society, from and after the end of the next August quarter; or, so to do at an earlier date, if in their judgment it is deemed expedient; in order that a school for the instruction of mechanics, apprentices and others, in the arts and sciences, may be established in its stead.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

New-York, March 3d, 1858.

JAMES VAN NORDEN, *Chairman.*

L. W. STEVENS,

JOHN WIGHT,

WILSON SMALL,

GEORGE H. FRANKLIN,

MATTHIAS BLOODGOOD,

JOHN T. CONOVER,

WILLIAM MILES,

WILLIAM SCOTT,

GEORGE F. NESBITT,

GEORGE W. FARNHAM.

WM. VAN NORDEN, *Secretary.*

NOTICE.

An adjourned meeting of the Society will be held at MECHANICS' HALL, No. 472 Broadway, on *Wednesday evening, March 17th, 1858*, at one hour after sunset, for the purpose of considering the foregoing report and resolution.

WM. VAN NORDEN, *Secretary.*