

REMARKS ON THE SCHOOL BILL.

If there be one thing of which we are justly proud, it is the high position of this country, as compared with other countries, in the average scale of intelligence, and if there be one thing more than another upon which we have to depend for further advancement in intelligence and general prosperity, it is our educational system. Although we shall be called on to consider, during this session, questions of great magnitude, questions relating to public policy, involving the expenditure of large sums of money, and largely affecting our future, for weal or for woe, yet the subject of our general system of education far surpasses them in importance.

I agree with those who say that practical experience is of great moment in this affair, and I frankly acknowledge my want of that experience, and the extreme diffidence and hesitation with which I venture to lay my views before the House. And it is because I consider it of such importance and because I believe that practical experience should, to a very large extent, govern our actions in dealing with it, that I attach great weight to the remarks that have been made in this House with reference to the attitude of the country. If we have heard, as we have on several occasions from the Treasury benches, when measures were proposed on both sides of the House, the objection raised to them that they were not demanded by petitions from the people—that there were no expressions of popular opinion in their favor, I ask can you conceive any question to which this sort of objection could be raised with greater force than to the question of our public schools? We know that there are an almost infinite number of common schools throughout the country, that there are meetings of the ratepayers in every school section, that the people pay directly large sums of money every year for the maintenance of these schools, that it is our proud boast that the common school tax, though cheerfully borne, is the heaviest burden on the ratepayers, and that the people at large are possessed of great practical experience in the matter—I say, looking at all these facts, our common school system is a subject upon which, if upon any, you may expect an early and lively expression of the popular will. If there is anything seriously wrong in that system, there would be almost immediately a loud and universal expression of public opinion upon it. Therefore, I concur in the view expressed by