

J. H. Comfort, Esq., M. D., Inspector, Town of St. Catharines.—In reply to the circular from the Education Office, asking my views on the policy of the Department supplying library books, prize books, maps and apparatus to the Public and High Schools, I beg to say that in my opinion the maps and apparatus required for the Public Schools should be supplied by the Department exclusively, as in that way only can uniformity in kind, which is absolutely required, be maintained. Library and prize books could, I think, be as well and cheaply supplied to trustees by booksellers as by the Department. I have had considerable experience in procuring books for the Mechanics' Institute of our town, as well as for different boards of school trustees, and have a decided preference to obtaining books in the way we do for the Institute—that is, leave the order with a bookseller of the town, and no difficulty or inconvenience is experienced in getting it completed and in good time. There need be no apprehension that pernicious and worthless books would be disposed of to trustees, as a regulation could be made requiring trustees to submit a list of the books they require to the County Inspector, or some other qualified person or persons, for approval. I showed the price list of books sent with the circular to the proprietors of the largest book and stationery establishment in the town, and he tells me that he will supply to trustees the same books at the price they are sold for by the Department.

Note by the Education Department.

To this letter from Dr. Comfort the following reply was sent, dated 2nd July, 1873 :
 "The practical experience of all the American educators who have communicated with the Department on the subject is entirely at variance with yours ; besides, to compel each of the 5,000 School Corporations which obtain prize or library books, to submit their lists to the personal supervision of Local Inspectors, would occasion great delay and cause endless inconvenience. That power is now objected to in its present simple and least offensive form (in the hands of the Council of Public Instruction and the Chief Educational officer of the Province, responsible to the Legislature). It would therefore never be concurred in, without endless disputation, were that power placed in the hands of a hundred local subordinate School Inspectors, as you propose. Besides, the lists which the Inspectors should be guided by would have to be revised and reissued every three or six months at the least, so as to have in them the new and approved works from the press. Booksellers all over the Province would also be expected to keep supplies of these new books. Although you say there need be no misapprehension that pernicious or worthless books would be disposed of to trustees, yet it would be done, as in the United States, by book peddlers ; and by your proposed substitution of local for a provincial supervision over these, sales would soon be disregarded, or evaded in a way that could not be practically controlled without constant collision with School Trustees. I am aware that some booksellers, when applied to, have made the same offer which you repeat on behalf of a St. Catharines one, when they have had an object in view. The list was not sent to you for that purpose, but simply as a comparison of the actual prices of leading booksellers with those of the Depository. It is the normal condition of things, and not special cases of exceptions, which must guide the Department in matters of this sort. The question of the supply of prize and library books to Roman Catholic Separate Schools (and they obtain large quantities from the Department) has not been submitted for consideration, but it also is involved in the question, and must be practically dealt with. It would be difficult to get them to consent to the supervision of local school officers, who have by law no control whatever over their school operations."