

blame upon instruction and education, which he regards as *a pretext invented by the Government to obtain money from the people*. There is but one step from thence to contempt for education and for teachers; and this step is soon got over.

The want of consideration for the teachers, the small salary allowed them, their poverty, the wants which beset them, the state of dependence in which they live, all contribute to give the uneducated portion of the population a very unfavorable idea of education. "What is the use," will an ignorant and rich farmer say, "what is the use of education? Look at the school-master who is as *learned as the curé*! Well, he is poor, no one respects him; I who am ignorant, who know not how to read nor write more than my father or my grandfather did, am rich and respected; I am a churchwarden, a municipal councillor. Without education, I can acquire property and influence among the inhabitants of my parish. It is not true then that education assists the people in acquiring property, as, everywhere, the schoolmasters are poor and less respected than the beadle of the parish. For, if education serves to enrich the people, why are the schoolmasters, who give instruction to others, so poor, so miserable, so little respected?" This is a specious argument that I have heard used a great many times. It has been productive of very deplorable consequences, which all the reasoning in the world will not remedy; for this argument is backed by ignorance and prejudice, and, it must be said, the present school system gives it new strength.

It has been stated and repeated that the mass of the people of Lower Canada are hostile to the cause of education. This is an infamous calumny. Our people are anxious to acquire knowledge and to learn. But what can they be taught, what can they learn in the majority of our elementary schools? Nothing; not even sufficient reading to make the children appreciate its attraction or its utility. What books are placed in the hands of the pupils? For the child, reading is a painful task which he performs without any taste as well as without pleasure, and which he gives up for ever from the moment he leaves the school, where he has passed in lonesomeness and inaction the bright days of childhood.

No; the people are not hostile to education. Look at the few rare localities where zealous and well-meaning Commissioners have succeeded by incessant efforts to make education progress, in spite of and notwithstanding the law. See with what zeal the parents attend at the examinations of the schools, with what interest they follow all the exercises. In these places, worthy teachers, whom a rare devotion has drawn into the ungrateful position of teaching, have known how to render study attractive, and to conceal with art the thorns. Their pupils, therefore, progress, and this is the sweetest recompense of these worthy teachers. Is it the law which has produced these happy results? No, they existed before it. This law may have destroyed the good that existed, but it cannot be productive of any.

Ought we then to be astonished that the people who pay uselessly for the instruction of their children murmur and feel badly disposed towards the present law? We ought rather to be astonished at their patience, in supporting a state of things which compels them to pay for the education of the youth, who lose their time in bad schools, where they learn, for want of anything better, idleness and perhaps something worse.

Create a rational, uniform, and efficacious system of public instruction; give it all the necessary requisites that it may recommend itself by its good efforts, by its happy results, then the people will hasten to give it the most cordial support, as they have always done, to what they know to be good, useful and advantageous.

Third Question.—What would be the best means to adopt for the advancement of Primary Instruction and to perfect our system of Elementary Schools?