

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

TORONTO, FEBRUARY, 1851.

PROGRESS OF FREE SCHOOLS IN UPPER CANADA, 1851.

As the important subject of Free Common School Education has begun to attract a good deal of public attention, and has excited much discussion and interest in various parts of Upper Canada, we select the following items of information from various sources relative to what has already been done to promote Free Schools in 1851. The summary will prove interesting to those who are engaged in promoting universal education in their several neighbourhoods, and may stimulate them to still further exertions in elevating the character and condition of their schools. Several other Free Schools have been established besides those mentioned below, but we have not been able to procure more authentic information regarding them. The *Toronto Globe*, a recent convert to the free school system, remarks:—

"We are glad to observe that the plan of free common schools has been adopted, at the recent annual meetings, in very many school sections through Upper Canada. The best gift the people of Canada can confer on their children is education—sound, practical education, available to all. Public money employed in educating the masses is a most profitable investment, and we hope the day will soon be when a good education is open, *of right*, to every child in the country. At the Annual Meeting of School Section No. 2 Township of York, the following resolutions were adopted:—*Resolved*, 1st—'That this meeting, recognising in the mental culture, and intellectual advancement of the people, the healthy and permanent basis of their moral and social condition; and believing, that in the wide diffusion of intelligence and knowledge exists the surest safeguard of their civil and religious liberty;—deems it to be the consistent and imperative duty of every enlightened and patriotic community, to promote, throughout the Province, a liberal system of universal education.' 2. 'That this meeting, deeply deploring the statistical fact, that in the Province of Upper Canada, out of 252,000 children between the ages of 5 and 16, but 144,000 are receiving any education; that, in the Home District, there are but 45,000 out of 88,000 attending schools of all kinds: and that, in the wealthy and metropolitan Township of York, of 2,300—626, or a little over one-fourth only, are receiving instruction in any school; believes, that the source of this great and alarming evil lies not less in the want of a general free school system, and in the culpable and prevalent indifference so commonly manifested in regard to this highly important subject.' 3. 'That the common school of this Section No. 2, in the Township of York, be *free*, and that the necessary and incidental expenses of the said school be provided for by assessment upon property.' 4. 'That the Trustees of the said school are hereby authorised and requested so to provide the same, in conformity with the 7th section of the 12th clause of the aforesaid Act.'"

The *Niagara Mail* states:—"An adjourned meeting of the school trustees of this town took place on the 6th inst., at which the question of free schools was taken into consideration. Mr. Simpson, seconded by Mr. Barker, moved the following Resolutions.—Mr. Burns in the chair:—*Resolved*, 1st. That in the opinion of this Board, it is the duty of all parents, who have the means of doing so, to educate their own offspring at their own expense. 2nd. That in cases where parents do not possess the means of defraying the cost of the education of their children, it becomes the duty of the public to step forward, and furnish such children with instruction fitting them to discharge rightly the duties of life. [The 3rd and 4th are unimportant.] In amendment it was moved by Mr. McBride, seconded by Mr. Munro:—That this Board hail with delight the wisdom of the Legislature, and their patriotic desire for the good of the country in the liberal system of education provided for all classes of the community, believing firmly that in the general diffusion of education consists the proper action of the people in their civil, moral, and religious duties. That for the full attainment of this desirable end, this Board are of opinion that no distinction should exist in the

common schools of the country as regards paying or nonpaying pupils, believing that although it may have the appearance of injustice to the owners of property, it will ultimately result even in a pecuniary point of view to their advantage, as well as to the advantage of the community generally, in the increased sobriety, industry, and absence of crime which is well known to exist in a well educated community over one not possessing the same advantages. Resolved, therefore, That the common schools of this town shall be free to all the children therein, so long as they conform to the rules of the school at which they may attend.

After considerable debate the amendment was put to the vote, and carried. Thus it will be seen that the free school system has been adopted by a vote of 6 to 2, a circumstance which cannot fail to be gratifying to every one who is favourable to an enlightened and diffusive system of education. In the words of the Editor of the *New York Tribune* we would remark, that "As a property holder, we wish the destitute to feel that their children are welcome to all the advantages of our schools, not as a matter of favour to them, but of wise and conservative public policy.

In the town of Perth the *Bathurst Courier* states, "The votes polled for free schools were 107, against free schools, 64. Many who voted against Free Schools *for this year*, are in favour of the system, and would have voted for it, had there been a guarantee that a union of the grammar school and the common schools would be immediately effected."—The *Boumanville Messenger* states, "We are informed that four or five school sections in this Township, including our two village schools, have adopted the free school system."—The *Oshawa Reformer* states, "At the annual school meeting in Oshawa a resolution was passed in favour of the free school system."—The *Chippewa Advocate* states, that "Chippewa has decided emphatically in favour of free schools. It has been decided that education in the common schools in Chippewa shall be free to all within its bounds, without regard to class, creed, or condition. The decision of the meeting of last Saturday evening was a unanimous affirmative on this question. In taking the vote on the question, not one of the large and respectable gathering of the people then present voted in the negative. We are glad to be able to state that the Trustees are now busy in carrying out the wishes of the inhabitants in regard to the new organization of the public schools. It is, we understand, their determination to secure the best teachers, and separate the male from the female department."—The *Galt Reporter*, (an opponent to free schools) states, that "Several meetings have been held in the various school sections in the township of Dumfries, lately, to decide the question of free schools, and we believe the result has generally been a considerable majority in favour of a general rate on the whole school section." Galt itself has decided against free schools for 1851—The school in section No. 3, Owen's Sound, has been made free for the current year, owing to the laudable exertions of the Trustees.

The school in section No. 1, in the township of Whitby is also to be free for 1851; and in addition, arrangements are in progress to erect in an agreeable situation, a superior school house. A recent report of the educational Committee of the York County Council states, "In reference to the working of common school education generally, your Committee feel themselves called upon to state that they hail the present movement in numerous sections of this County in regard to the establishment of free schools therein, as indicative of a decided melioration in the tone of the public mind in its appreciation of this sound and enlightened mode of rendering the blessings and benefits of education available to all. And your Committee have no doubt that the result, provided that the system be fairly and candidly, and to a commensurate extent, perseveringly carried out, will be that a most salutary and satisfactory position, in regard to these matters, will be speedily attained."—The *Niagara Chronicle*, and one or two other papers, object to free schools on the ground of the inequality of the assessment law. That inequality has been removed by a recent Act of the Legislature, and therefore the objection on that ground should cease to be urged.—In several townships in the Province there has been a good deal of discussion