

system under his first Act, passed in 1846. This Bill became law in 1850, and is the basis of the Public School Law of Ontario at the present day.

In advocating the dissociating of the administration of the Education Department from the regular governmental administration of provincial affairs, it is well to recognize the liability of unwise and ill advised interference on the part of the Legislature, the Education Department being powerless to resist. The Legislature is supreme, and must necessarily remain so. But whether the Legislature is competent to improve or change the school law without the guidance of a body whose experience and special knowledge can give the right to advise, must be doubted. Dr. Ryerson, sensible of this weakness of his position, and not having learned by experience what other evils he was invoking by his counsel, in 1869 and in 1872, and on, until he succeeded in having his counsel taken, urged upon the local Government to assume the control of the Department, and to give to the Superintendent of Education a seat in the House and a place in the Cabinet. This was done on the 10th of February, 1876. That the evils gotten rid of were more than counterbalanced by those which came in with the change, I think we shall see further on.

A feature of the old system of administering the school law was the Council of Public Instruction. This body was organized in 1846, and consisted at first (in addition to the Chief Superintendent, who was member ex-officio) of five members, and never of more than eight. They were appointed by the Government on the recommendation of the Chief Superintendent. They were gentlemen of education, intelligence, and high social position, and were representative in the sense of being men of prominence and influence in the different religious bodies to which they belonged. This Council was an important factor in popularizing the new system of non-sectarian public instruction; for the opposition to it in the beginning arose, in great measure, from the jealousy of the different religious sects. Non-sectarian education was a new thing in the world. It had been introduced in Ireland in 1831 only. In England it had not yet been tried. The Upper Canada Council of Public Instruction, representing every important religious sect, when it sanctioned methods of religious instruction and worship in Public Schools, and authorized text-books and programmes of studies, by its very constitution guaranteed to the religious community the orthodoxy of what was done. But in course of time it came to be seen that the Council was in no educational sense a representative body. The gentlemen composing it were by their occupations debarred from all real knowledge of the wants of the people in the schoolroom. Most of them had received their own education in other countries and in other conditions. As judges of the general fairness and honesty of school regulations, and of the moral innocuousness of text-books, they were beyond reproach. They could endorse the ordinances of the Chief Superintendent with perfect readiness, because as to all interests which they were appointed to protect the Chief Superintendent was as liberal and impartial as they collectively could wish. But that system which now for nearly thirty years the