

FAREWELL ADDRESS

OF .

WILLIAM WOOD, LL.D.,

TO THE

BOARD OF EDUCATION

OF THE

CITY OF NEW YORK,

DECEMBER 30, 1879.

---

New York :

WYNKOOP & HALLENBECK, PRINTERS, NO. 121 FULTON STREET.

---

1880.

## IN BOARD OF EDUCATION,

DECEMBER 30th, 1879.

---

Commissioner DONNELLY offered the following :

*Resolved*, That, in view of the early retirement of Wm. Wood, LL.D., from the Board, and from the office of its President, which he has filled for four years continuously, this Board do place upon record its estimation of his services.

*Resolved*, That his unwearied devotion to the duties of his office of President, in all their breadth and detail, has earned the confidence and commanded the respect of this Board.

*Resolved*, That in bringing into the interests of the schools his extensive knowledge of educational subjects, and his scholarly tastes, united to an active energy, so much the more admirable in view of his advanced years, and to a ripeness and justness of judgment, in part their consequence, he has contributed largely to the successful results of the schools, and to the public confidence they so justly enjoy.

*Resolved*, That the Normal College of the City of New York is especially indebted to him for his unwavering support and the constant watchfulness he has exercised in its behalf, and that the important influence this institution is exerting and

is likely to exert on the educational system of the city, is largely owing to his interest and efforts.

*Resolved*, That this Board parts regretfully with its President.

The ACTING CLERK put the question whether the Board would adopt the resolutions offered by Commissioner DONNELLY, and it was decided in the affirmative.

## ADDRESS.

---

President WOOD addressed the Board as follows :

GENTLEMEN—At this particular juncture the remarkable and appreciative kindness of the handsome, but too flattering resolutions, in reference to my services, which have just been adopted by the Board, is especially grateful to me ; and what adds to my pleasure is that they should have been offered by a friend holding different religious views from myself, thus proving that, however various the creeds of the members of this Board, we can all meet, and act harmoniously on the broad ground of the effective promotion of Common School education.

“Parthians and Medes and Elamites,” and all the dwellers in our Mesopotamian City, can through our Common Schools receive a thorough and unsectarian education, while at the same time we can boast, which even London itself cannot do with its State Church, its Bishops and its Deans and its Prebendaries—that every school day morning at 9 o’clock, more than 100,000 children are having the Bible read to them, and the small seed thus sown may under the fostering care of the great Husbandman bring forth everlasting fruit.

Gentlemen, during 1879, including the present we have held 29 public meetings, and there have been 10 public meetings of



the Board of Trustees of the College of the City of New York; 39 public meetings in all, over all of which I have presided.

I have also, *ex officio*, attended 184 Committee meetings of this Board, and 13 of the Executive Committee of the College of the City of New York, or 197 Committee meetings in all. The total Committee meetings of this Board in 1879 have been 263, involving an amount of work, regarding which the outside public have very little idea. The minutes of our public meetings alone, up to and inclusive of that of 23d inst., fill 1,080 pages, and will exceed 1,100 pages when the minutes of this meeting are recorded.

The average attendance at our Common Schools for the month ending 30th November, 1879, was 115,548 scholars, exceeding that of the month of November, 1878, by 3,539, and in addition to this increase, I regret to say, that in November, 1879, no less than 1,051 pupils were refused admittance for want of room.

In October, 1869, the year in which I first became School Commissioner, the attendance in our Common Schools was 86,000; in November last, 115,548; therefore, in round numbers, there is an increase of 30,000 pupils in 10 years, which is at the rate of 3,000 per annum. Now during 1879 the additional school accommodation provided consists of 28 rooms, capable of containing 1,400 pupils, or less than one-half of the annual increment of scholars. It is no fault of this Board that such a state of things exists. We are from two to three years behind in school accommodations for the prospective annual increase of scholars. We have not failed to cry mightily every year to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment for more money to acquire sites and to build schools. To go no further back than the Centennial year:

In 1876 we got for 1877, \$335,352 less than we asked for;  
 In 1877 we got for 1878, 549,800 less than we asked for;  
 In 1878 we got for 1879, 184,000 less than we asked for; and  
 In 1879 we get for 1880, 58,200 less than we asked for;

and already sites and building materials are at least from 20 to 30 per cent. higher than they were during the previous three years of depressed business and low prices.

