

Marvelous Growth of Cuban Schools

HAVANA, June 18.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—For months all Cuba has been in a ferment over the coming excursion of teachers to the United States, and as the date of its departure approaches excitement concerning it is rapidly nearing fever heat. This is not surprising since the excursionists are to number 1,450, are to be selected from the schools of the entire island and their whole expenses are to be paid by the United States government and the authorities of Harvard university and their friends.

This remarkable enterprise was planned and all its details blocked out by Alexis Everett Frye, superintendent of the Cuban schools. The idea of such an expedition took possession of him soon after he assumed charge of the island's educational system. In carrying it out he has been well supported by the entire faculty of Harvard university and particularly by President Eliot. General Wood has also endorsed and helped the scheme materially and Secretary of War Root has shown his approval in the most practical manner by designating the five largest transports in the service to take the teachers from Havana to the states.

Cuba's School System.

At the close of the Spanish-American war there were virtually no children in school at all, not even in Havana and the larger cities. Most of the parochial schools, even, were disbanded, and in a population of about 1,500,000 the education of the children was quite forgotten.

In November, 1899, after almost a year of American occupation, the reports showed a nominal school enrollment of only about 40,000 pupils. To the Cuban secretary of justice and public instruction in General Brooke's cabinet had been entrusted the work of drawing up a school law, but it had been drafted along the lines of the Spanish regime, and its schedule was an impossible one, presenting such manifest absurdities as the teaching of higher mathematics to children of 10.

Down to this time the enforcement of law and order and various strictly sanitary and military problems had occupied the energies of the American officials in Havana, but it was now evident that the serious matter of founding a system of public schools could no longer be delayed. It was then that Mr. Frye came to Cuba at the suggestion of the secretary of war, and on the invitation of General Brooke, whose personal friend he was.

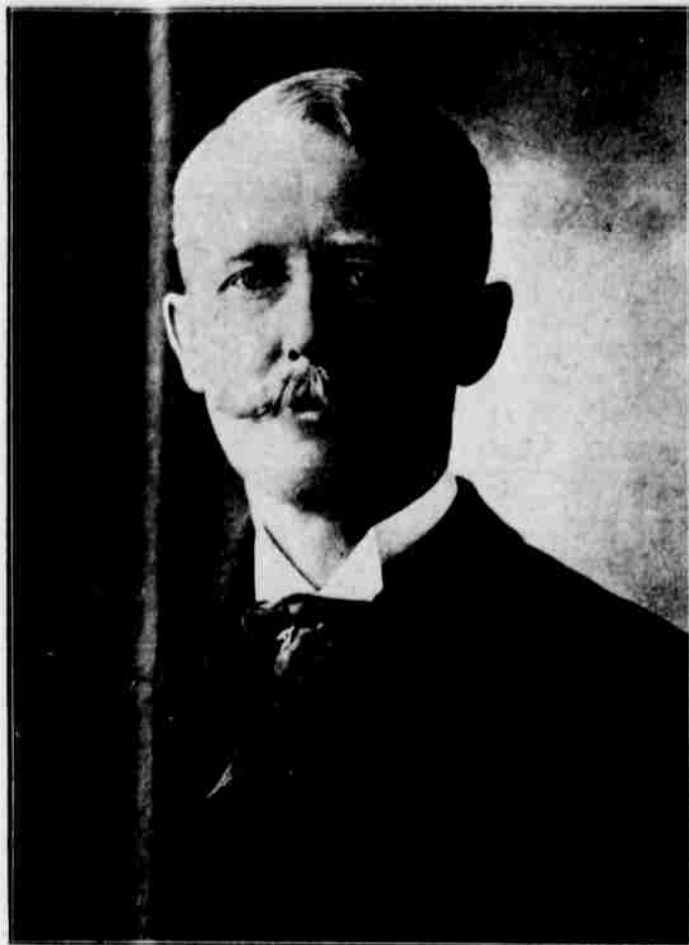
Mr. Frye's Work.

Superintendent Frye investigated conditions thoroughly and made an unofficial report to General Brooke. It was plain that nothing could be done without a new and practical school law. One hot evening Mr. Frye went home and worked till morning by the light of the candles. The next day he took a workable law to General Brooke. It was promptly signed by the Cuban secretary of justice and public instruction, and at last the foundation was laid. From that hour to this no changes have been made in the law, either by General Brooke or General Wood, and its success is assured.

The field was now clear for Mr. Frye's work and he set about it with characteristic energy. He had previously volunteered to serve five years in the Philippines without pay, and he offered his services here on the same terms. A salary of \$5,000 was offered, but declined. He is now receiving the same salary as his first assistant, \$2,500, but he has never kept for his own use any portion of this, devoting it each month to relief work among the more needy schools.

Cuban Opposition.

At the beginning Mr. Frye met with vio-



ALEXIS EVERETT FRYE—FIRST SUPERINTENDENT OF CUBAN SCHOOLS.

lent opposition on the part of the Cubans. They fancied that his sole object in establishing a public school system, avowedly based on that of the United States, was unduly to "Americanize" the Cubans and further annexation. This report ran like wildfire all over the island; the newspapers broke out in virulent and scathing editorials and not a day passed that General Wood was not requested to discharge this purveyor of pernicious education. Washington was besieged with protests and letters and petitions against the new system poured in from all sources for weeks. During that period Mr. Frye was the most cordially hated American on the island.

