

than the present I am quite sure that hon. gentlemen will appreciate the difficulties under which we have labored, and will make allowance for the time that was necessary to confer with the members of the Legislature after the opening of the session. I was anxious, also, that the country should have the fullest opportunity of expressing its views upon this important question, and even down to this very day petitions have been presented on this subject. I need hardly say that no government was ever called upon to undertake a more arduous task, than when a twelve-month ago the present government undertook to grapple with this difficult subject of education. That question has been fraught with such difficulties, that although, from time to time, tolerably strong Governments—sustained by very fair majorities in this Legislature—have held the reins of power, and whilst it has been admitted that there was no matter that demanded more imperatively the consideration of the Legislature and the action of the Administration, yet none of them were able to carry successfully through the House a measure calculated to promote the education of the country. Although the present Government, at the last session, had the good fortune to be sustained by a very large majority of this House—although the previous general election had proved that the party with which I have the honor to be connected had the confidence of a very large proportion of the people, yet on a question of this kind, of such vital consequence to the country at large, they did not hesitate to invite the co-operation and support of gentlemen on the Opposition benches. They felt they were entitled to ask that aid from any opposition in reference to a question which did not affect one class or party, but all classes and parties in this Province;—that it was due to the great question of Education that it should be as far as possible placed above party, and dealt with in such a mode as to secure the confidence and co-operation of both parties. Everyone must feel that, however strong a government might be, however strong any party might be who was called upon to take up so difficult and delicate a question, that it was due to the success of the measure that it should secure the interest and sympathy of all classes in this country. Therefore when we proposed a radical change in the system of education, which had been so long desired in this country, we assumed all the responsibility which should fall upon a government, and at the same time invited the cordial co-operation of all our opponents, as essential to the proper construction of a wise and useful measure on the subject. The government were aware, as every intelligent man was aware, that to deal with a question of such difficulty and delicacy as that of education, it would be impossible for any party however strong,—for any government, however much they might enjoy the confidence of the house or country, to mature a measure which would not necessarily involve a great deal of hostility and trouble on the part of many of their friends and supporters throughout the country, and that it became doubly essential therefore, if any educational measure were to be successful, that it should have the support of intelligent and patriotic minds of all sections in the country, as that alone would to place it upon the sound and stable basis which it was desirable that such a

measure should rest upon. I am bound to admit that the gentlemen who composed the opposition in this Legislature did, with a patriotism that I think is deserving of all praise, frankly respond to the invitation of the Government, and on this, as upon many other questions of public policy, avowed at the outset their determination to assist in, and give their best energies to the maturing of such a measure as would tend to the most successful results in regard to the great cause of education in this country. I believe that owing to the aid derived from both sides of the house, the government were enabled to pass a measure which will be recognized in all time to come as a great step in advance in relation to the education of the masses in this province.—I am aware that a great deal of clamor has arisen in the country—that much hostility has been excited in connection with the measure—that much difficulty has occurred in reference to its administration, and that probably this province was never agitated, from one end to the other, to a greater extent than it has been during the last twelve months in relation to the important subject of common school education; but I am proud to be able to say that notwithstanding all this excitement and clamor—despite the fact that this question was one which touched the pockets of the masses, and was therefore necessarily calculated above all others to excite a feeling of hostility,—we have the facts before us and the public to show that this measure, although not so perfect as it was desirable it should be—although not so successful as it ought to be—has proved itself eminently adapted for the great object for which it was intended. When I call the attention of the house to the facts bearing upon this question, I think I shall be able to show, whatever may be the shortcomings of this measure, whatever difficulties may have been connected with its administration, so far from having proved a failure, we have the evidence, after only three months of time since it has been in operation, that it has been as successful as this house, in reference to a question of such delicacy and difficulty, could reasonably expect.

Those who will take the trouble to refer to the reports of the able superintendents of education who filled the position for many years in this Province, will find that the common school education of this country was in as deplorable a condition as it could well be at the time this measure was brought up for the approval of the house. They will see that the common school education of this country required reorganization throughout the Province from one end to the other—that the time had come when some great radical change was imperative. There is, perhaps, no duty of a more delicate character that any Government could be called upon to discharge than the re-organization of the school sections. It is obvious that, coming home, as the re-arrangements did, to the interests of every man in the province—attended with difficulty as it was, inasmuch as it touched the pecuniary interests of the people residing within these sections—this measure must have been necessarily fraught with much embarrassment. No duty could be calculated to involve a greater degree of difficulty in its adjustment than the arrangement of these school sections. Now let us enquire into the results that have at-