

# The Canada School Journal

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Extract from letter received from Hon. J. W. SIMMONDS, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, New Hampshire

Some weeks since I received the June No. of your Journal, at my home, Franklin, N. H. sent in answer to a request. That was a very valuable and instructive number. I read it with much interest. I ask you to send me the subsequent numbers and enrol me as a subscriber.

*Recommended by the Minister of Education for Ontario.*

*Recommended by the Council of Public Instruction in Quebec.*

*Recommended by the Chief Supt. of Education for New Brunswick.*

*Recommended by the Chief Supt. of Education, British Columbia.*

TORONTO, NOVEMBER, 1878.

NOTE.—The attention of our readers is called to the premiums offered for subscriptions, on page 146, by which those getting up a club may obtain a copy of Worcester's Unabridged Dictionary.

## TOWNSHIP SCHOOL BOARDS.

We have before us a communication on this subject which we would gladly publish in full but for its length. The matter is one which admits of a good deal being said on both sides, and our correspondent puts very effectively the argument in favor of Township as against Section Boards of Trustees. To much of what he says a reply of some sort is possible, while some of it, on the other hand, seems to us unanswerable. His argument is, in brief, that, as a rule, Trustees under the present system are illiterate men, and, on that account, not competent to judge of a teacher's fitness for the position to which they appoint him; that they are unable to distinguish a good from a bad quality of education; that being residents of the immediate vicinity of the school, they are more liable to be swayed by local prejudices, to the detriment and annoyance of the teacher; and that on account of "neighbourly" feeling they often shrink from enforcing the compulsory education provisions of the School Act.

In "Subscriber's" opinion, under the Township Board system a better class of men would be obtainable, especially if some remuneration were attached to the office, and on this point we are disposed to agree with him. In fact, if trustees under the present system were, if not remunerated for their services, at least indemnified against actual loss, the chances of getting better men to serve on school boards would be greatly improved. No office could be more thankless than that of a rural school trustee, and we can conceive of no motive he has at present to perform his work aright except a high sense of duty. Popularity he need not look for if he does what he ought to do, for in order to do that expenditure must be incurred and taxes levied, and every imposer of taxes must be prepared to face a certain amount of obloquy as the inevitable consequence. We incline to the view that the low average qualification of trustees is due mainly to the unhealthy condi-

tion of public opinion with respect to education. One persistent phase of the disease is indifference, and we doubt whether the substitution of township for section boards would of itself do much to arouse a deeper interest in educational matters. It might be of some use, however, even in this direction, and certainly it could not operate in the contrary one.

We are disposed to attach a great deal more importance to two other considerations put forward by "Subscriber." One is the improved position of the teacher under the township board system, the other is the necessity for removing some of the existing inequalities in the educational burdens resting on the ratepayers. None can doubt that the teacher who has to deal with, say five men, who have under their charge a number of schools, is in a far better position, other things being equal, than the one who has to deal with three men in charge of a single school. The members of a township board cannot but have their horizon enlarged by laboring in a wider sphere and shouldering heavier responsibilities. They are placed in a position to be able to compare school with school and teacher with teacher, and the comparisons and contrasts thus thrust upon their notice must in course of time educate them by dissipating local prejudices and correcting extravagant ideas of the teacher's position and function. The kind of treatment which every teacher ought to receive at the hands of his employers, and which may not inaptly be described as "gentlemanly," he is far more likely to receive if he has to deal with township instead of section trustees. By having a large staff instead of one or two individuals to deal with, trustees, on the other hand, learn how to estimate more correctly the respective merits of teachers; and as they are less hampered than section trustees are by financial considerations, they can more easily obtain good men by pursuing a policy of faithful selection and judicious liberality.

The inequality of school taxation is so great an evil that when its magnitude comes to be fully realized one can only wonder how the section system has remained in existence so long. The township being the unit of the municipal system, it was adopted as a convenient starting point in the arrangement of school sections. If all the land in each township was alike good, and all townships were of a certain regulation size and shape, the evil we speak of would be of very small proportions, for all sections could be made then about equal in dimensions and tax-paying capacity. But townships are often of such peculiar shapes that the creation of one or two dwarfed or badly outlined sections cannot be avoided, while the land in some localities is often in great part swamp or marsh—quite uninhabitable and not seldom impassable. Occasionally a section, when of the proper size and shape, is intersected by a stream which has no bridge over it within the section limits. Owing to these and other causes, some ratepayers in a township have often to pay two or three times as much as their more fortunate neighbors in order to get the same quality of education for their children. If all sectional subdivisions in one of these unshapely townships were abolished, the same grade of school could be kept up in each locality at the expense of all, and the children could be allowed to attend the school most convenient to them.