Then the bubble of opposition collapsed and the reaction set in. Today the flood tide of native enthusiasm over Mr. Frye and his wonderful work is at its height, the present appreciation of him being commensurate with the abuse which was heaped on his head at first. The reversion of popular feeling was natural enough. Mr. Frye simply went steadily ahead, receiving with smiling cheerfulness all who came into his office to denounce him and unflinchingly expressing his faith in the Cuban people when they should understand his real motives. Above all, he never turned aside to notice the torrent of vituperation that filled the columns of the papers all over the island. Today the active work of carrying on and perfecting the new school system is largely in the Cubans' own hands.

There are now 3,079 schools on the island, with about 140,000 school children enrolled; over half a million dollars' worth of the most modern school furniture has been purchased and sent to the different municipalities; the pupils of the island are furnished with books and all necessary school supplies free of charge; night schools for adults are about

to be established and a plan has been formulated for a teachers' normal school on the island during the summer months for the benefit of those who cannot join the excursion to the United States.

To most American teachers the salaries paid to the teachers of Cuba will probably seem high, but it should be remembered that living is much more expensive in Cuban than American cities, a fact which Americans in Havana learned by sad experience last winter. Also that formerly the Cuban teacher had his house free of rent, a custom that has been done away with under the new regime. It was in addition thought desirable to fix good salaries in order that the best possible material might be secured. At present about three-fifths of the more than 3,000 teachers are women and two-fifths are men, no discrimination being made between the sexes in the matter of pay when similar services are performed.

The lowest salary paid to any teacher in Havana is \$900, and this is 25 per cent more than the average of the highest salaries paid in fifteen of the largest cities of the United States. Seven other cities in Cuba receive exactly this average of highest salaries in these cities of our country, while the lowest salary paid to any regular teacher in the Cuban public schools is \$600.

It must not be supposed, however, that many well trained, highly qualified teachers are now in the work. The exigencies of the situation demand that the school boards should simply select the best and most available men and women and employ them. There is not a single teacher now in the Cuban schools who has passed an examination, but the school law provides that after September next all teachers must be examined. This will be after the great excursion has returned from the United States. The supply of books, materials, etc., free of charge to pupils is probably the most remarkable in the world. It was made necessary by the empty treasuries and the impossibility of raising money sufficient for the purpose by any system of internal revenue until the country could recover somewhat from the devastating effects of the war. The law provided for compulsory attendance at school. Now, if the children went to school they must have books, but the parents had no money with which to buy books and frequently there were no parents, there being upward of 50,000 orphans on the island today, according to the official returns. The time will probably come when such lavish furnishing of supplies will no longer be necessary, but that will not be for a year at least.

Representatives of both Cuban and American firms fairly swarmed about Mr. Frye as soon as it was known that the furniture was to be bought, for the value of equipments needed mounted up to more than \$550,000, the order being the largest of its sort ever placed. This provided for over 100,000 pupils, and it was thought at the time that it would do for the whole of the present school year, but the increase

of enrollment has been so great that at this writing several thousand children are unprovided for in any way, and the prospects are that new awards must be made by the opening of the next term.

A special summer course with reference to the needs of the Cuban teachers has been arranged at Harvard and instructors conversant with both languages will impart the instruction. At the same time it is expressly understood that on their return the excursionist teachers are to impart as much of the instruction received as they can to those who remain at home, and also to describe the trip in general in as great detail as possible. Thus the ideas gained will be distributed over the entire island.

It will be seen that the Cuban teachers are to receive a great object lesson. They are to be introduced in American homes and entertained, and besides the instruction of the regular six weeks' course they are to see our museums, laboratories, parks, great public buildings and public works; they are to have the opportunity of studying our cities and our manners and customs in general. The plan includes outing and social features as well as study and a trip to Washington, Chicago, Niagara Falls and New York. GEORGE RENO.

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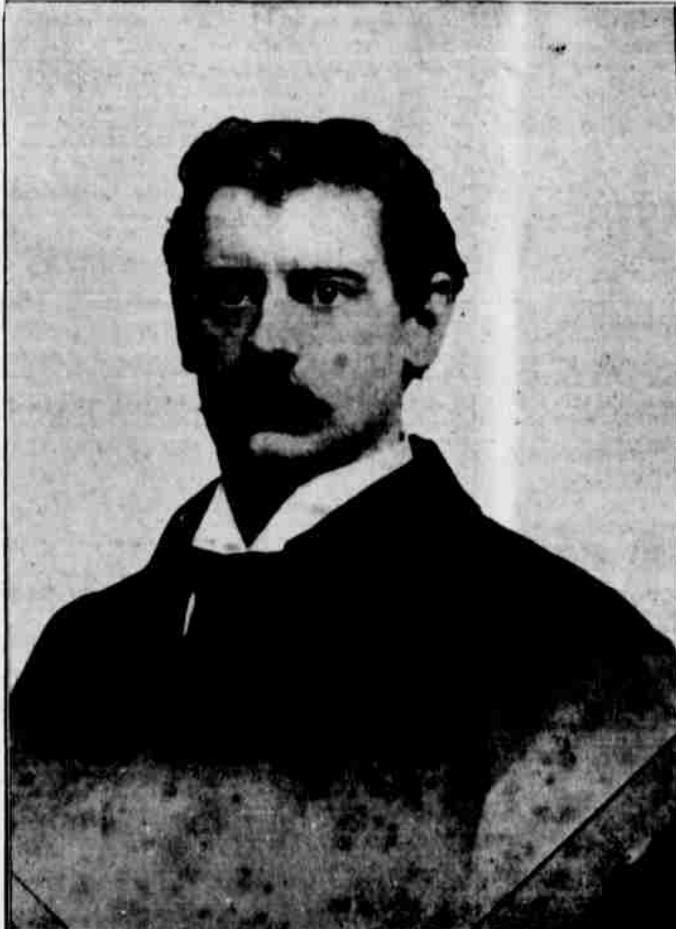
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