The *Normal College* Session, which began 1st September, 1879, gives so far the following results:

The largest number on register was on Friday, 5th Sept... 1,698.  
 The largest number in attendance on Wednesday, 24th Sept. 1,463.  
 The registered number on Tuesday, 16th Dec., was..... 1,437.  
 And the number in attendance same day..... 1,382.

In the Training Department of the Normal College the largest number on register in September was..... 1,056.  
 And the largest number in attendance in September was... 970.  
 On 18th December the registered number of pupils was... 1,000.  
 And the number in attendance..... 883.

I leave the Normal College and Training Department in the most satisfactory and prosperous condition, and I am confident that the addition of a Fourth Year to the Normal College Course will most materially add to the efficiency of the future Teachers of our Common Schools, and so to the proficiency of their scholars.

In June, 1881, a class of the 1st Grammar grade will graduate from the Training Department, and will be qualified for entrance to the Normal College, which will afford practical proof of the



truth of what I advocated in my valedictory address to this Board, of 20th December, 1876, that all the 14 grades of the Primary and Grammar Courses can be taught under the supervision of one Superintendent or Principal, and thus a large amount, at present paid for supervision, can be saved to the City.

It appears to me that it would be only fair to the graduates of the Normal College, and only fair to the pupils of our Common Schools, that all female candidates for teachers' licenses should pass through the same ordeal of examination as the Normal College graduates.

In 1879, there have been 33 young women who *failed to graduate at the Normal College*, and who have applied to the City Superintendent for licenses to teach. Of these thirty-three, twenty-one have managed to squeeze through, and have received licenses, although they failed to pass the Normal College examination. This is *most unfair* and discouraging to the hard-working and efficient graduates of that institution, and if State legislation cannot be had to rectify the existing condition of matters, then certainly our by-laws should be so modified as to make all female candidates for teachers' licenses pass through exactly the same examination as the Normal College graduates.

Besides Normal College students, 22 female teachers have been licensed by the City Superintendent. On 26th June last, 288 young ladies graduated at the Normal College, and in September the number was made up to 300. These have received, or will receive licenses to teach, when they are 18 years of age, as required by the by-laws. Outside of the Normal College graduates, as I have stated, 43 female candidates have received licenses

to teach from the City Superintendent, or about  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the whole number licensed were *not Normal College graduates*. As the licensing of the graduates is a mere form, their diplomas virtually securing their licenses, why should not the licensing of all female teachers be transferred by new legislation to the Faculty of the Normal College? When we had neither of the Colleges, the City Superintendent was perhaps the proper official to license teachers; but I think that the power would now be far more appropriately lodged with the Faculty of the Normal College for female candidates, and with the Faculty of the College of the City of New York for male candidates.

The *Evening High School*, which affords such admirable opportunities for young men engaged in business pursuits to perfect their education, continues, as heretofore, in a state of thorough efficiency. It reopened on Monday, 6th October, 1879, with a registered number of 1,776 scholars and with an actual attendance of 1,510.

The average attendance during October, was . . . . .	1,590
“ “ “ November . . . . .	1,330
“ “ 1st till 19th December . . . . .	1,164
The average from 6th October till 19th December . . . . .	1,382
Same period 1878 . . . . .	1,377

In the *Department of Truancy*, the total number of warrants issued in 1879 for the arrest of truants was 67; of these 17 have been issued since 1st September. All arrested previous to that date I discharged, on or prior to 29th August, 1879, and yesterday I discharged the last of those arrested since 1st September, so as to leave my successor a clear stage, without remanents.



