

guardians, and that the right of the State to interfere is but secondary and derivative. It will be a grand day for any country when it reaches the advanced position in which its citizens can be trusted to provide for the whole intellectual, moral and religious training of the young under their individual charge. It will be a grand day for the teaching profession when its dignity is so recognized, and its remuneration so adequate, as to make it worth the while of the most talented to secure the most thorough preparation for it at their own expense, just as is now the case in the other learned professions.

To measure ourselves by ourselves is, we have good authority for believing, not a mark of wisdom; certainly it is not the best aid of progress. Are not the educational institutions of Ontario in some danger from a habit of this kind? A prominent daily made an observation a few days ago to the effect that some one, perhaps Dr. Ryerson, having once dropped the remark that the Ontario Public School system is the best in the world, we have been congratulating ourselves ever since. We often hear an opinion not quite so sweeping, perhaps, expressed by some graduate or other admirer of the Provincial University in respect to that institution. A little scepticism in regard to the perfection of both might do them no harm. The best test of an educational system or institution is afforded by its fruits. Is it, or is it not, clear that the average graduate—to speak *more Americano*, of the Ontario Public or High school, is superior in intelligence, thinking power, versatility of mind, and facility in the correct use of his own mother tongue, to the average graduate of a Nova Scotian, New England or Western school? Is it clear that judged by these same tests the average graduate of Toronto University is so immeasurably the superior of him from even some of our own “petty,” “one-horse,” colleges? We are not denying the fact, but merely suggesting the query. “To see ourselves as others see us,” is often helpful; and there are those who are ready to say that our public and high schools are so hampered by machinery and compulsory cram that teachers cannot do their best in the way of true education, and that even in University College, with one or two grand exceptions, the learned professors have not learned to be scientific educators, and that some departments of the very highest importance, to which special attention is wisely given in many of the smaller colleges, such, for instance, as original writing and independent criticism by students, are almost wholly neglected.

A FETTERED PROFESSION.

We note with surprise the readiness with which bodies of teachers will sometimes endorse departmental regulations the effect of which is still further to curtail the too narrow limits of their own individual liberty of action. A notable instance suggests itself at once in the case of the text-books. These books are the tools with which the schoolmaster does his work. In regard to the choice of these we should expect to find every intelligent teacher emphatic in insisting upon the largest freedom at all compatible with the unity of the public school system. Who should be so competent as the teacher

to select the best book? Who can have so good a right to have a voice in the selection as the man who is responsible for the efficient use of the book? What would the doctor say to a Government regulation which should undertake to determine the medicine or regimen he should prescribe for every class of patients? Every earnest teacher has an honourable ambition to see his work rise more and more to the dignity of a profession. Such an aim is manifestly unattainable so long as he is bound hand and foot by a complicated set of cast-iron rules, which take from him all liberty of action in respect not only to the subjects he shall teach but to the very manuals he shall use in: the teaching, reducing him as nearly as possible to the level of a mere teaching machine.

This would be intolerable to a man of independent mind, capable of thinking and acting for himself, even had he some guarantee that unexceptionable books would in each case be chosen. Were the selection in each instance made by a board of highly educated men, every one of whom was a practical teacher and an expert in some particular branch of the profession, it would still be objectionable. No man of mind, no matter of what trade or profession, can be without some ideas of his own, or can do his best work in the exact lines prescribed by another. But when, as is now the case in Ontario, we have not only a one-book system, but that one book chosen by a single mind which, however great, has not yet been proved to enfold all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and worse than all, that one book manufactured to order by some amateur hand, the climax of absurdity seems to have been reached.

The first fruits of this wonderful policy are now before us in the shape of the First Reader, Parts I and II. We have examined these books and may perhaps in a future number have something to say about them, though possibly it may be thought fairer to wait until more of the series are ready. Meanwhile, we wish to put a hypothetical, but quite possible, not to say probable, case. The Education Department and, through it, the public of Ontario, have contracted for these books at a great expense and are under heavy bonds to use them and no others for ten years to come. Suppose now that the experiment should break down in practice. Suppose that the books should prove wholly unsuitable. Suppose, for instance, that the First Reader should be found on trial to be decidedly inferior, if not utterly impracticable, constructed on defective principles, crowding as much into one lesson as the average pupil should be expected to master in three; failing largely in the simplification and disguised repetition which are so necessary for young children—suppose in a word the teachers should after trial unanimously declare it unsuitable and comparatively worthless—what is to be done about it? What provision has the contract-making and copy-righting department for meeting such an emergency?

And, be it observed, this question of the quality of the book as a book for the child learner, is *the one great question*. We have heard a great deal about the cost of the books, the quality of the paper used, their mechanical excellence in other respects, etc. All these are points worthy of attention, but they all sink into insignificance in comparison with the all important question of the fitness of the book for its purpose—its adaptation to the mind of the child into whose hands it is to be put. Failing here, it fails everywhere. What guarantee has teacher or public that it may not fail here? And if so, what? Do teachers, who, in virtue of their professional knowledge and experience, should be the advisers of the public in such matters sufficiently consider all these points before recording their verdict in favour of the new policy of the Department?