

# THE BULLFROG.

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## THE EDUCATION ACT.

It were the merest folly to deny that the Education Act, passed last session, is eminently unpopular throughout the Province. We cannot take up a country paper without seeing an article directed against the measure, and we have already opened our columns to the expression of sentiments hostile to the workings of the Act as at present constituted. Yet the Act has been carefully drawn up, and is, taking it all in all, rather a good Act than otherwise. The difficulties which environ all educational questions have been for the most part successfully combated, and the faults of the Act lie, not in its provisions, but in the mode of carrying them out. We have no fault to find with the Constitution of the Council of Public Instruction, nor the method resolved upon for appointing the district revision Commission;—indeed, the head quarter arrangements of the Act seem unexceptionable, and calculated to promote education upon a sound and liberal basis. Yet the Act is eminently unpopular, for reasons which we shall endeavour to point out. In the first place, the wording of the Act is by no means clear. Let us take, for example, the following paragraphs, as relating to the first appointment of Trustees:—

23. The annual school meeting for the appointment of trustees and other school business, shall be held in the school house of the section, or if none, in any other convenient building, on the last Tuesday in October. The first meeting succeeding the passing of this Chapter, shall be convened by the Clerk of the Commissioners, and all succeeding meetings by the trustees, or where none exist, by the Clerk, by notices posted in three of the most public places, at least three days previously, signed by the Clerk, or trustees, as the case may be.

24. At the first annual meeting under this Chapter, three trustees shall be appointed in each section, and at each annual meeting thereafter, one of the trustees first elected shall go out of office by ballot and another shall be elected in his room; provided always that he may be re-elected with his own consent. Any person appointed a trustee, and refusing to act, shall forfeit the sum of ten dollars.

25. At every annual meeting the majority of the freeholders and householders present shall elect one of their number to preside over the meeting, and shall appoint a Secretary to record its proceedings; and the chairman shall decide all questions of order, and shall take the votes of rate payers only, and shall give a casting vote in case of an equality of votes. Rate-payers in this Chapter shall mean the persons whose names are included in the last county rate roll for the district, rated in respect of real or personal property, but shall not include persons rated only for poll tax.

From the foregoing clauses, we presume that the trustees are, or have been elected, by the votes of all such persons as pay any rates—however small—and here at once we have a clue to the dissatisfaction so universally expressed. The appointment of Trustees is almost, if not entirely based upon a system of universal suffrage; whereas Education is one of those points whereon the opinion of the educated classes should, as a mere matter of common sense, outweigh the opinion of the masses. An educational system cannot be successfully carried out by the people, inasmuch as its one aim and object is to elevate the people to a standard hitherto

beyond their reach. If we wish to raise the intelligence of the masses, we must place before them an intelligence superior to their own;—in a word, we must set on high the advantages of education if we would have such advantages duly recognised. When a Government undertakes to legislate for the education of the people, it assumes a task purely paternal. It should not seek to coerce, neither can it hope to dictate;—it must fall back upon the combination of experience and common sense. And the combined influence of these two inestimable qualifications is not ordinarily underrated. When a man draws up a will, he thinks twice ere resolving upon his executors. When a man finds himself on the brink of the grave, he is not a little anxious regarding those whom he may elect as trustees of his children's fortunes. No man would, in such a case, desire his children's interests to be confided to any one whom a jarring crowd of hungry relatives might think proper to elect by ballot. And we cannot see why a Government should be indifferent as to the moral character and social position of trustees appointed to carry out its own schemes regarding education. The duties assigned to school trustees under the Education Act, are open to the gravest abuse, and it is of the utmost importance that such trustees should be nominated with reference to individual character and local influence. But local influence may in some cases render a man obnoxious to the majority of rate payers, and the latter may elect a trustee totally unfitted for the duties assigned him. We are of opinion that in each school district a limited number of gentlemen should be held eligible for trusteeship, with reference to a high property qualification, real or personal. Were such the case, we have little doubt that all parties would be materially benefited.

But popular indignation has not been called forth with reference to the election of trustees, but rather as regards the provisions of the Act concerning school support. And here we are of opinion that the Education Act needs revision. To expect that any body of men with a spark of self-respect will tamely submit to be taxed in the manner laid down in the following paragraph, is to expect what is altogether unreasonable:—

26. The annual meeting shall receive the report of the trustees as to the state of the school, and the funds required for its support in the ensuing year; and the majority shall decide as to the manner in which such support shall be raised—whether by subscription or assessment; and in case it is decided to raise the required funds by subscription, and the sum subscribed for the support of the school fails to be realized, the balance shall be raised by assessment in manner as hereinafter mentioned, the amount previously paid being taken into consideration; and if a majority present agree to raise money for the support of one or more schools by assessment; or for the purchase of lands whereon to erect school-houses; or for the building or repairing them,—they shall then appoint three assessors who shall forthwith assess the amount upon the inhabitants of each section by an equal rate upon such section to be imposed according to the assessment roll for the year to be furnished by the Clerk of the Peace for the County or district in which such school section shall be situate, and shall be collected by a collector, to be also appointed at such meeting, under a warrant to be signed