

and to come to conclusions. It is easy nowadays to point out to our pupils the glaring mistake made by English law-makers in the framing of regulations affecting the poor, the coinage, or commerce; it is just as easy to make as serious a mistake in imagining that we have seen the end from the beginning in drafting our own statutes. That, however, our view is limited we acknowledge every time we repeal or amend an Act of Parliament, and the very existence of such courts as the Court of Equity, instituted to remove any injustice arising from the administration of the strict letter of laws supposed to be just, ought to remind us of our proneness to err. Our educational system is still young, and time will doubtless point out not merely minor but also serious mistakes, perhaps in connection with foundation principles that we regard as imperishably true. In fact there are some that fancy they see serious complications and dangers about to arise in society, not in spite of our system of education, but because of it. It would be interesting to discuss some of these supposed dangers, but it is purposed to point out only one of the defects of our school system, and that a sin of omission and not of commission; in other words, not to find fault with what we have, but to indicate what we have not.

We never tire of stating that in Ontario the schools are free to all, without exception or distinction. In fact this is our chief boast, the feature that, in our opinion, distinguishes our system from those of older countries. But it is in this very respect that our system lacks, for it is not free to all. There is a large—and apparently a growing—class of boys and girls that are unable to attend school, or, at any rate, that do not attend. Though no fees are required of pupils, our schools can never be

called free till every boy and girl in the land is able to attend. The possession of money is, of course, not now necessary, but decent clothes are. Many a poor child, knowing that going to school means loss of meals and lack of clothing, will tell you that to him, at least, our schools are not free. For such children, our system makes no adequate provision, and it is only recently that any at all has been made.

That a class of boys and girls—considerable in size, if not large, and certainly of much importance—is practically deprived of the right to attend school is evident from facts recorded in the registers of our Police Courts; that provision should be made at once for them is plain from considerations of policy and justice, not to mention benevolence. In the year 1885 there were arraigned before the police magistrate of Toronto, 828 boys, and 74 girls, under 16 years of age, and the numbers for 1886 were 550 and 29.* Add to these those that succeeded in keeping out of the hands of the police, and you have an element, the management and control of which will entail enormous expense and anxiety on the part of the public. Nor is it in the cities alone that such a class is found. In all our towns these children are to be seen on the streets picking up what living they can, or refusing to be held in discipline by irresolute or perhaps vicious parents. Even in our villages many of this class may be found, not perhaps suffering to the same extent from hunger and exposure, but growing up to be even more of a terror to the vicinity because of its lack of effective police protection.

Speaking roughly, this class may be divided into three classes. (1) Those without parents or relatives. (2)

*The decrease in 1886 is to be attributed to the special efforts instituted in that year to enforce the laws respecting attendance of boys in bar-rooms, billiard parlours, etc. The number is still, however, strikingly large.