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SKETCH OF THE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTION IN UPPER CANADA.

The description and illustrations given in this number of the buildings for the Normal and Model Schools for Upper Canada, together with the account of the imposing ceremony of laying the chief corner stone, suggests the propriety of presenting a brief outline of that system of public elementary instruction, with which those schools are now so essentially connected.

The origin of the common school system of Upper Canada, as now established, is as follows:—Annual parliamentary grants were made in aid of common schools for more than thirty years, but expended without system, and with but little advantage to the country. In 1841, the first law was passed (introduced and conducted through the Legislative Assembly by the Hon. S. B. HARRISON, then Secretary of the Province) embodying the great principle of granting money to each county, upon the condition of such county raising an equal amount by local assessment. Considerable opposition was made at first in many parts of the Province to the principle of that Act; and it is said that when the Hon. R. BALDWIN was engaged, in 1841, in an election contest in the county of Hastings, and was informed of the opposition against him, even among many of his own friends, on account of his supporting such a principle of school taxation, he answered in effect that he would rather lose his election than give up that principle. The machinery of that law requiring modification; the Hon. F. HINCKS brought in another Bill in 1843, which became a law, and which very much simplified and improved the details of the Act of 1841. By that law, the Secretary of the Province was ex-officio Chief Superintendent of Schools, with an assistant. In 1844, the office of assistant superintendent was offered to the present incumbent; and after having received the sanction of the authorities of his Church, he accepted it in the autumn of that year, upon the understanding that the administration of the school system should constitute a distinct non-political department, and that he should be permitted to provide for the performance of his duties for a year by a deputy, and have a year's leave of absence to visit and examine the educational systems of other countries, both in Europe and America, before attempting to lay the foundations of a system in Upper Canada. The whole of 1845 was employed in these preliminary enquiries, and the results were embodied, in March 1846, in a "Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada," and a draft of Bill which was introduced into the Legislative Assembly by the Hon. W. H. DRAPER, (then Attorney General,) and became a law in June, 1846. In a few months afterwards, a draft of Bill was prepared for establishing a system of schools in cities and incorporated towns, which was introduced into the Legislative Assembly by the Hon. J. H. CAMERON, (then Solicitor General,) and became a law in June 1847. These two Acts, with the modifications and improvements which experience has suggested and the progress of the system required, have been incorporated into one Act, which was introduced into the Legislative Assembly by the Hon. F. HINCKS, (Inspector General,) and became a law in 1850—the first Act to which His Excellency the Earl of ELGIN gave the royal assent after the removal of the seat of Government to Upper Canada.

Our system of public elementary instruction is eclectic, and is to a considerable extent derived from four sources. The conclusions at which the present Head of the Department arrived during his observations and investigations of 1845, were, 1. That the machinery or law part of the system in the State of New York was the best, upon the whole—appearing, however, defective in the intricacy of some of its details, in the absence of an efficient provision for the visitation and inspection of schools, the examination of teachers, religious instruction, and uniform text-books for the schools. 2. That the principle of supporting schools in the State of Massachusetts was the best—supporting them all according to property, and opening them to all without distinction; but that the application of this principle should not be made by the requirements of state or provincial sta-

tute, but at the discretion and by the action, from year to year, of the inhabitants in each school municipality—thus avoiding the objection which might be made against an uniform coercive law on this point, and the possible indifference which might in some instances be induced by the provisions of such a law—independent of local choice and action. 3. That the series of elementary text-books, prepared by experienced teachers, and revised and published under the sanction of the National Board of Education in Ireland, were, as a whole, the best adapted to schools in Upper Canada—having long been tested, having been translated into several languages of the continent of Europe, and having been introduced more extensively than any other series of text-books into the schools of England and Scotland. 4. That the system of Normal School training of teachers, and the principles and modes of teaching which were found to exist in Germany, and which have been largely introduced into other countries, were incomparably the best—the system which makes school-teaching a profession, which, at every stage, and in every branch of knowledge, teaches things and not merely words, which unfolds and illustrates the principles of rules, rather than assuming and resting upon their verbal authority, which develops all the mental faculties instead of only cultivating and loading the memory—a system which is solid rather than showy, practical rather than ostentatious, which prompts to independent thinking and action rather than servile imitation.

Such are the sources from which the principal features of the school system in Upper Canada have been derived, though the application of each of them has been modified by the local circumstances of our country. There is another feature, or rather cardinal principle of it, which is rather indigenous than exotic, which is wanting in the educational systems of some countries, and which is made the occasion and instrument of invidious distinctions and unnatural proscriptions in other countries—we mean the principle of not only making Christianity the basis of the system, and the pervading element of all its parts, but of recognizing and combining, in their official character, all the clergy of the land, with their people in its practical operations—maintaining absolute parental supremacy in the religious instruction of their children, and upon this principle providing for it according to the circumstances, and under the auspices of the elected trustee-representatives of each school municipality. The clergy of the country have access to each of its schools; and we know of no instance in which the school has been made the place of religious discord, but many instances, especially on occasions of quarterly public examinations, in which the school has witnessed the assemblage and friendly intercourse of clergy of various religious persuasions, and thus become the radiating centre of a spirit of Christian charity and potent co-operation in the primary work of a people's civilization and happiness.

The system of public instruction is engrafted upon the municipal institutions of the country. We have municipal councils of counties, of townships, of cities, of towns, and of incorporated villages. The members of county councils are elected by the councils of townships and towns—one or two for each. The members of township, city, town, and village councils are elected by the resident freeholders and householders of each municipality.

The municipal council of each township divides such township into school sections of a suitable extent for one school in each, or for both a male and female school. The affairs of each school section are managed by three trustees, who hold their offices for three years, and one of whom is elected annually by the freeholders and householders of such section. The powers of trustees are ample to enable them to do all that the interests of a good school require—they are the legal representatives and guardians of their section in school matters. They determine whatever sum or sums are necessary for the furnishing, &c., of their school and the salaries of teachers, but account for its expenditure annually to their constituents, and report fully to the local superintendent by filling up blank forms of annual reports which are furnished to them by the Chief Superintendent of Schools from year to year. The township council imposes assessments for the erection of school houses, or for any other school purpose desired by the inhabitants of school sections through their trustees. The inhabitants of each school section decide as to the manner in which they will support their school according to the estimates and engagements made by the trustees, whether by voluntary subscription, by rate-bills on parents sending children to the schools, or by rates on the property of all