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POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES.

(BY THE EDITOR.)

As considerable correspondence has taken place in the department of Public Instruction respecting the authority of School Trustees, especially in cities, towns, and incorporated villages, and as the discussion of the question has been introduced into some of the public papers, we deem it proper to explain the objects and nature of the provisions of the School Act on this important subject.

2. From the correspondence on the subject of the School Law, which was printed by order of the Legislative Assembly last year, it appears that in each of four reports which the Chief Superintendent made to the Governor General, between March 1846 and May 1850, he adverted to the radical defects of the School law in reference to the office of School Trustees, and the necessity of increasing their powers, in order to improve the Schools, as well as improve the character of the Trustee Corporations. The provisions of the present Act were, therefore, intended to remedy the evils thus repeatedly pointed out and very generally felt.

3. The evils were two fold;—the powerlessness of Trustees when elected, and deficiency in the qualifications of persons elected—the latter being, to a great extent, the consequence of the former. Trustees could not establish or maintain a good school without employing a good Teacher; and they could not procure such a Teacher without securing to him a fair salary. This they could not do, as they had not power to secure the payment of such salary. They depended upon two uncertain resources for means to meet their engagements. The one was a rate-bill, the amount of which was as uncertain as the varying feelings of the persons having children to send to the school. If that resource failed, or was insufficient, as was very commonly the case, the only remaining resource (except voluntary subscription) was to petition the Municipal Council to impose a tax to make up deficiencies; and one or two persons in a school section opposed to such tax could, by their representa-

tions to the Council, almost invariably defeat the Trustees. The effect was loss to the Teacher, mortification, defeat and contumely to the Trustees.

4. Such was the case in numbers of school sections where the Trustees were intelligent, active and public spirited. In those sections where the Trustees themselves were indifferent to their duties and obligations, the state of things was still worse in respect both to children and the Teachers, especially as Teachers had no remedy against the Trustees personally.

5. The consequence of all this was, that the office of School Trustee was burdensome and vexatious; and being powerless, it fell into contempt. Intelligent and active Trustees frequently became discouraged and disgusted, and refused to serve, as did other competent persons, and incompetent persons were elected. Thus the office of School Trustee was regarded, to a great extent, if not generally, as one of the least respectable and most undesirable of all the elective offices in the gift of the people.

6. Now, the objects contemplated by the provisions of the present School Act were, as far as possible, to remedy this accumulation of evils by rendering the office of School Trustee one of the most powerful for good, and therefore one of the most honourable in town or country; and thus to induce the utmost care and vigilance on the part of the electors to choose proper persons for that office, and to induce such persons to accept it and become candidates for it, as they do in regard to other responsible and honourable offices, the occupancy of which depends upon popular election.

7. The principle on which these provisions of the School Act are founded, is in harmony with that which lies at the foundation of our general system of government. It is that of representation. In our representative system of government, a town or township tax is imposed by the elected representatives of that town or township. So a county or provincial tax is imposed by the elected representatives of the people in a County Council or in the Provincial Legislature. Those representatives possess the largest discretionary powers to raise moneys to erect public buildings, and make or authorize contracts and provide for their fulfilment. No surprise or doubt is expressed or entertained in regard to such representative powers, because they are familiar to all, and known by all to be necessary for the interests and improvements of the country, however objectionable or unwisely they may be exercised in particular cases. On the same principle are based the enlarged powers of School Trustees, whose numbers are much larger in proportion to the respective constituencies they represent than members of Township or County Councils, or of the Provincial Legislature.

8. The principle of the School Act, therefore, is, that the Trustees, or elected School Representatives, of each school division, whether section, village, town or city, shall determine the amount of every description of school expenditure, of contracts, appoint-