

features it should be preserved. Here two questions come up;—First, how can we call a school system that makes no positive provision for religious instruction a blessing?—and, secondly, why has Halifax not shared in the blessing?

As to the first of these questions, I answer,—(1) half a loaf is better than no bread. The country had no system of common school education at all, and was drifting from bad to worse. (2) Our people are on the whole a moral and a religious people, and the new system was put into their own hands to work. They solve the religious difficulty practically. They elect trustees who encourage the reading of the Scriptures in schools, and, as the clergymen of the districts are members of the School Boards, and the teachers generally men of the yeomen class, who welcome religious influences for themselves and their scholars, most of our country schools are far from being “secular.” (3) People in the country give more time to the home training of their children in religion than is the case in towns; and in the country the avowedly irreligious class is always small. Our modern cities are the darling homes of the infidel, the reckless, the “dangerous” classes. These three reasons are sufficient to explain why our present School System does very well for the Province generally.

But why then does it not do as well for Halifax? And this question has its interest for all other towns similarly situated. That it does not do as well, is all but universally admitted. The system is expensive, and the results are unsatisfactory; there are denominational heart-burnings, and, what is still worse, public indifference to the whole thing, as if it were quite right that it should be the football of politics, and not the sacred and vital thing it is. What is the reason, and is there a cure?

I believe the reason at the root of our present evils is, that the School Act did not recognize fully and frankly enough the difference between the city and the country. It did acknowledge a difference, and met it with two provisions, viz.—it refused the city the right to elect a School Board, and it empowered the Board that it called into existence to treat with already existing schools,

and to pay them with city money, though they remained denominational. Perhaps it was not foreseen that here was not only the thin end of the wedge introduced, but a Board created peculiarly adapted for driving the wedge home. It would have been far better to have adopted the Ontario system at once,—to have allowed the citizens to manage their own school affairs; to have given a Board power, should the citizens so desire, to appropriate the school taxes of Roman Catholics to R. C. separate schools, and the rest of the money to common Protestant schools. For, to suppose that in a city of 35,000 people, over 15,000 Roman Catholics admirably organized, and faithful to their spiritual advisers, and who had already contributed largely to erect schools, to be taught by “the Christian brothers” and by “sisters,” would be satisfied with Common Schools where no religious teaching was given, or where the Protestant version of the Bible was read, and where most of the teachers would be Protestants, was to show considerable ignorance of human nature and avowed Roman Catholic ideas. The result of trying to shuffle over the difficulty, instead of meeting it squarely, has been to give the Roman Catholics more than they themselves would have asked, and the Protestants less than they have a right to demand. At present the Roman Catholics have the advantages, and the rest of the taxpayers the disadvantages, of both the Common School and the Denominational systems; and all this has come about, seemingly without any one intending it; and nobody seems to have any distinct idea as to how far it may or ought to go.

In these circumstances, what is to be done? Should any one propose that we go back to the beginning again, and make a better beginning of it; carry out a Common School system in its entirety of a secular School and none other in each ward or half ward of the city, my answer is, that such a policy is now impracticable, and even were it otherwise, at the best, not a thing to be very enthusiastic about. But it is impracticable, and that is enough about it. The Catholics have got Separate Schools in Halifax, and it is much easier to keep than to get. What is needed now is a