

STATE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN ONTARIO BEFORE 1839.

By Dr. Williamson.

When Queen's University was founded in 1839 one of the chief difficulties with which it had to contend was the almost total want of any public provision for the elementary education of the people of the country. In 1798, indeed, His Majesty George III. had authorized the appropriation of a portion of the waste lands of the Province in the following terms: "To assist and encourage the operations of this province in laying the foundation for promoting sound learning and a religious education.

"First, by the establishment of *free Grammar Schools* in those districts in which they are called for, and

"Secondly, in due process of time, by establishing *other Seminaries of a larger and more comprehensive nature*" (Universities) "for the promotion of religious and moral learning, and the study of the arts and sciences."

Accordingly, on the receipt of this authority, 459,217 acres of Crown lands were set apart by the Legislature for these purposes. For a long time, however, these wild lands yielded no revenue for the accomplishment of the objects for which the grant was made, and nothing was done for the education of the people except in adventure and private schools.

The very first of these, it may be noted, of which there is any record was one opened in Kingston in 1785 by an Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. John Stuart, in a house a little to the west of the spot where Murney's tower now stands and celebrated as being the place to which Moore refers in the beginning of his well-known song, "I knew by the smoke that so gracefully curled above the green elms that a cottage was near." For 22 years thereafter, down to 1807, no public provision of any kind was made for the support of schools, although the population had increased to about 100,000. In that year \$3,200 were granted by the Legislature for the maintenance of eight Grammar Schools, one in each of the districts into which Upper Canada was then divided. These schools, however widely apart as they were from one another, and in most of which high fees were charged, were available only for the sons of "the more opulent classes," and nothing was done for the general instruction of the people in Common Schools until 1816, when a sum of \$24,000 was obtained from Parliament for that purpose. This amount was reduced in 1820 to \$10,000, no single school, except in special cases, to receive more than \$50 per annum. For thirteen years following no addition was made to this miserable pittance, although the number of the population had risen in the meantime to nearly 300,000. In 1833 the grant was increased, but only to \$22,600, less than had been given seventeen years before, while that to each Grammar School remained the same, and this deplorable neglect of any proper provision for Common and Grammar education continued down to 1841. In fact nothing was effectually done to improve its condition until 1850, when the Amended School Act embodying the recommendations of the Rev. Dr. Ryerson was passed, forming the basis of the present school system of Ontario. Bills for a general system and an adequate appropriation for Common School education had year after year been passed by the House of Assembly,

but were again and again rejected by the dominant party in the Legislative Council. They were satisfied with extending aid, scanty as it was, to a few Grammar Schools for the benefit of the more wealthy classes and as feeders to a University for which they had received a charter as far back as 1829, but which was not yet set in operation.

The result of the course thus pursued was that in 1839, outside of the Grammar schools just referred to, and even in some of them, the educational condition of the Province was almost at the lowest ebb. One-half of the population of those of school age were left to grow up in a state of semi-barbarism. The annual attendance at school of the other half was for only seven months, generally in log houses with accommodations of the rudest kind, where they were initiated in the mysteries of reading, writing and some simple rules in arithmetic by teachers hired by the year, wretchedly paid and, as might be expected, with a few exceptions little qualified for their office. The consequence of this state of things was that in many instances those who could afford it sent their sons to the United States to receive their education.

Such were the difficulties to be met; such were the evils to be remedied; such were the circumstances, so different from those under which the land of the fathers of many of them had flourished, when the founders of Queen's College, in 1839, for the public benefit as well as that of their children, took practical steps for its establishment by their own voluntary efforts. Having long looked in vain to the powers that were for a system of University and School education throughout the Province they, after anxious deliberation, felt themselves compelled to adopt this course and do what they could to supply the want of a higher training for youth, and as one main object, better qualified teachers for our schools.

I may here remark, that our friends, the Methodists, actuated by similar views, and knowing well the needs of the Province had, in 1836, erected an institution at Cobourg for the purpose of affording a more advanced education under the name of "The Upper Canada Academy," which was afterwards, in August, 1841, merged by Provincial charter into the present Victoria College with University powers.

How many changes, small and great,
Have happened since that distant day
When Queen's first gently tempted fate,
Scarce knowing she had come to stay.

Our country's self wears other name,
And speaks with louder, prouder tongue,
For "Canada" means not the same
As what it meant when we were young.

For why? The years have given birth
Unto a people—here it stands—
As fair as any on the earth,
A lovely land among the lands!

And what though rude winds oft perplex
The pilots of our Ship of State?
And what though varying currents vex?
She need not fear to face her fate!

For as she is, her hardy sons,
And lovely daughters, east and west,
Do name her with the noblest ones
And joining, rise, and call her blest,