

## II. Papers on Compulsory Education.

### 1. SHALL WE HAVE COMPULSORY EDUCATION?

When Dr. Ryerson made a tour of the province, two years ago, to elicit information on proposed changes to the school law, the question of compulsory education was pretty fully discussed. On the merits of the plan public opinion was divided. There were those who thought that enforced attendance at school would be an interference with the rights of the citizen—would be an act of despotism. Others regarded the scheme as impracticable; or as practicable only on the assumption that the State took upon itself the duties of the parent. Its strongest advocates were ready to admit that difficulties existed; but they claimed that those difficulties were surmountable, and that the end justified the means through which alone it could be attained. If the State must feed and clothe a certain class of children, it was wiser, they held, to do so in the school room than in the jail. If, as the clearest evidence showed, the ranks of crime were filled from the ranks of ignorance, it was better that an outlay should be made to educate them, that even a less outlay should be necessitated in bringing them to justice. From time to time, those who favored compulsory education placed its merits before the country, and gradually it has been gaining ground in public estimation. Those whose calling brings most in contact with crime have been its ablest and most strenuous advocates. The Hon. Justice Hagarty has frequently called the attention of Grand Juries to it. At the Assize Court opened in Toronto, on the 30th December, he addressed a powerful charge to the Jury, in which he showed the pressing necessity there existed for interference. A petition, evidently based on this charge, has lately been circulated in that city, and has received the signatures of the most distinguished ornaments of the Bench and the Bar. This petition, we understand, will, shortly, be presented to the Local Legislature, when, doubtless, some important action will be taken.

We are told that by making the support of schools imperative on the people, the other provision is not required, as the desire to procure value for money is always a strong enough motive to secure attendance. The difficulty, however, is not with those who contribute to the support of schools, but with those who do not. "All respectable parents," to quote the language of Justice Hagarty, "gladly avail themselves of the splendid gift of free education. The only class the community at large has to fear—the class from which all damage has to be dreaded—is that with which our educational system is entirely powerless to deal." Every observant teacher has noticed that where free schools have been established the children of those who pay the highest tax are most regular in attendance; while the reverse is true of children whose parents pay the least. To the extent that this evil prevails, it is only necessary to refer to the last annual report of the Chief Superintendent. From this we learn that out of a school population of 431,812 there are 40,336, or nearly eleven per cent. who attend no school whatever. Of those whose names have appeared upon the register, 42,379 attended less than twenty days during the year; 75,788 attended between twenty and fifty days; and 99,357 between fifty and one hundred days; while the number who attended between two hundred days and the whole year was but 30,407, or seven per cent. of the whole! These figures are sufficiently startling to call for enquiry. Means are provided for the education of all; yet a very small fraction avail themselves fully of it. We know of no means whereby this state of things could be corrected better than the compulsory system. It may appear harsh. It may appear like interference with the rights of the parent. But it must be remembered that society has rights as well as the parent, and that in this case its interests are superior to those of the parent. The elements of education it is necessary that every human being should possess; and parents who neglect to give their children the opportunity of acquiring these are guilty of a double breach of duty towards their children, and towards the community which is likely to suffer from the consequences of their ignorance. Hence it is the duty of the government to step in and protect society by imposing on parents the obligation of educating their children. There is another reason why enforced attendance is necessary, one which arises out of the nature of our system. The property holders of the country are under legal obligation to provide education. They cheerfully submit to this obligation, as they are conscious an educated and enlightened class of citizens most likely to respect their persons and property. But that this result may follow, it is necessary to accompany the obligation with a corresponding one, making its acceptance a necessity. Neither obligation is complete without the other, and together they form a perfect and consistent whole. We trust that in the interest of all classes this anomaly in our school system will be removed, and

that every child, independent of its parent's will, shall reap the benefits of an elementary education.—*Canadian Home Journal.*

### 2. FORCED EDUCATION.

That our public system of education is good, surpassed perhaps by no other in the world, equalled indeed by few, must be admitted by every impartial person that has carefully examined it and compared with the other national systems of the world.

Canadians have rightly argued that an intelligent people can only be procured through the universal diffusion of primary education, and the furnishing of the best departments and means for teaching the higher branches to those who are designed to be, or who are in a situation to become our future statesmen and leading fellow subjects. They concluded that good sound learning, especially of incorporated with religious teaching, which in the absence of a State Church they believed would be more or less imparted through the zeal of our clergymen and the members of our Churches, and through the natural solicitude of parents and guardians for the eternal welfare of the young, that good sound learning we repeat would cause our people to cultivate that self-respect and decency of deportment that would keep them from our jails, reformatories and Penitentiary; and render them practically industrious, frugal and enterprising. Therefore our general public have cheerfully agreed to taxation, and in some cases rather higher and almost invidious taxation for the benefit of the children of our country in reference to education.

In return for this good nature, and for these great exertions made by all parties concerned in educating our youth or legislating for their benefit, it was reasonably expected that the masses both in the towns and cities, and in the rural districts would be reached; or in other words, that their parents and guardians would gladly avail themselves of the splendid opportunities afforded them in this respect. It has been found, however, by unhappy experience that this is not the case; that vast numbers do not reach the schools; that, on the other hand very many of the scholars, especially in the cities and larger towns are allowed to run at large to the detriment of their morals, and to their utter deprivation of useful learning.

This has caused great concern and dissatisfaction, and led certain parties to petition the Legislature to do something in the shape of compelling parents to send their children to school. The people whose money is expended for so good a purpose have a right to see that, so far as possible, it accomplish the purpose intended. From Toronto a large number of signatures have gone before the House. No wonder that the petition is signed by 'the highest names on the Bench, and by others of the most prominent citizens of Toronto,' or that the most energetic action should be taken by the friends of education to work a reformation.—*Brantford Courier.*

### 3. EARLY TRAINING.

Lord Shaftesbury, some short time ago, stated at a public meeting in London, that from personal investigation he had ascertained that of the male criminals of that city, nearly all, certainly the very large majority, had fallen into a course of crime between the ages of eight and sixteen years, and the inference he draws from this, is apparently quite a legitimate one, that if a young man live an honest respectable life till he is twenty years of age, there are forty-nine chances to one that he will maintain such a course ever after. Whether the experience of others may be of the same character with that of Lord Shaftesbury, we cannot say. That noble Lord, however, has devoted himself so long and so heartily to works of social amelioration, and has, in the course of his efforts, had such varied opportunities of studying the character and becoming acquainted with the history of many of the criminal population, as well as of comparing notes with those who in different countries have been engaged in similar labours, that very great weight is to be attached to any opinions he may advance, and any conclusions he may have arrived at in reference to these and kindred matters.

If then, it is a fact that our criminal class, as a general thing, become such by the time they are sixteen, it is one which is well deserving of the attention of fathers and mothers, and statesmen and patriots as well. The all but universal testimony of "fallen women" is that they were led astray before they were that age; that in short, those who become the pests of our streets, are ill-trained, thoughtless, neglected girls, and that such a thing as a person coming to the years of maturity, with a reputable virtuous character, and afterwards sinking to any such point of degradation as we have referred to, is the comparatively rare exception. Even though we go not so far as Lord Shaftesbury with reference to the other sex, yet the records of all our criminal courts tell what a very large percentage of those tried there are mere boys, and that those who are no longer such have been hardened by a youth of crime.

There surely must be something grievously wrong if parents do