

THE committees appointed respectively by the New Brunswick Provincial Institute and the Nova Scotia Educational Convention, in regard to the holding of an Interprovincial Convention, are obtaining information to be laid before the executive committees of both bodies. It appears to be the unanimous wish that such a convention should be held. The Nova Scotia Association at its last meeting warmly approved of the step and St. John was suggested as the place for holding the Convention. The feeling in the N. B. Institute was in favor, although there was no opportunity for any discussion of the matter. It remains for the Prince Edward Island Convention, which assembles in October, to take action. We see no serious obstacle in the way of such an interprovincial gathering. If arrangements can be made for a time convenient to all, and to arrange for the holding of sessions of each Provincial Association for the transaction of their legitimate business, the most pressing difficulties would be overcome. Some sacrifices may have to be made, but they will be slight in comparison with the great good that will result from the meeting; and we feel confident that when the time comes to make the final arrangements no obstacle will be regarded as insurmountable.

ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS.

It is a chronic complaint that the ordinary subjects which form an English education are not efficiently taught in our schools; that pupils leave even the higher grades totally unable to write a sentence in an easy, intelligible style, in a fair hand, and devoid of ordinary blunders in syntax and spelling. Are these and such statements facts or exaggerations? If the latter, it ought to be an easy matter to disprove them and correct an error, the repetition of which must be productive of harm. If there is any foundation in fact for such statements, there should be an honest effort—immediate and general—to substitute for our present methods of teaching English, others that would secure better results.

Let us grant at the outset that there is some ground for the statement that the majority of students leave school without the ability to express their thoughts in clear, well-formed sentences, free from ordinary blunders in spelling and syntax. That the ability to write finished sentences requires careful training and a very considerable amount of practice is very evident. As a matter of fact poor composition is not confined to the pupils of our schools—it is very general even with those who have had the advantages of a fair education, and considerable experience in

writing. This may be the result of defective training. And this defective training is not confined to the schools of these Provinces. A few years ago the Superintendent of Education for Massachusetts gathered and tabulated the results of an examination, the purpose of which was to ascertain how many pupils of schools throughout the State could express themselves in a few simple off-hand sentences. These results were marvelously suggestive of what could not be done, and in the great majority of cases showed that the efforts to teach the important branch of English composition were a lamentable failure, at least so far as practical results were concerned. We wonder if the test of the ability of pupils a little nearer home would be productive of better results. We fear they would be far from satisfactory, except in the case of pupils with a natural aptitude for English composition. In the great majority of children this aptitude does not exist. Does our present system of teaching beget a taste for English composition, and tend to develop a pupil's powers in that direction? So far as we have observed we believe that it does not.

As the limits of this article will not admit of a full discussion of this point, we shall confine ourselves to a few of the ordinary methods of teaching English grammar and composition.

Take an examination paper given to pupils in the higher grades of our schools, in order to form an idea of the line of teaching which prevails. It has many questions of theory, many definitions of terms, many nice points of grammar to be decided upon; some sentences of improper syntax to be corrected and the rule given, while a large portion of the paper or papers is devoted to analysis and parsing. The essential requirement—that pupils give expression to their own ideas on given subjects—is an exceedingly small factor in the paper. Now it is evident to a thoughtful person that this condition of things should be reversed, that a greater amount of practice and less of theory should be required of pupils. If they have been given a great deal of practice in writing sentences in the lower and intermediate grades, a portion of their work in the higher grades may very profitably be devoted to the study of the principles of grammar and their application by means of analysis and parsing. That pupils have had that amount of practice that will enable them to express their thoughts with tolerable ease and fluency is questionable when we compare results. Why, then, give them sentences to analyze—to take apart, when the rational and common-sense plan ought to be to teach them to compose—to build up sentences. Another source of mischief in teaching English composition is