

or retrogressing, according to the point of view. Thirty years ago it was optional with the people of each school district to say, in annual meeting assembled, whether the tuition in their school should be free for the ensuing year. Twenty years ago that option was taken away by legislation, all public schools in the province being made free schools by law. The number of localities in which fees were charged was so small in 1871 that the voice of protest was scarcely heard, and no one has ever seriously proposed since that we should go back even to the optional system, not to speak of making the free system compulsory. The natural complement of a compulsory free school system is an obligatory attendance law to compel the parents in whose interests the law was passed to allow their children to profit by it. The plea on which the free school rests is that it is dangerous to the whole community to permit children to grow up in ignorance. There is so much force in that plea that those who pay taxes to educate other men's children have long ceased to utter protests against what they often feel to be an injustice, but its value as an argument is greatly lessened if a considerable proportion of the children are for any reason kept out of school. Non-attendance is still a great defect of our system, in spite of our stringent law, and it is very doubtful whether any means can be found to make it more effective. The plea urged now most strongly in support of the proposal to supply free school books to pupils is that many children at present debarred from attendance on account of the expense would be sent to school if they got their books for nothing. This argument has been skilfully parried in the newspapers by opponents of the movement, who point out that it applies equally well to the case of providing the child with clothing and food. It is not easy to answer this rejoinder, and therefore the present outlook for the free text-book scheme is somewhat dark. It is rather strange that the best of all reasons for not giving text-books to the pupils has not even been hinted at during the controversy. It is that a great part of the present cost of text-books is practically unnecessary. The large majority of the pupils never go beyond the third reader class. No child in that, or any lower class, ever needs a so-called "grammar," or a "geography," or an "arithmetic." All it really needs is a reader, a slate, and writing paper in the form of copy and exercise books. Of course, doing away with the former three means a change in the mode of dealing with the subjects in the classroom, but that change is coming in any case, and the text-books will become less and less necessary. The revolution in school methods here foreshadowed is not confined to Toronto alone. It is setting in all over, in different grades of institutions, and in private as well as public schools and colleges. It is a change of spirit as well as, or even more than, a change of methods, and within the next few years it will unquestionably produce results which would be startling if their approach were not so gradual.