

# JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

## OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SEVERAL years have now elapsed since the passing of the Act which forms the basis upon which the existing Common School system of Nova Scotia is founded. Numerous emendations upon that system have since been made; but its essential elements remain the same, or pretty nearly so. There were those who objected to the system as originally founded. We believe there are some persons who, probably more from personal than public grounds, are still dissatisfied with the Law and Regulations relative to our Common Schools. This is something which it was only reasonable to expect. There never yet was a law, Divine or human, which did not cause dissatisfaction in some quarter. But, to do justice to many of the critics of our existing Common School system, we must admit—nay, we feel rather inclined to boast that, regarding that system as we now find it, we have no idea of advocating the principle of finality. It is progressive. We hope to see it continually improving—continuously verging towards perfection.

Amongst those who really evince a sincere interest in the matter we frequently hear suggestions made relative to the improvement of our Public Schools—suggestions which are oftentimes of real value. We are always glad to receive valuable and opportune suggestions in the direction of improvement; yet we must remind those who make them that it is much easier to make suggestions than to carry them into practical operation. One special remark we must make upon this point. These suggestions referred to, however valuable, most frequently reach us at times when there are not opportunities for making them early practicable. We have observed this to be especially the case immediately before the annual, or October, meeting. Then much is said, and many things proposed, which, owing to the great accumulation of business upon the Education Department, and the numerous matters passing upon the attention of the promoters of Education generally, at that period, eventuate in no practical result. Whilst freely courting enquiry into our Common School system, and inviting valuable suggestions for its improvement, we beg leave to remind the reader that the latter, to be duly appreciated, must be made at a timely season.

In a recent visit made to some of our Western Districts, with a view to a better understanding of our Educational necessities, we were impressed with the importance of having the great mass of the people themselves take a more enlarged view of the whole system of Free Public Schools. This was painfully apparent in many sections from the inefficient provision made in the way of School-houses. It is to be feared that, in many instances, this want is owing to the fact that the people themselves do not realize the importance of the duties incumbent upon them in this respect; for we find that in many of the central and wealthy districts of the Western section of the Province, the School-houses are wretchedly inefficient, and such as would scarcely pass inspection twenty years ago, when the educational interest of the country might almost be said to be in a state of somnolency. This is a great error, and one most damaging to the welfare of the community wherein it prevails. We have no hesitation in saying that it is utterly impossible for a teacher of the highest order of talent and the best of attainments to perform his duties in a way that ought to be satisfactory to himself and to his employers, in a cramped, crowded, and incommensurable school-room, unprovided with the apparatus and improved facilities which can now be so easily and cheaply provided in any part of Nova Scotia. Not only should the school-house be capacious in proportion to the numerical necessities of the school—airy, comfortable, and amply provided with the requisite furniture, books, maps and apparatus—

but everything should be done to render it and its surroundings attractive. The importance of cultivating the pupil's tastes, as well as his more utilitarian faculties, should never be lost sight of. In short, the school-house should be the best building in the School Section; and the grounds about it should be made as ornamental and attractive as their nature will admit of.

In some of the instances to which we refer, when the subject of providing improved school buildings is presented to the people, they complain of the heavy outlay which they would thus have to assume, and of the shortness of the time—five years—within which they would have to pay it. We suspect that, in most cases, this hardship is more imaginary than real; for we have seen the highly creditable and successful efforts which have been made in this way by some decidedly poor sections. We would like to impress upon those who thus complain the importance of making one effort for the sake of posterity; for, let people say what they will about it, we live as much for posterity as for ourselves. But we must remind them that by the very fact of their not providing efficient School-houses, they are wasting means which, in the interests of all concerned, would be better expended in that way. They have to pay more for tuition, because they do not provide the teacher with the due facilities for the discharge of his duties.

In some sections, where the greater number of the people are in straitened circumstances, it may be that the brevity of the time allowed for paying the cost of erecting a school-house may be found a real hardship. In such cases, which we nevertheless incline to think are rare, it might be well if the time were extended, at the option of the rate-payers, over ten, twelve, or, if need be, even twenty years. If there really is a necessity for it, the Law relative to this matter might be modified to suit the requirements of the poorer school sections. But, however the end can best be effected, the erection of commodious and well-equipped School-houses, in all the school sections of this Province, should be considered indispensable to the successful working of our Free School system.

We fear, too, that there is by far too large a proportion of Female Teachers employed throughout the Province at the present time. This is more especially the case during the Summer term. This is a fact to which the best friends of Education are constantly calling our attention. We are well aware that many of these Female Teachers possess excellent attainments, and are of rare worth in the calling which they have adopted; and we trust that they all endeavor conscientiously and earnestly to discharge their professional duties. But it is the large number of them, in proportion to those of the other sex, which is the cause of complaint. There is a certain class of schools to which Female Teachers are, no doubt, especially adapted; but it is needless to suppose that, in the more advanced branches, and especially in incalculating what we may call the severer studies so necessary to fit young men for the hard, practical duties of life, they can successfully compete with Male Teachers. Equally unreasonable is it to suppose that they can maintain that ascendancy in the school over the pupils more advanced in years which comes with comparative ease to Teachers of the male sex. Yet we find that, in many sections where there should be a Male Teacher, females are employed in that capacity all the year round. Hence some branches of instruction very requisite for boys are, in such localities, scarcely taught at all. Again we find that, in other sections, Male Teachers are employed during the Winter term only, Females in Summer. This method operates injuriously upon Educational interests. Most men in the profession prefer engaging for the whole year; and when they find themselves thrown out of employment during the Summer months, to make way for Female Teachers,