

THE PRESBYTERIAN.

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ABSTRACTLY considered, the position taken by the Chairman of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners of Montreal is undoubtedly right, that no education can be sound but that which is based on the Word of God. This was the view taken by our forefathers, and it was upon this view they acted when they placed a school beside every parish church and enacted that in the schools ordinary education should be accompanied by religious teaching. Circumstances cannot make that wrong which was right, and no argument of expediency can be brought to the support of the commission of what is, in itself evil; but yet circumstances cannot be overlooked in considering how best to carry a principle into practice. It is not always what is theoretically perfect that must be insisted on, but what is practicable. In this matter of education the end to be reached must be considered, and then what are the best means to secure the result aimed at. These two points, we think, should cover the ground of the present controversy between sectarian teaching, on the one hand, and on the other, the adoption of one common school system accessible to the children of parents of all denominations alike.

The end to be reached is, undoubtedly, the education of the whole people of the Dominion without respect to race or creed. Restricting ourselves in the meantime to the Province of Quebec as far as the argument depends on details, although we think the general principle laid down will include all the Provinces, what do we find as the result of the system hitherto pursued? It is impossible to conceal the fact that, in spite of the reports of the Superintendent of Education, ignorance of the barest elements of education is the rule among the majority of the population. The result of Catholic school teaching has been most discouraging. To judge merely by official reports there would be every reason for congratulation at

the progress made; but facts, too well authenticated to be disputed, show that among the French Canadians the proportion of those who are able to read and write is almost incredibly small. It is the testimony of those taking down depositions and affidavits, or having to obtain signatures of the French Canadian population to legal documents in the Courts at Montreal, that they seldom think of asking whether the witness, &c., can sign or not, but write at the end of the document mechanically, "and deponent saith he cannot sign" in very few instances having to change this to the form "and hath signed." The same evidence comes from other quarters and in even a stronger form. It is asserted most positively, by those who are in a position to know the facts, that the education even in the higher institutions of learning is so defective as to be useless for all practical purposes of life. These statements are fully borne out by the facts that French Canadians are unrepresented in the higher branches of engineering, metallurgy, mineralogy, physics, and in employments dependent on a knowledge of these. A very remarkable article which appeared in the *Minerve*, an influential French newspaper published in Montreal, and which excited great attention and called forth expressions of indignation from the French press generally throughout the Province of Quebec, contains, unintentionally, apparently the strongest condemnation of the course of education given by the schools and colleges. The article was one defending the appointment of Mr. Brydges as Intercolonial Railway Commissioner, the main argument being that there was no man among the French Canadians capable of filling the office, and that because their attention had not been directed to engineering. Incidentally admissions were made corroborative of what we have above stated. It is clear, therefore, that there is something radically wrong in