To make the Truancy law effective, it requires several amendments, which have suggested themselves to me during the four years in which its administration has been in my hands.

It is a great evil to have to take truants to be committed to a place of detention before a Police magistrate, thus bringing them in contact with the criminal classes. The President of this Board, or in his absence, the Chairman of the Committee on By-Laws, ought to be made magistrates, with the power to commit truants, if such special power can be granted by the Legislature.

Then the New York Juvenile Asylum ought to be obliged by law to take our truants, subject to our control as to the time of their discharge. At present the Catholic Protectory is the only institution which receives our truants whether Catholic or Protestant, subject to the order of this Board as to their release.

The Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents on Randall's Island, has no room for our truants in open dormitories, and I am utterly opposed to having them locked up nightly like felons in cells.

Of course a Reformatory Institution of our own, either on Randall's or Ward's Islands, or on board a ship moored in the Bay, would be better than any of the existing institutions; but if the necessary funds cannot be provided by the City, then let us at least obtain power from the Legislature, to commit Protestant Truants to the Juvenile Asylum, upon our own conditions. It is, I think, an admirably managed Institution.

The *Nautical School*, during 1879, up to the 19th December, has had an average attendance of 122 scholars, while the total number taught during 1879 was 175; and although the Board very well knows, that I am opposed to having the cost of the

Nautical School defrayed from the funds properly belonging to our Common Schools, yet I cannot refrain in this my last address to this Board, from expressing my admiration of the manner in which the affairs of the Nautical School have been administered ever since its inception, by Commissioner David Wetmore, Chairman of the Committee on Nautical School, and his various coadjutors on that Committee, and we have been exceedingly fortunate in obtaining the services of Commander Henry Erben, U. S. N., as Superintendent in place of his able predecessor, Commander R. L. Phythian, U. S. N.

Gentlemen, during 1879, much more than ordinary attention has been bestowed on their respective departments by the Committees on Buildings, and on Warming and Ventilation, and very great good will inevitably result from the painstaking and intelligent investigations of the respective Chairmen of these important Committees, Messrs. Watson and Donnelly.

Before my departure, I think I ought to express my opinion regarding the working of the present educational system, in reference to the highly important office of Trustee of our Common Schools. The creature ought not to be more powerful than the creator. The Trustees' term of service should not be 5 years, while ours is only 3. We all know the tendency which exists in most of the Wards, for the Trustees to form themselves into rings of 3 and 2. The larger ring has practically the entire power, and does all the work of appointing the Teachers. Why, then, should not the number of Trustees in each Ward be reduced to 3, and the term of office to 2 years? Two Trustees going out of office one year, and one Trustee the next year, and



so on, alternately. This would put it in the power of this Board effectually to break up the rings I refer to.

The Board of Education should also by fresh legislation obtain the power of confirming or rejecting all nominations or transfers of teachers in the Day Schools, as they now have in the Evening Schools, and in case the Trustees do not, within 10 days from the occurrence of a vacancy, nominate a suitable person to fill it, then the appointment ought to vest in this Board.

Gentlemen, on the whole, our work in 1879 has flowed on more equably and quietly than in any of the three previous years; the only causes of excitement being the extraordinary and unexpected Kiddle episode, brought first formally to the notice of the Board at its meeting on 21st May, by the tendered resignation of City Superintendent Kiddle, to take effect on 1st September, or as soon thereafter as his successor was appointed. That successor was appointed on the 1st October, 1879, in the person of John Jasper, Jr., Esq., previously one of the Assistant Superintendents; and judging from his former record and from the reports he has made to the Board since his election, I augur a brilliant future for him in the Department over which he presides; and we have also been most fortunate in securing on 12th November the services of James Godwin, Esq., as Assistant Superintendent, to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Jasper's resignation.

