

his comprehensive Bill of 1850, at which time our system assumed substantially its present form.

As is well known, under Dr. Ryerson's administration, the executive power was vested in the Council of Public Instruction—a body of eighteen members—the Chief Superintendent or his Deputy, eight members appointed by the Crown, one by each degree-granting college, one as representative of the High School masters, one representing the Public School teachers, and one from among the Public School inspectors—each member holding office for three years.

All the legislation which took place for about thirty years was practically effected through this Council, representing as it did, all the various educational interests of the country.

When any question of special importance was about to be proposed, the Free School System, for example, the Chief Superintendent visited the various counties, and by personal intercourse with the people, fully ascertained the wants of the country, and the drift of public opinion. As this generally *preceded* the introduction of radical changes, very few crude measures were introduced.

The next important change took place in 1876, when a responsible Minister succeeded the Chief Superintendent and the functions of the representative advisers of the Chief were transferred to a Committee appointed by the Executive Council.

This change was recommended, it is said, by Dr. Ryerson, on the eve of his retirement; yet we are not certain that his recommendation was based on a decided preference for the present form of administration. It arose partly from practical difficulties in securing a suitable successor. Be that as it may, after four years' experience, we are able to form some idea of the comparative merits of the two systems.

I venture to say, in a word, that the

fears expressed when this change was proposed, have to some extent been realized.

It was feared, you remember, that it might imperil the best interests of education to transfer the discussion of school matters from the quiet circle of the Council to the stormy arena of party politics. Those who have closely followed the discussions in the Legislature, on educational topics, must feel that this fear was not altogether without foundation. On few subjects have more crudities been presented than on this. It would seem that, while nearly every member feels called upon to offer suggestions, there are comparatively few sufficiently acquainted with the details of educational work to discuss profitably such matters as are every session brought up in debate. From the general character of these discussions, and the results as seen in the form of legislative enactments, we are led to think that the change of 1876 was ill-advised and not promotive of the best interests of education.

So far reference has been made only to such results as arise from assuming that School legislation can be dealt with in the same way that is found safe in the case of ordinary legislation.

It was feared also that educational interests might be made subservient to political ends. And it was only reasonable to suppose that a measure introduced, say by the Minister of Education, might meet with opposition, merely from party considerations; that the party in power might be tempted to look with suspicion on any educational measures proposed by those in opposition. This is but natural, and, I believe, to a great extent inevitable. Not that either party would deliberately sacrifice educational interests to party interests, but it is almost impossible to avoid it. Witness, for example, the almost uni-