

EDUCATIONAL OPINION.

Some time ago the REVIEW drew attention to the fact that provincial and district revenues are being wasted in the loose methods that prevail in the management of school libraries, and the consequent bad moral effect of such loose methods. In the last Annual Report of New Brunswick Schools, Inspector Smith writes:

Some work is done each year in adding to the school libraries, but most of the work in this line is done in the towns and villages. I would like to see more done in the country districts, as it is in the country schools that the benefits from a good library are most apparent. I have noticed in a few cases that there is no system of giving out books, and the result is that many of the books are lost. The teacher should be able to report to the trustees at the end of each term where every book of the library is. As the government contributes to the funds with which the books are purchased, I think some means should be adopted to guarantee, as far as possible, the preservation of the books.

The following note of warning comes from Inspector Mersereau concerning three very important subjects taught in schools (Writing, Canadian History and Natural Science):

There are many schools in which these subjects are as well handled as any others, but in some of the graded departments, and in the vast majority of ungraded schools, the results obtained in the subjects named are far from satisfactory. Writing is the worst taught subject in the schools. Teachers have no method of teaching it. They allow their pupils to hold the pen improperly. Unsuitable furniture assists this evil, and instead of *penmanship* we have mere *scribbling*. The schools that have obtained the best results in this subject are those that have tried the "vertical system." It seems to me advisable for the Board to allow this system to be used in any school where the teacher is competent to give in it regular and systematic instruction.

Inspector Steeves has encouraging reference in his annual report to the proper equipment of his schools with apparatus. He follows this up with a criticism on the practice of filling positions in the most important schools, on the ground of economy, with inexperienced teachers.

* * * The supply of necessary apparatus for the scientific teaching of the various school subjects has also substantially increased. The industry and devotion of many teachers in both country and graded schools are deserving of the highest commendation. Their persevering efforts to procure apparatus, and to make the school houses more comfortable and pleasant, sometimes in the face of the opposition or indifference of ratepayers, are object lessons of powerful influence, silently yet surely elevating the educational standards of the people.

* * * Professionally settled teachers feel that their services should receive financial recognition. Leading schools are now in a great degree held by persons of small experience who, while often possessing excellent capabilities, have either not yet finished their own school education, or are preparing for another profession. Among such the competition is sharp, not to say sometimes unscrupulous; and the result is that the settled man must fall to the lowest point of salary or retire from the contest. If, in addition to present qualifications, four years' experience were required for principalship, would it not be an advantage to the profession and to a majority of the schools?

This is a most important point. The success of our superior and high schools, and the retention of our best

and most experienced teachers in the service, call for a wiser and more liberal policy on the part of school boards. The best teachers available should be secured for every school without regard to selfish considerations, and in this connection Inspector Carter has some very pertinent suggestions to offer:

The better class of school boards endeavor, in as far as possible, to secure first-class teachers, not only as to license, but as to experience and skill. This has a stimulating influence upon teachers and induces them to qualify for the highest class of work. In some districts and towns there seems to be a strong sentiment in favor of employing home teachers. A teacher seldom develops as well at home as abroad, and the infusion of a little new blood has a beneficial effect upon a staff of teachers. The argument that taxpayers should be preferred is the shallowest possible, as all the taxpayers but one suffer if the appointment has not been a judicious one. If this sectional feeling extends it will place the surplus teachers of some localities in a very awkward position. I regret to notice that there are still trustees who expect something for nothing, and instead of placing a fair valuation upon the work they have to be done, put it up at auction, as it were, and give it to the lowest bidder. If these same men required the services of a doctor or a lawyer they would by no means employ the cheapest, but the one they considered the most skilful. It is the districts that are looking for cheap teachers that do most of the complaining regarding schools.

Inspector Bridges calls attention to the apathy and indifference of ratepayers, and favors the appointment of parish instead of district school boards, a measure that the REVIEW has more than once advocated:

I am sorry to say, however, that public interest in the annual school meeting is not increasing. The man of narrow views, who is only interested in keeping the vote of money as low as possible, is almost always present, while he who is directly interested in the maintaining of an efficient school carelessly absents himself; and there is sometimes more trouble arising in a school district of \$10,000 valuation than in the administration of the educational affairs of a town of 10,000 population. Perhaps it is not too much to say that we cannot expect much greater efficiency in our rural schools than at present until we have Parish School Boards elected and appointed as our town boards now are. Then we might look for equalization of taxation for school purposes, for the substitution of graded for ungraded schools, and the concentration of our smaller schools into large central ones.

Following up the somewhat startling disclosures made in the May REVIEW on irregularity of school attendance, we quote from Inspector Meagher who appreciates the magnitude of the evil and offers a tangible suggestion as to its removal:

The weakness seems rather to lie in the school itself. For the teacher, failing, as he often does, to infuse life into the number of small classes that he is obliged to deal with, loses heart in his work; and the pupils, in whom little or no spirit of emulation can be awakened, or interest aroused, lose heart too, and, coming to look on their school life as a mere drudgery, stay away on the slightest pretext. This problem of the country school is one that cannot but attract our attention; and until it be solved it will nullify to quite an extent the benefits that should be derived from our school system.

The general adoption of the Concord system seems to me to be about the only way out of the difficulty; and I would respectfully recommend that each Inspector be exempted from the visitation of schools for one term, and be required to devote all his time and energy to the calling of meetings throughout his district, at which he shall explain the advantages of the system to the assembled people, and urge them to give it a trial. * * * In my opinion, compulsory education is only possible in large populous centres, or in a combination of districts, when officers