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REV. EGERTON RYERSON, D.D., LL.D.

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"For a quite complete and admirably arranged Exhibition, illustrating the Ontario system of Education and its excellent results; also for the efficiency of an administration which has gained for the Ontario Department a most honourable distinction among Government Educational agencies."—*Award of the American Centennial Commission, 1876.*

Such was the gratifying tribute which a number of eminent American Educationists unconsciously paid to the distinguished founder of the Ontario system of Education, in estimating the results of his labours as illustrated at the Centennial Exhibition.

Although it is difficult to sketch, with freedom, the life and career of distinguished men, while living, yet it can, nevertheless, be done; and there are cases in which it is desirable and fitting that it should be done as far as possible. Such a case is that of the Rev. Dr. Ryerson, whose official career as the founder of our Educational system was so honourably and successfully closed in 1876. The history of Dr. Ryerson's life and labours has yet to be written; but this cannot be done in the lifetime of the present generation. The conflicts of his noted and eventful career have been so many, and have been more or less so severe that it would be a difficult and delicate task just now to describe them, or to discuss the motives and proceedings of the principal actors with the judicial calmness which would give to such a work an impartial character. The materials are, however, abundant; and the writer of this sketch hopes that it may yet be in his power, from his long and intimate knowledge of the facts relating to these events, to be able to perform this filial duty, and to do justice to the noble qualities, statesmanlike views and comprehensive grasp of mind of the distinguished man who, while yet in the vigour of a "green old age" has reared for himself so enduring a monument as the public school system of Ontario, and has enshrined his name in the hearts and affections of his countrymen.

In seeking to account for the great success which has attended the labours of the late Chief Superintendent of Education, in founding our system of public instruction, it is desirable to enquire into the causes of that success. Energy and ability will do much in any great work, and they are essential to its successful accom-

plishment; but many a man of untiring energy and undoubted ability has failed, because he had overrated his own powers and had lacked tact and judgment in their exercise. Dr. Ryerson may have erred now and then in these particulars; but such errors were the rare exception and not the rule. He wisely laid down certain great principles which he believed to be essential to the success of his labours. These general principles may be thus summarized: 1. That the education of the people should be by themselves, and through their own agency; and that they should, therefore, be consulted in regard to all school legislation. 2. That the aid of the Government should only be invoked where it can most effectually stimulate and assist local effort in this great work. 3. That the property of the country is responsible for, and should

contribute towards, the education of the entire youth of the country. 4. That a thorough and systematic inspection of the schools is essential to their vitality and efficiency. These with other general principles, Dr. Ryerson kept steadily in view during the whole thirty-two years of his administration of the school system of Ontario. Their judicious application has contributed largely, under the Divine Blessing, to the success of his labours.

The Reverend Egerton Ryerson, (or, as he was baptized, Adolphus Egerton Ryerson,) was born in the Township of Charlotteville, near Lake Erie, London (afterward the Talbot) District, (now the County of Norfolk) on the 24th of March, 1808. His father, Colonel Joseph Ryerson, a United Empire Loyalist in the British service at the time of the American Revolution, was born in New Jersey. He first joined as a cadet, and was one of the five hundred and fifty loyal volunteers who went to

Charleston, South Carolina. For his good conduct in bearing despatches one hundred and ninety-six miles into the interior, he was promoted to a lieutenantancy in the Prince of Wales' Volunteers by Sir Guy Carleton, (Lord Dorchester). Subsequently he was engaged in six battles, and was once wounded. At the peace of 1788 he was exiled, and went to New Brunswick, thence to Canada—he and his family enduring very great hardship in penetrating into the interior of the then unbroken wilderness of Canada. He settled in Charlotteville, and lived there about seventy years. In the war of 1812 he and his three sons again joined the British standard, and acquitted themselves bravely. During his life he held various appointments under the crown. He died in 1854, at the venerable age of ninety-four years, after having enjoyed his

