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INSPECTION AND SUPERVISION OF SCHOOLS.

NORMAL SCHOOL,
Toronto, February 13th, 1850.

To the Editor of the Journal of Education.

SIR,—I beg to enclose for insertion in the *Journal of Education*, a few remarks on the supervision of schools, and the expediency of adopting measures to confer certificates or diplomas on deserving Common School teachers with the view of elevating their occupation to the rank of a profession.

My observations are purposely of the most general character, being intended chiefly to direct attention to subjects which appear to me to be of considerable importance. The details of a thorough system of inspection I can easily supply as a basis for suitable modifications, should plans of the nature I have alluded to, be hereafter introduced.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your very obedient Servant,

THOS. J. ROBERTSON,
Head Master, Provincial Normal School, U. C.

Various circumstances connected with the Common School system as regulated by the new Act, would appear to render this a peculiarly suitable period for endeavouring to direct public attention through the medium of the *Journal of Education* to a few points connected with popular education, which appear to me to be of paramount importance, and deserving of more careful attention than they have hitherto received. Impressed with the idea that the whole subject will, in all probability, shortly experience a careful revision, and well aware of the advantage of long experience in the consideration of such matters, I venture to hope, that my remarks may lead to a more thorough examination than hitherto of the points in question, and may possibly serve to bring them more vividly under the notice of those whose public position will render the consideration of the subject an imperative duty.

The first, and perhaps the most important point to which I am anxious to direct public attention, is the inspection and supervision of schools.

It is an acknowledged maxim, that every public arrangement guaranteed by the state, and supported by the public funds, should be carefully carried out; its administration placed in suitable hands; its internal working properly regulated; and its most minute details duly adjusted to the furtherance of the end to be attained. This principle is of so general application that it is found in operation as well in the minutiae of domestic economy, as in the vast machinery of a mighty government; and to carry it into careful execution is invariably the boast of all skilful managers, whether of a family, a great commercial establishment, or a vast and extended governmental department pervading every corner of an empire.

In addition to the appointment of suitable agents and the other means usually adopted to further this object, it is everywhere acknowledged that a strict and frequent examination of the working of all parts of the machine is absolutely necessary.

In domestic or more extended private establishments, the means of effecting this object are sufficiently obvious, and we find them stringently applied in all well regulated institutions; but in great

national concerns the methods to be adopted necessarily assume a far more complex aspect. Here, of course, the eye of the principal cannot effect the object, and in all instances subordinate agents are employed. Then follow all the usual considerations of expense, nature of the duty, mode of discharging it, selection and trustworthiness of the agents, &c., &c., all varying more or less with the machinery employed.

In a great system of national education—speaking in the most general terms, and without special reference to Canada or any other country,—one or two great principles may be alluded to as constituting a reasonable basis whereon to found the details of duty to be discharged, and the modes of operation. We may perhaps regard as the first consideration under this head the adoption of a system least likely to interfere with the power reasonably vested in all local authorities; and into this consideration several important points will necessarily enter. The most important of these I shall proceed briefly to indicate. The opinion has long been generally entertained, that he, who possesses the requisite literary acquirements, is necessarily capable of giving instruction therein. Though this opinion has been daily and hourly proved to be false, and has for some time past been rejected by the most enlightened communities, it is still by no means extinct; the inference from it is easy and simple, namely, that all persons possessed of a certain amount of intellectual cultivation are capable of forming a correct judgment of a teacher's qualifications. In another part of this letter I shall allude to this subject as exercising a most important, and, in many instances, a most unfair influence on the public teacher. I mention it now because it necessarily operates with regard to every Common School, influencing by the selection of the teacher, the nature of the system therein adopted, and the value of the instruction therein afforded, and thus affecting in a most important degree the due disbursement of public money allocated to the support of such school. It is clear that wherever less value is given for the sum expended, the purchaser is a loser; if inferior services are employed in a school, where superior might be obtained without increased expenditure, either from incapacity on the part of the judges or unwillingness to offer sufficient remuneration, then more or less of the public money is wasted; and a glance will show that this consideration bears directly upon the nature of the supervision required, the degree of authority with which it is to be executed, and the qualifications for its proper discharge. So long as inspection is of a nature to elicit merely statistical details, no information or preparation of a very peculiar character is required for the execution of the task. Such is, however, in my opinion, but a very small part of the duty of a School Inspector. In addition to the collection of a requisite statistic, the inspection of a school should include the sufficient examination of every class in all the branches wherein they receive instruction, and this examination should be conducted according to the system of teaching recommended for adoption and by no means with the view of forcing upon any one a particular mode of giving instruction, but for the purpose of imparting information to a deficient teacher, correcting the errors under which he may labour, and exemplifying some improved mode of school organization. Without some such plan no general system, however valuable, can be effectively introduced, and any school, no matter what amount of public money it may receive, may be left without the slightest opportunity of obtaining a reasonable knowledge of the improvements daily made in the art of teaching—an art now confessedly difficult