

THE SCHOOL QUESTION.

The frequent references made to the Separate School system during the session of the Ontario Parliament recently terminated shows that public attention is being directed in a very marked degree to the present status and efficiency of that system. For a long time it was the practice of certain of the enemies of Catholic education to deem the existence of Catholic schools a matter of too little moment to require attention. Others, again, when deigning to refer to them, indulged in either violent condemnation of the system or in prophecy of its speedy downfall. There is now quite a change in the attitude of the non-Catholic public in regard of our schools. The number of friends of Catholic education amongst non-Catholics has year by year increased, till it may be said that in the Province of Ontario a large majority of Protestant citizens is well affected towards the Separate School system. It has, however, numerous enemies, some quiescent, awaiting a well-timed opportunity for assault, others as loud and pronounced in condemnation as ever. It is well, in our estimation, for the friends of Catholic education in Ontario that it should have its enemies, for enmity ever makes friends vigilant, active, and earnest. The time may come—we cannot say how soon—when all the vigilance, activity and earnestness of the friends of the Ontario Separate School system will be called into play. It is our duty to prepare for that time by giving the condition of our Schools, the causes of their inefficiency—wherever inefficiency exists—and the further legal protection demanded for their growth and solid development, such consideration as may lead to their being placed on a solid and unassailable basis. The present condition of our Catholic Schools affords just ground for self-congratulation. When we compare their present status with that of twenty years ago, we see on every side evidences of marvellous progress, impervious to the most adverse criticism. In every city and town of Ontario where Separate Schools existed in 1863, there has been, as our readers well know, so very decided an improvement in the condition of our schools as to lead to the hope that in the next twenty years a much more decided improvement can be effected. There has been advancement in the character of school buildings, in the number and quality of teachers, and in the intellectual training of pupils which even a comparison with the progress of the public schools in that time cannot but bring into fuller light. The causes of the rapid progress of our schools in the face of adverse legislation, and of ill-disguised if not open hostility on the part of school officials, as well as the indifference of a large number of Catholics themselves are (1) the thorough devotedness and noble self-sacrifice of the Catholic laity of Ontario in the organization and support of Separate Schools—(2) the ceaseless supervision and active assistance extended to the schools by the hierarchy and clergy of the Province, and (3) the untiring though materially ill-rewarded labor of the Catholic teachers, lay and religious, in the furtherance of the moral and intellectual welfare of the Catholic youth of Ontario.

Wherever inefficiency now exists, it is due, as has always been the case, to either one of these causes, the absence of adequate legislation, the hostility of departmental and municipal officers, the indifference of Catholic schools-supporters, resulting in unwise selections of trustees, the employment of ill-qualified teachers, the want of necessary school requisites, and the irregular attendance of children.

Several amendments to the School law have been, of late years, made in a direction beneficial to Separate Schools. These amendments should be utilized to the fullest practical extent, and others necessary—and there are some very necessary—called for and vigorously insisted upon. The hostility of government departmental and municipal officials should never be allowed to pass without ready exposure and severe condemnation. Many of these persons find a particular gratification in impeding the work of Catholic education. Their conduct should meet with so stern a reprobation on the part of Catholics as to lead, if at all possible, to their official decapitation. Too much attention cannot be given by Catholics to the selection of Separate School Trustees. An inefficient board of trustees, either in whole or part, always exercises a most deleterious effect on the schools under its care. If thoroughly devoted Catholics only be appointed to these important charges, there will be earnestness in school management, wise selections made of teachers and a ready provision of all requisites called for in progressive and efficient schools. We have now in this Province a body of Catholic teachers second to none in the Dominion. By their fruits are they known. Many of them have grown gray in the noble work and have the consolation to know that through their assistance a generation of patriotic citizens has risen, a credit to country and religion. Others are but beginning what must be a

useful and honorable career. All of them, whether lay or religious, in view of past services and present merit and efficiency, require and should have generously extended to them the ready and undivided support of every section of the Catholic population of Ontario.—*Catholic Record.*

THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS.

It is a difficult thing to convince many parents who are not indifferent in religious matters—who hear Mass and approach the Sacraments—that their children would not suffer temporal loss by attending a Catholic school. Catholic as these parents claim to be, the question of temporal gain or loss is paramount. It is so important in their eyes, that the spiritual question, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" weighs, in comparison, very light. But it is a sad truth, the application of which is not confined to nominal Catholics, that the supposition that a boy or a girl is better fitted for the struggle by the public-school process, is widespread. The parochial schools in this city are overcrowded, it is true, not because the number of children in the parishes is proportionately represented, but because the school-buildings are inadequate to hold the comparatively small number of children that attend them.

Illiterate people are most eager in defence of the public schools. "Education" to them means something rich and rare, mysterious, high and incomprehensible. The more red tape there is about it, the more valuable it becomes in their eyes. Hence the enforced lack of "book-learning" among many of our people, who, deprived of all their rights and privileges by the despotism of England, are really incapable of truly defining what this dazzling mirage, modern education, is. It is odd to find Irishmen who gloriously sacrificed all the advantages of learning rather than give up that Faith which was dearer to them than life, or anything that life could give, willing to imperil the spiritual welfare of their children for something which they are by no means sure will bring these children even the coveted "mess of pottage." Esau sacrificed less, but gained more than these people. It is honorable to Irish faith and Irish firmness that so many of the race are ignorant of those things which a blind world values as most precious. It is shameful that so many of that race, illustrious, above all, for its devotion to the Church, should follow the counsels of a blind world and allow their children to risk the Faith for which Ireland suffered all sorrows and all wrongs. There are many reasons why a parent in this country should value education highly. It is supposed to be the key to all temporal good; and so it would be, if it were real education, but it is not. If it gave a child's hand skill, if it guided and helped him to concentrate his thoughts, if it trained him for those tasks for which he is best fitted, it would be worth a sacrifice, but not the sacrifice which many Catholics are willing to make for its counterfeit.

There has been an easy, go-as-you-please air about many of the Catholic parochial schools which confirmed ignorant or careless parents in prejudices that their inclinations led them to adopt with readiness. Lax pastoral supervision and incompetent teachers have, in some localities, made parochial schools words of reproach, and created an antipathy towards them which years of earnest and zealous work only can remove. If all Catholic parents knew their duties and felt their responsibility, a badly-managed Catholic