

## THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

Some Pertinent Remarks That May Be Thought Impertinent.

THE present controversy over school affairs will, in the end, prove beneficial. Heretofore the controversy has been confined to the board of education, a very inconsiderate and impractical body of women and men, however much may be said in its defense. It is time the public should take a lively interest in the management of the public schools. So-called non-partisan boards of education have proved flat failures, regardless of the excellent opportunity offered to them by a confiding public, and we now join the vast number of respectable women and men who ask for results rather than mere sentiment, for the yearly expenditure of \$150,000 to support the public schools of Lincoln.

It is well known, inside and outside of this so-called non-partisan board of education, that there is a Lewis faction, and again there is feigned a Gregory faction, which, with armor and mail, struggles to a finish at times, for a *non-apparent* principle. Whether this is feigned or not, there are instances enough on record to show that Mr. Lewis and Mr. Gregory can readily harmonize when occasion requires it, and that their concerted, as well as their individual action, has not usually been for the best interests of either the public schools or the tax payers.

Mr. Lewis has, from the first, been opposed to lady principals of buildings, and with his cordial support the board succeeded in importing two college bred men, ignorant of the principles of pedagogy and without experience in the management of schools, to important principalships.

In the first instance, the college bred man proved an absolute failure, and his general inefficiency evidently promoted him to an equally important position in the high school.

Good citizens pronounce the second principal as much of a failure as his predecessor, and all agree that Mr. Lewis' mingled prejudice and favoritism in the selection of teachers, as well as of principals, shows an equally striking inefficiency on his part as a member of the board of education.

Mr. Lewis now appears in a new role altogether. "Our principals of buildings," he says, "should be men." But in his harangue before the democratic convention, he pleads for women as members of the board of education. No women for principals of buildings, but women as members of the school board is, to say the least, an inconsistent consistency that Mr. Lewis may explain to his little coterie of admirers; but the people reserve the right to judge him according to his conduct.

The mistakes of the present board of education are innumerable and inexcusable. When three non-partisan members, Lewis, Gregory, and Bowers, were, by courtesy of over-nice republicans and the anything-to-get-office-fusionists, elected, they promised untold reforms in the entire school system of Lincoln. The people have confidently waited for two years, and now appreciate that a more reckless expenditure of money and time has resulted from the present management than from any preceding board of education. With the three members already referred to, the women members have with almost unbroken regularity united and supported their schemes, whether good or bad, economical or extravagant.

First, in order to compromise, if possible, preceding boards of education, an accountant was secured—a member of the Congregational church—without any stipulation as to price, to resurrect and investigate the books and accounts of the board. The accounts, vouchers, contracts, and proceedings of the dead past for many generations were exhumed, witnesses were summoned, the "Book of the Dead" was read, everything animate and inanimate was called forth to implicate and indict former boards of education with criminal mismanagement. What was the result? No one as yet knows of any appearance of crookedness being found anywhere, but the public is well aware that it cost a cool \$1000, and that when the bill was presented to the board the question was asked "What was the price agreed upon?" No one knew, and the bill was quietly paid.

This expenditure would have benefitted the board somewhat if a competent bookkeeper had been placed in charge of the books, and the method suggested by the accountant continued, but a place had to be provided for Mr. Bowers, whose marked incompetency has reduced the present board's expensive system of bookkeeping to a more conspicuous failure than before.

Secondly, as another evidence of the present board's incompetency

to manage its business affairs, the effort to build a new high school deserves attention. Two years ago the present non-partisan board, with the help of the women, called a special election to vote bonds for a new high school. The matter was handled in a most unbusiness-like manner. The election was called at an unfortunate time, poorly advertised, with comparatively little effort to get the people interested, and resulted in defeat with an almost insignificantly small vote. This alone cost the city many hundreds of dollars.

The recent effort for the same purpose is fresh in our minds. The bonds were carried, but their issue enjoined by some taxpayer who hadn't sufficient confidence in the board to entrust it with so large an undertaking. The matter could easily have been settled at one time had the board assumed the court cost, amounting to \$18.75, but refused to do so. At this time, the attorneys' fees have reached \$250, and will be \$250 more for services in the supreme court, while the court costs alone will be from \$300 to \$500.

Such imbecile management of the most ordinary public affairs is inexcusable on the part of men supposed to be fairly rational in their methods of conducting business affairs.

Third, the employment of an architect by the board, and especially the partial and peculiarly irrational method of securing plans and specifications for the new high school building, should receive the unqualified disapproval of all taxpayers desiring to get the full worth of their money, and the emphatic condemnation of the teachers, school patrons and public spirited citizens, who know what such a building must be to meet the needs of the city of Lincoln at this time, saying nothing of the future.

The Lewis element of the board, supported by the women, opposed even a limited competition in receiving plans for a new high school building, and selected a comparatively inexperienced architect to direct the building of the most important and most expensive school building of the city. Considering the elements of light, heat and ventilation only of school buildings as yet, we may safely say that the foremost architects of the country are none too safe as counselors and directors in so important an undertaking as the erection of a high school building. But in the face of all experience, with full knowledge of the mistakes of boards of education in this and other cities, the Lewis element of our board approves a plan which receives the unqualified condemnation of two architects whose school buildings are the pride of the largest cities in the west.

Will the people submit longer to this arbitrary and reckless conduct on the part of an irresponsible majority on the board of education?

The Lewis element, supported by the women, elected Superintendent Stroug for three years against the wishes of the newly elected members, increased his salary \$500 a year, increased the salary of the high school principal \$300 a year, very justly increased the salaries of deserving teachers, when the wheel of inspiration changed its direction, and the salaries of deserving janitors were cut to please the esthetic taste of the Lewis element.

Furthermore, we do not believe that the universities of eastern states furnish better equipped high school teachers than are graduated from our own state university. Yet the Lewis element of the present board has almost or quite ignored the applications of deserving young men and women who have modestly given way to the importation of teachers who are possibly, indeed probably, not so well qualified as themselves.

Have Mr. Lewis and the women any personal reasons for electing a half a dozen young men, college graduates, wholly inexperienced teachers, from New England, to important positions in the Lincoln public schools? Has the Lewis faction a single reasonable excuse for its imbecile policy for the last two years?

Can the intelligent or indifferent voter cast his ballot for the present lady candidates whose election Mr. Lewis is urging, and whose co-operation Mr. Lewis will secure if elected, under existing circumstances? Will the intelligent, loyal, home-loving woman of Lincoln perpetuate the mismanagement of school affairs a day longer than April 3rd, 1894? \* \* \*

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