

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

TORONTO, APRIL, 1851.

THE SPIRIT OF THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT IN UPPER CANADA.

We desire to say a few words upon the spirit and manner in which the new educational campaign in Upper Canada should be conducted.

That an important era has arrived in the history of our educational operations, is a gratifying and encouraging fact. The spontaneous adoption of the principle of free schools, in the minds and feelings of the people, generally, is a striking proof of the singular adaptation of that system to the wants and wishes of the country, in regard to the diffusion of popular education. The practical application of the free school principle is, however, not so universal; nor are we anxious that its immediate adoption should be urged too strenuously by the many new and ardent friends which it has acquired in various parts of the country. In some instances we have reason to fear, that a laudable zeal to confer upon a school section the inestimable advantages of a generous and unrivalled system of schools, has been tainted with a spirit of acerbity and dogmatism. To such friends of free schools, as well as to those who would wish to call in the authoritative voice of the legislature to enforce the adoption of the system, we would respectfully offer one or two suggestions.

The character of our educational system is rapidly assuming a consistence and vigour, which will mark its progress for many years to come. The various officers charged with the administration of that system, as well as those more immediately concerned in promoting its success, should, therefore, proceed with greater caution and singleness of purpose. An enlightened spirit of generous coöperation should characterize their efforts. In all cases, whether by lecture, or at public and special meetings, and quarterly examinations, the great question of popular education should be intelligently discussed—its principles elucidated, and its vital importance to the neighbourhood practically illustrated. To accomplish this successfully, conciliation and forbearance are essential. Attention should also be specially directed to the intrinsic merits of the subject; its equal, if not paramount importance with other great national interests already cheerfully sustained by the public, such as the administration of justice, organized systems for the repression or prevention of crime, &c.

In the advocacy of any measure, however excellent and equitable it may be, it is expedient and proper that we should attentively listen to the objections of opponents; and not imperiously attempt to repress the expression of sentiments, which, though, perhaps erroneous, are, equally with our own, independent and sincere. There is a latent pride and spirit of resistance in the bosom of almost every man, which, if imprudently or incautiously aroused, will result in a settled opposition to the favourite theories of others—however invested with practical utility those plans may be. The skill of DAVID to calm the troubled spirit of the wayward SAUL lay not in the vigour of his arm, but in the sweet and touching melody of his harp. The mighty hunter, with his arts and stratagems may often fail to cage the lion, or the watchful lynx; but at the gentle strains of the fabled ORPHEUS, the fierce, the fearful, and the untractable were alike subdued. What can we see in those two instances, but a figurative illustration of the mighty power of the "human voice divine"—modulated to the accents of persuasive truthfulness, and sympathy.

In many school sections, we have witnessed with pain the advocacy of that national peacemaker—a generous system of universal education, and the great charter question of the age—degenerate into mere party strife, and petty, personal bickerings. The zeal of one party coming into strong contact with the selfishness of another, must ever ensure disaster and defeat to the best and noblest cause. It is an anomaly that a forced system of education should be a free system, and vice versa. We would, therefore, suggest to all the friends and advocates of free schools, that they would carefully avoid permitting such a reproach to be cast upon this great national system of education in its infancy. A prejudice founded, at this early period, upon harshness and severity exercised in the application of the law authorizing free schools, will, in after years, be more difficult to contend against and overcome, than the legitimate and decided opposition of the avowed enemies to the principle itself. We are aware that the reasons which induce trustees and others to urge the immediate adoption of the free school system, in their school sections, are numerous and weighty. To a person, who ardently deplores the want of education in a neighbourhood, and the apathy prevalent regarding it, the excellence of the system may be so forcibly apparent, and the reasons for its adoption so strong and urgent, that he may become impatient at the stolidity or indifference of his neighbour, and endeavour to compel the arbitrary adoption of the free school system by law. But, while we deeply sympathize with such persons in their anxiety, we deprecate resorting to any measures so decisive. Better to submit to a year or two years' delay in the application of the free school principle, than that it should be prematurely enforced by the "terrors" of the law. Its progress and ultimate triumph is only a question of time. But at present, unanimity alone can promote its speedy adoption; and perseverance, argument, facts, and figures are necessary to produce that unanimity.

In many instances we have known of a comparative oneness of feeling having been created in a school section by the introduction of trifling articles of school apparatus—a map, a globe, a numeral frame, tablet, or pictorial lessons, &c. A wise teacher, or judicious trustee, by placing those things before the pleased and anxious eye of the pupils, have invariably excited their curiosity and gained their confidence and attention; and, thus, through the children, have opened the parents' hearts, and enlisted their generous feeling of parental love, to afford still greater facilities for the instruction and amusement of their children. Trifling efforts of this sort have frequently led to important results in individual school sections; and thus have free schools been often most agreeably and permanently established—children, hitherto indifferent to any instruction, or listless when receiving it, have evinced great anxiety to be permitted to witness the many ocular proofs, pleasantly exhibited, of numerous important truths connected with the ordinary branches of education, heretofore to them a sealed book, or a dead letter. No one can visit the Model School, at Toronto, the Central School, at Brantford, or the Union School, at London, without being forcibly impressed with the true philosophy of the plan here indicated.

To accomplish even this step in advance may, in some instances, we admit, be difficult; but a little effort judiciously put forth will amply repay the trouble and expense incurred. A practical proof of the excellence and value of a school, and the utility and importance of these little adjuncts in the promotion of popular education, is often more irresistible and convincing than the most eloquent argument, or most brilliant rejoinder. And once this point is gained, few persons will feel disposed to cavil at a free school which may be productive of so much good, and where these gratifying results of the solicitude of the teacher and trustees can be still more effectively and agreeably brought about.

To those who would insist upon the expediency of a legislative enactment, compelling the universal adoption of the principle of free schools, we would observe, that, however desirable it may, be some years hence, to follow the example recently set us in the State of New York, we are, as yet, by no means unanimous enough among