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THE COMMON SCHOOL SYSTEM OF CANADA.

BY THE REV. JAMES FRASER, M.A.,

One of the Assistant Commissioners appointed by the Queen to inquire into the Schools of England, Scotland, the United States, and Canada.

We make a few extracts from this comprehensive report, as indicated in a previous number of the *Journal*. Mr. Fraser says:

"The school system in the two provinces of Upper and Lower Canada—legislatively united, but for educational purposes still distinct—formed the second object of the inquiry which I was appointed to conduct. I entered Canada from Detroit, on the 21st of July, traversed it in its length as far as Quebec, penetrated into the interior as high as Ottawa, and quitted it again, after nearly six weeks sojourn, on August 31st. Of this period of six weeks I spent nearly half in Toronto, placing myself in immediate communication with the office of the Department of Public Instruction for Upper Canada, which is located there; and my very best thanks are due to Dr. Ryerson, the chief superintendent, and Mr. Hodgins, the deputy superintendent, for the abundant facilities they afforded me for making myself acquainted with the system of which they are such efficient administrators. At Montreal I was equally fortunate in my intercourse with the Hon. Pierre Chauveau, whose relation to education in the Lower Province is similar to Dr. Ryerson's in the Higher.

"Of schools in actual operation, from the circumstances of the case, I could see very few; and I was particularly disappointed not to find the schools in session at Hamilton, when I visited that city, where the system is worked very vigorously, and is said to be best organized and most fully developed.* I had the

pleasure, however, of seeing there Dr. Ormiston, the local Superintendent, and formerly Inspector of grammar schools, who is thoroughly acquainted with the system in all its bearings, and who was most willing to give me all the information which he possessed; and subsequently at Toronto, I met Mr. Macallum, Principal of the Central School, who supplied me with some of the reports, containing valuable statistical details.

"The schools that I saw at work were the city schools of Toronto, those of Ottawa, and one or two village schools. They were characterized by a remarkable similarity of system, and the differences observable between them were differences of degree rather than of kind; and as I had abundant opportunities of ascertaining the opinions of persons thoroughly conversant with the system both theoretically and practically, and have besides carefully read the extracts from the reports of local superintendents, published in the report of the Chief Superintendent, I doubt whether a larger induction of particulars, the fruit of my own observation, would, in any material point, have disturbed the conclusions at which I have arrived.

"In Lower Canada, it is true, I had not the opportunity, owing to the time of my visit being in the heart of vacation, of seeing with my own eyes a single school; I have had to trust, therefore, entirely to the printed and oral reports of others. But the condition of things in that province, both as regards the social condition and the religious distribution of the people, is so entirely exceptional, and so utterly unlike what prevails among ourselves, that very little practical information would be available from this source; and the theory of the system, in the points wherein it differs from that of Upper Canada is all, I think, that the Commissioners need concern themselves to know. At any rate, owing to circumstances over which I had no control, a loss somewhere was unavoidable; and of all actual observations that I could have made, that of the schools of Lower Canada seems to me now, as it seemed then, to be the one that could most easily be spared.

* The letter of the law is peremptory about vacations. "There shall be two vacations in each year; the first or summer vacation shall continue for two weeks from the first Monday in August; the second, for eight days at Christmas. In cities, towns, and incorporated villages, the summer vacation shall continue four weeks, from the first Monday in August," (*Consolidated Acts*, p. 127). The first Monday in August, 1865, fell on August 7th. I visited Hamilton on Tuesday, July 25th, and found that the schools had already been broken up for some days, and was informed that the vacation would last for six weeks.