

THE ADVISABILITY OF A CHANGE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHOOL LAW, BY THE APPOINTMENT OF A CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION AND A COUNCIL OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, IN LIEU OF A MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

JOHN E. BRYANT, M.A.

If any one thinks that our educational affairs can be managed by a system free from objection, I venture to submit that he has not fully considered the question. That the present method of administration is very faulty, I have not the slightest doubt; that it has some advantages which any substitute for it would lack, I do no doubt either; but the plan of administration which I shall propose for your consideration before I finish this paper—although not a perfect solution of the educational problem, will, I hope, be admitted by you to be so much less objectionable as to warrant its adoption, in principle at least, if not in all its details.

From the autumn of 1844 to the beginning of 1876, at the head of the school system of the Province was an executive officer styled the "Chief Superintendent of Education." Every child and every grown-up person in Ontario knows who this able and energetic, wise and patriotic man was, and if within the breast of every one of us there does not glow a feeling of gratitude for what this man did for us—for what he made possible for us to obtain and do—then are we lacking in that generous affection which a people should always cherish towards its noblest and its best. It is not too much to say that Dr. Ryerson founded the system which he administered, that he planted the tree which he afterwards watched and tended till all might enjoy its blossoming and partake of its fruit.

This system was essentially the work of one man's hand; and necessarily so. The country was new, its resources undeveloped, the people engrossed in constructing out of its material wealth homes for themselves and children. Just as the fabric of its political constitution was designed by one discerning mind, though reared, it is true, by others, so its educational system was planned and built, added to and strengthened, adapted to the growing and changing needs of the country, and made more efficient, by the skill and wisdom of him who for so many years was spared to do this honourable and beneficent work. Difficulties and opposition of every sort, arising from enmity, jealousy, prejudice, sectarianism, and party rancour, as well as just criticism, were in his way, almost at every step, and in every hour of his course, but they were always encountered with courage, and were generally overcome. There was one difficulty of his position, however, which he thought to be insuperable, and which indeed was so, as long as the constitution of the system remained as it was, viz., his inability to meet his opponents on equal terms, and so defend himself and his work when criticized or attacked. To the criticism of the press, whether open or anonymous, he was indifferent, as his was the pen of a ready writer and one wielded with a controversialist's skill.