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THE HON. GEDEON OUIMET, Q. C., D. C. L.

Prior to the Confederation of the British North American Provinces, the administration of the Laws of Public Instruction in Lower Canada was confided to a "Superintendent of Education." The office was filled, first, by Dr. J. B. Meilleur, appointed in 1842, and subsequently, from 1855 to 1837, by his successor, the Hon. P. J. O. Chauveau. The Superintendent was a non-political functionary, being neither a member of the Government of the day nor of the Legislature; but he exercised, nevertheless, advisory functions in respect of legislation concerning Public Education, and a recommendatory voice as to the distribution of the public money appropriated by the House of Assembly for its advancement. At the epochs of Confederation, the British North America Act having delegated the control of Public Education almost exclusively to the Provincial authorities, the office of Superintendent was merged in that of a Minister of Public Instruction, who, besides being a member and the head of the Local Cabinet, might represent a constituency in the Federal as well as in the Local Legislature.

The subject of this notice—the Hon. Gédéon Ouimet—on Mr. Chauveau's retirement in 1878, was called upon to succeed him, as Premier of the Provincial Government and Minister of Public Instruction. Although holding a seat in the House of Assembly he was, fortunately for the interests of Education, free from the outside cares that had devolved on his predecessor as a member of the Federal Parliament; and, in consequence, the supervision of educational affairs became, in a marked degree, more efficient than it could have been before. Nevertheless, the union of the cares of State with those appertaining to Public Education was held by many to be incongruous, and in several respects hurtful to the cause of Education, notwithstanding the acknowledged advantages accruing to it from its having an influential patron and advocate in the Cabinet. Happily, the connection was abolished by an Act of the Local Legislature passed in 1875, which enacted that the administration of the Educational affairs of the Province should be replaced in the charge of a Superintendent. Public sentiment pointed to the Hon. Gédéon Ouimet as the person most eligible for the important position, and he was named accordingly on Feb. 1st, 1876. An interval of about 18 months had occurred since he had ceased to be the head of the Educational Department, and



during which the Hon. Mr. De Boucherville had been Minister.

In the comparatively brief period which has passed since the Hon. Mr. Ouimet has had charge of the educational interests of the Province of Quebec, apart from politics, a very powerful impulse has been imparted to the Educational machinery, and already a very gratifying progress has been made. The School Acts, passed and amended from time to time, in the last 37 years, and which had become very complicated in respect of practical use, and, in some cases, obsolete or inoperative, have been carefully revised and reprinted, with marginal references very useful to members of School Boards and others engaged in educational concerns. The work of the Department itself has been re-organized and rendered more efficient than before. In respect of correspondence and official intercourse with School Commissioners and Trustees, with Inspectors, and those charged with special duties in carrying into effect the laws of Public Instruction, much improvement has been effected, and this has been, in a great measure, brought about by the issuing of several important circulars, defining the functions of all concerned, instructing them in particulars and details of their duties, and encouraging, at the same time, more elevated views of their nature. On a small scale the system of public exhibitions of educational work was introduced last season, with gratifying success, so that a beneficial emulation has been stimulated amongst managers of institutions, teachers and scholars, which has led to the making up of an extensive and most interesting collection of educational objects for the forthcoming International Exhibition at Paris.

It is worthy of mention—a fact of some significance in its bearings upon the interests of a mixed population like that of the Province of Quebec—that Mr. Superintendent Ouimet is regarded with much favour by the minority of the Province generally. In all cases in which Protestant and Roman Catholic educational interests infringe upon each other, or come into collision, he has the reputation of being strictly impartial in his decisions; and, so far as one can judge from the frequency of his presence at Protestant institutions on public occasions, and from his published address, it cannot be doubted that he is at heart a real friend of education irrespectively of creed or nationality.

The law of 1875 modified, in several respects, the relations between the Superintendent and Council of Public Instruction, trans-