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NEW ENGLISH EDUCATIONAL DEPARTURES.

During recent visits of the Right Hon. W. E. Forster and Hopworth Dixon, Esq., to the Ontario Education Department, they were kind enough to explain and discuss some of the new problems in the English educational system, and made inquiries as to the success of our attempts at a practical solution of the same questions.

The two principal subjects referred to by Mr. Forster were compulsory education and denominational schools, and on these two points full explanations of our Ontario system were given.

We are now seeking to obtain, and hope to publish shortly, information relating to the working of the compulsory clauses of our School Act in the cities and towns of this Province.

It is known to many of our readers that it is only of late years that the former of these subjects was looked upon with any favour, or even discussed with any toleration, in England. In the unsophisticated English mind the abstract question of the "liberty of the subject" overshadowed the higher and more equitable and practical one (embodied in our school legislation of 1871) of the right of every child to education. Thus our Act declares that "every child from the age of seven to twelve years inclusive shall have the right to attend some school, or to be otherwise educated for four months of every year."

The machinery in our School Act, for giving effect to this humane "declaration of right" on behalf of the child is very simple and practical; and we hope shortly to be able to show how far the local Trustee Boards have acted under the provisions of the law on the subject.

Our present purpose is, however, to point out what progress has been made in England in the solution of this vexed question.

The subject is ably discussed by Mr. J. G. Fitch, in a recent number of the *Fortnightly Review*. The writer, in pointing out the

happy change of sentiment on this subject, even on the part of the class most affected by a system of compulsory education, says:—

"Now one of the most hopeful signs of our times is the extraordinary rapidity with which this notion has become prevalent, and the willingness with which it has been accepted as a principle, not only by politicians, in spite of the traditional English jealousy of State interference with the liberty of the subject, but also by the artisans themselves.* It is to their credit that compulsory education is unquestionably popular with the working-men as a class. In this matter they do not ask for liberty, but for restraint. Five years ago, when engaged, just before the framing of the Education Act, on an official inquiry in Birmingham and Leeds, I had occasion to confer with several societies of operatives, with a view to learn their own needs and wishes on the subject. It was evident that the idea of compulsion was already familiar, and very far from unwelcome to the majority of the members. I inquired, not without surprise, 'Do you wish for a compulsory law for yourselves, or for the sake of other labouring men less conscious than you are of parental responsibility?' 'For both,' was the reply. 'We want to be freed from the temptation to neglect and carelessness in this matter. We want the law of the land to settle it once for all that none of our children shall grow up in ignorance, as so many of us have been compelled to do.' And it is very noticeable that the complaints which have recently been audible, in reference to alleged harshness of school-board officials in enforcing the compulsory laws, have not been made by the poor themselves, but by weak sentimentalists who have professed to speak on their behalf, and have shown great ignorance as to the care and forbearance with which the law has been generally administered. The sympathy lavished on the drunken or thriftless father who selfishly desires to use the labour of a little child for his own convenience, would surely be better bestowed on the poor boy or girl thus condemned to life-long ignorance, and to permanent disqualification for honourable employment.

* * * * *

"It is only while we have a race of fathers and mothers themselves untaught that so harsh a thing as law is required to enforce on any of them the need of instruction for their children. And thus, while all laws of indirect compulsion must continue in force, and become increasingly stringent as the competition of the trade increases, laws of direct compulsion will become, as the experience of Switzerland and Germany conclusively shows, practically needless

* The first business is to bring all English children into school, and to familiarise their parents, once for all, with the notion that school attendance is not a luxury—not a matter to be left to the voluntary choice or rejection of the father—not a habit to be intermitted at pleasure whenever the child can be found useful at home or at work—but a necessary of life, a condition of citizenship, one on which the State means to insist, a parental obligation which shall not in any circumstances be evaded.