I have attended all the meetings except one, of the City Superintendent and his Assistants, held on the last Saturday of every month (excepting July and August), under the by-law of 27th November, 1878, and I am of opinion that these meetings are calculated to do great good to our system of Common School instruction, by affording opportunities for the

City Superintendent and his Assistants, together with the President of the Board, to discuss all the subjects constantly arising in reference to the efficient administration of the by-laws of this Board throughout our city schools.

The other exciting episode of the year, occurred on 19th November, when his Honor the Mayor appointed five *new* Commissioners of Common Schools, in place of five old ones whose terms of office expire to-morrow. Such a sweeping change has been hitherto quite unprecedented.

For myself, I am by no means disposed to whine over my severance from the duties which I have loved so well, knowing as I do, that had my reappointment rested with my colleagues in this Board, who best know my services to the cause of common school education, and to the higher education of women, I should have been reappointed by a large majority, and probably re-elected President in 1880, in spite of any protests I might have made to the contrary.

Gentlemen, I retire from the Board of Education with a proud consciousness of having done my duty to the taxpayers of the City of New York, and to their children in the Common Schools, during the long period in which I have held office as School Commissioner.

My first commission bears the date of 4th May, 1869. My second, as "Commissioner of the Department of Public Instruction," is dated 22d April, 1871. These two commissions were both issued to me by Mayor A. Oakey Hall. My third commission is dated 28th April, 1875, when I was appointed to succeed my successor of 1873, the late James W. Farr, Esq.; and my fourth and last appointment was made on 15th November, 1876.



These two last commissions were issued by our present associate Commissioner, Mayor Wickham. During these various terms I have been absent only once in March, 1871, and twice in December, 1876, the latter from severe illness.

I feel thankful to God that I have been permitted to devote the eighth part of a long life to the educational interests of our great city; but although I regard the office of President of the Board of Education of the City of New York as the most important office in the municipality, I descend from it into the calm sequestered vale of private life with perfect equanimity, believing with Robert Burns that

“The rank is but the guinea’s stamp,  
The man’s the gowd for a’ that.”

Although to-morrow the cause of common school education will be deprived of the services of my experienced colleagues, as well as of my own, I have no fear that our absence will do any permanent injury to the system of common school education; *that* is a perennial fountain, fertilizing and beautifying the waste places of our city, and causing our moral deserts to “rejoice and blossom as the rose.” Like Tennyson’s Brook—

“Men may come and men may go,  
But it flows on forever.”

Of course, in parting from you all I shall deeply feel the want of the pleasant excitement of our fortnightly public meetings, and even more the less formal but most interesting discussions in our numerous Committees, but I shall cheer myself with the hope that when I am absent—

“Some kind voice may murmur,  
I wish he were here.”

And, gentlemen, I am not without some slight hope, that in two years hence I may be a Commissioner designate of Common Schools, and if I feel then as well and fit to work as I do now, I shall certainly accept my nomination.

I well know how presumptuous it is for a man who has entered upon his seventy-second year, to look forward so far, but I can say with old Adam in “As you like it”—

“Though I look old, yet am I strong and lusty,  
For in my youth I never did apply  
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,  
Nor did not with unbashful forehead, woo  
The means of weakness and debility;  
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,  
Frosty but kindly.”

But if the idea of a return to this Board be but a vain and fond delusion; if the place which has known me so long shall henceforth know me no more forever; if this be indeed the final severance from the work which I esteem as the most important of my life, then, gentlemen, even then,

“Let fate do her worst, there are relics of joy,  
Bright dreams of the past, which she cannot destroy;  
Which come in the night time of sorrow and care,  
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.  
Long, long be my heart with such memories filled,  
Like the vase in which roses have once been distilled;  
You may break, you may shatter the vase, if you will,  
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.”

Gentlemen, farewell! and may God bless the Board of 1880, in all its wise efforts to promote popular education.