

tended the operations of the Act. In over two hundred of the school sections, no school houses existed at the time it was brought in. There was no means for carrying on a school. Many houses were without windows or doors, and in a dilapidated condition generally. Now we have the gratifying evidence that out of these 1400 sections outside the city, in 16 counties which have only been heard from, embracing a little over a thousand sections, there were only 213 in which no meetings were held under the Act passed last year. There were only 142 sections in which meetings were held, and refused to organise under the law. In 654 cases of the 1000 heard from, the law was adopted—a law making a radical change in the mode of carrying on the schools of the country—a law carrying on its face the most obnoxious feature that any law can—assessment, which imposed the principle of direct taxation upon the people. In twenty-nine of these sections graded schools were established, containing numerous departments. A still more gratifying fact is it, that, obnoxious as the law was calculated necessarily to be, that not only 654 meetings have been held under it, but at this day, with something like one half the schools in operation, the result of free schools is, (as we have good reason to believe,) that there are more children at school than under the old law. Whilst great difficulties have arisen, whilst this law presented the most unpopular feature that a law could exhibit—whilst it required time for the people to understand and appreciate it, yet it has given a stimulus to free schools that must be exceedingly gratifying, not only to the government but to the Legislature which gave it force. In many cases the result has been that when under the old law the attendance was only from 30 to 60 pupils, you can count the number by hundreds—proving satisfactorily to the mind of every man that the effect of the law has been to open wide the portals to hundreds and thousands of children who otherwise would be without education. This is a result so satisfactory that I think it has placed for ever at rest the question whether in this province the principle of free schools shall continue to exist. I believe, considering all the difficulties that this measure was necessarily exposed to, the evidence which is now furnished to the House of the result of its operations during the comparatively brief period the people have had an opportunity of understanding its merits, have been such as to render it impossible for any government or any legislature, unless they forget what they owe to the country and the education of the masses, to recede a single step back from the great principle of establishing free schools and of maintaining that legislation which has been already enacted—that every child in Nova Scotia shall have the means of obtaining a common-school education.

Not only is the attendance at schools numbered by hundreds where there were only forties and fifties, but in connection with another feature of the enactment, the arrangement made to establish superior schools, the most gratifying results have been obtained. A most effective stimulus has been given all over the country to the common school education by the principle that the best school should be entitled to, and should, by a competitive process, obtain the position of superior schools. Not only is every one enabled to obtain a common

school education, and a still higher education through the superior schools, but in every county the means are provided of learning those acquirements that would fit a man for the highest position in life—for the learned professions or whatever his abilities might enable him to fill. Out of 12 counties to which that provision applied—for the law did not touch those counties where academies already existed, 9 made arrangements for giving the highest means of education to the people. In connection with these academies the memorial which has been read by the hon. member for Yarmouth, (Mr. Killam,) shows the extent to which that county has appreciated the importance of the highest description of education and the amount of patriotic exertion that the people in that enlightened section have been prepared to exhibit, in order that they may have the indisputable advantages that are afforded by an academy for instruction in the higher branches of learning. When it is recollected, as you will see by reference to the report of the Superintendent of Education, that the common school education of the country was in such a deplorable condition, that the persons who were qualified to fill the position of teachers had abandoned their profession for more lucrative pursuits, you can easily understand that if the law which is now on the statute book had been as perfect as it could be—if there had been the utmost disposition on the part of the people to adopt it—it would, nevertheless, have been impracticable to carry it out to a much larger extent than has already been the case. For out of all the teachers in the Province, only 650 were found in a position to obtain a license to teach school under the law—proving that the condition of common school education was such as to give no encouragement to men of the qualifications necessary for teachers. In order to meet the difficulty of not having persons who would be able, under the operation of the law, to fill the position of common school teachers, and to provide for the requirements of the country whilst in a state of transition from the old to the new law, the examiners were instructed throughout the Province, to give *permissive licenses* for one year to persons whose qualifications would not bring them under the provisions of the Act. The Government do not intend to propose any fundamental change in the mode of carrying on the common school education of the country. The only step which they propose to take is one which, I am proud to say, will be in advance. If the government of the day were disposed to recede from the position which they felt called upon to take a year ago, when they brought forward a measure for the education of the people; if they were so recreant to their duty as to abandon the stand which they assumed and recede from the great principle, that in Nova Scotia free schools shall exist, and the means of education be opened up to all classes of the people, I believe the independent spirit of this Legislature would rise up on both sides and would say, that the course of the government was not only unworthy of themselves, but, with the evidence that is now before the country of the success of the measure, would be, in the last degree, prejudicial and distasteful to the people of this province.

I have listened with most anxious attention to the voice of the country, as expressed in the