

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AND THE TRUANCY ACT.*

By J. H. KNIGHT, P.S. INSPECTOR, LINDSAY.

A FREE School Act implies not only that every child has a right to be educated, but also that every ratepayer has a right to know that every child in the municipality in which he pays taxes is educated.

The truancy Act of 1891 has done much to improve the attendance of children in cities and towns, and possibly in incorporated villages. It provides for the appointment of truant officers in all urban municipalities, and wherever teachers, truant officers and magistrates do their duty the attendance ought to be all that can be reasonably expected.

There is one case, however, in which the Act is weak and could easily be improved, and that is where the absence from school is the fault of the child and not of the parent or guardian; in fact, where the child actually plays truant. To fine or imprison the parent, when he has done all he can do, is not likely to accomplish the end in view. If the child were imprisoned two days for the first offence, two weeks for the second, and received a flogging for the third, very few scholars would stay away of their own accord. It might be better still if the flogging were administered for the first offence.

Whether our legislators supposed that it did not matter whether children attended school in rural sections or not, or whether they wished to see how the Act would work in urban municipalities, it is hard to tell. They provided that trustees of rural schools might appoint truant officers, that is, the appointment was optional. I know of

two cases where such appointments were made, but no good came in either case.

The plan I propose for rural sections supposes that truant officers are not necessary. It also supposes that it is not necessary to notify parents to send their children to school.

The Truancy Act requires the assessor to make a list containing the name, age and residence of every child between the ages of 8 and 14 in the municipality, and the name and residence of each child's parent or guardian, and return the said book to the clerk of the municipality with the assessment roll.

Let the clerk make a copy of the list, dividing the names according to the sections in which the children reside, and furnish the copy to each secretary-treasurer.

Immediately after the 30th day of June, let the secretary-treasurer, with the assistance of the teacher, compare this list with the register. The assessor's list might contain the names of children who had not attended school during the last twelve months. For each such child a fine of \$10 should be entered against the parent or guardian, and for every child who had attended less than 150 days, a fine of five cents for every day the child had been absent from school should be entered against the parent or guardian.

The secretary should notify each party concerned that the fines entered against him would be collected with, and in addition to, all other taxes for which he was liable, unless good cause was shown that the said fine should not be imposed.

There should be two appeals, first

*Read at the Ontario Educational Association, April 18th, 1900.