

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,  
ONTARIO.

## HISTORICAL RETROSPECT.

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*(Third and Concluding Paper.)*

THE Act of 1871 largely revolutionized and greatly improved the machinery of our educational system. It introduced—(1) the present plan of public school inspection; (2) established county boards of examiners; (3) secured through them a system of uniform examinations all over the Province; (4) made the public schools free for the first time by Act of Parliament; and (5) authorized the establishment of collegiate institutes, etc.

One of the first and necessary acts of the Provincial Board of Education was the adoption of a uniform series of text-books—one only on each subject. Those chosen were the Irish National Series, with two additions. The next important step taken by the Board was the establishment, in November, 1847, of a Normal School, with the necessary adjunct of a Model School. The old Government House was fitted up as a Normal School, and the stable connected with it as a Model School, or school of practice for teachers-in-training. On the removal of the seat of government to Toronto, in 1849, the Normal School was held in the Temperance Hall, and other arrangements were made.

So successful were these schools in raising the status of the teaching profession that the Government of the day—the memorable Baldwin-Lafontaine Administration—willingly listened to a proposition of the Provincial Board of Education to grant funds for the purchase of a site and the erection of suitable buildings for these schools. The Hon. Francis Hincks, who was Inspector General, had (upon Dr. Ryerson's estimate) a proposed grant of £15,000 put in the Estimates of 1850 for the purposes named. A site of seven acres and a half of land (now Victoria Square) was purchased from the estate of the Hon. Peter M'Gill. The writer had the pleasure (in the absence of Dr. Ryerson in Europe) of signing the cheque for the purchase money, £4,500, and of seeing that the deed was duly made out in the name of Her Majesty the Queen and her successors.

After the plans for the buildings had been approved, certain important additions were considered desirable (chiefly a theatre, or central lecture hall, etc.). As the grant already made was quite insufficient for the proposed additions, Mr. Hincks was once more appealed to. He responded very promptly and heartily, and recommended to his colleagues that a further grant be made, which was done, and an item of £10,000 additional was placed in the estimates of 1851 and concurred in by the Legislature. The work then proceeded and near the close of the second year it was brought to a conclusion.

So carefully had these two grants been husbanded that when the buildings were completed and furnished, there was a balance left over of

£90. With this sum the expense of fitting up the Departmental Library was defrayed. The result was highly gratifying to Mr. Hincks, and he so expressed himself at the opening of the buildings in the following year.

On Wednesday, the 2nd of July, 1851, the imposing ceremony of laying the corner-stone of the new edifice took place. The guard of honor was the 71st Highlanders, under Sir Hew Dalrymple. Ministers of both Houses of Parliament, the City Corporation, etc., attended. The inscription on the brass plate—I quote from the original, as written by Dr. Ryerson—was as follows:—

“This Institution, Erected by the Enlightened Liberality of Parliament, is Designed for the Instruction and Training of School Teachers upon Christian Principles.”

Right. Rev. Bishop Charbonnell, to whom was assigned the duty of presenting the Governor-General with the silver trowel, spoke with great cordiality, and with French grace and eloquence. He said—

“MONSEIGNEUR,—Je suis très heureux et très honoré d'avoir été choisi par le Conseil de l'Instruction Publique, dont votre Excellence a daigné me faire membre, pour lui présenter cette truelle d'argent aux industrieuses emblèmes du blazon des Bruces.

“L'établissement dont votre Excellence va poser la pierre angulaire, Monseigneur, sera un des plus glorieux monuments de tout ce que son libéral gouvernement aura fait pour la prospérité, de ce pays : *ad aedificationem.*”

This in substance is as follows:—

“My Lord,—I am very happy and am highly honored to have been chosen by the Council of Public Instruction—of which your Excellency has condescended to make me a member—to present to you, on their behalf, this silver trowel emblazoned with the industrial emblems which form the arms of the Bruces.

“The institution, of which your Excellency is about to lay the corner-stone, is destined to be, my Lord, one of the most glorious monuments amongst all of those which your liberal administration has devised for the welfare of this country.”

In laying the corner-stone, Lord Elgin was particularly happy in his reply to these remarks, and to the address of the newly-constituted Council of Public Instruction. He said, addressing Dr. Ryerson:—

“It appears to me, sir, . . . that this young country has had the advantage of profiting by the experience of older countries—by their failures and disappointments, as well as by their successes; and that experience, improved by your diligent exertions and excellent judgment . . . and fortified by the support of the Council of Education, and the Government and Parliament of the Province, has enabled Upper Canada to place herself in the van among the nations in the great and important work of providing an efficient system of general education for the whole community. . . . I do not think that I shall be charged with exaggeration when I affirm that this work is *the* work of our day and generation—that it is the problem in our modern society which is most difficult of solution. . . . How has Upper Canada addressed herself to the execution of this great work? . . . Sir, I understand from your

statements—and I come to the same conclusions from my own investigation and observation—that it is the principle of our educational system that its foundation be laid deep in the firm rock of our common Christianity. . . . Permit me to say, both as an humble Christian man and as the head of the Civil Government of the Province, that it gives me unfeigned pleasure to perceive that the youth of this country, . . . who are destined in their maturer years to meet in the discharge of the duties of civil life upon terms of perfect civil and religious equality—I say it gives me pleasure to hear and to know that they are receiving an education which is fitted so well to qualify them for the discharge of these important duties; and that while their hearts are yet tender . . . they are associated under conditions which are likely to provoke amongst them the growth of those truly Christian graces—mutual respect, forbearance and charity.”

Such speeches, and many others of a like kind, had a wonderful effect in moderating the opposition which Dr. Ryerson received in laying the foundations of our system of education. They had also the potent effect of popularizing that system in the estimation of the people which it was designed to benefit. That popularity has happily continued until this day—thanks in a great degree to the dignity imparted to the important subject of education by the persuasive eloquence of Lord Elgin.

Rev. Dr. Ryerson's labors in connection with the Department of Education (extending over a period of thirty-two years) ceased on the 21st of February, 1876, but not before he had sanctioned the plan and main features of the proposed Ontario Educational Exhibit at the American Centennial of that year. It was particularly gratifying to him, therefore, after he had retired from office, to know that his administration of the Department had been so highly honored, as it was, by the American Centennial Commission. A diploma was granted by that Commission:—

“For a quite complete and admirably arranged exhibition, illustrating the Ontario system of education and its excellent results; also for the efficiency of an administration which has gained for the Ontario Department a most honorable distinction among government educational agencies.”

The proceedings of the Department since Dr. Ryerson's retirement are matters of contemporary educational history, so that they require no remark from me in this connection.

WHY is it that nine-tenths of all the students of our universities are looking forward to some one of the professions? The true idea of education will never prevail until young men and women aspire to a collegiate education, apart altogether from its relation to professional pursuits. Our higher institutions will never do their best work until they send forth graduates by hundreds to the mine, the work-shop and the farm—especially the latter. Cannot the teachers of the country do more to spread abroad the great truth that education, in its highest and truest aspect, is not a means to an end, but an end in itself?