

# JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

## OUR TEACHERS.

THE occupation of a Teacher is a very onerous and wearisome one. This, we presume, will be denied by no one having any knowledge of the matter, either from experience, or observation. A few years since, it might, with justice, have been added that it was also a thankless occupation, or pretty nearly so, but, thanks to the operation of the School Law now in force, this can no longer be said. Through the wise provisions of that Law, the profession—for such we consider it—of a Common School Teacher, has undergone many ameliorations. The Teacher is now recognized as occupying a higher social standing than formerly, his labors are more fairly remunerated; and he is surrounded by many comforts, protections, and facilities for professional action, formerly unknown. We have no idea of saying that any Teacher is overpaid, provided he performs the duties which his engagements demand, many are still much underpaid, but we think that, on the average, they receive a fair remuneration, or pretty nearly so.

So much having been received by the Teacher, he cannot be too careful in scanning the other side of the account and seeing what he gives in return. We wish particularly to call attention to this matter; for not infrequently complaints have reached our ears that some Teachers rest quite too lethargically upon the comfortable beds prepared for them. It is said that, to repeat the popular expression, some of them require to be "hauled over the coals," for neglect of duty. It is sometimes urged that, so far as regards Teachers thus disposed, the old Law was better than the present, inasmuch as it brought the two principals in the School Contract, the People and the Teachers, more nearly together. Now, the contract is really made by and between the Teachers and Trustees; and any complaints against the former must be made to the latter. But the causes of complaint, however strongly felt, may be only general and not special. There may be no one particular charge which parents, or guardians, can make against the Teacher, or which the trustees may be able to bring home to him, yet the impression may be general and undoubted that, as a Teacher, he is very inefficient. Under the old system of doing things, the people would summarily rid themselves of such a Teacher, simply by signifying that they wanted him no longer. It is complained that, under the New System, this is not so easy, that people find themselves compelled, at times, to pay their School taxes whilst being imposed upon by a Teacher in whom they have no confidence whatever.

This complaint is more likely to occur, and indeed does occur more frequently, in towns than among a like number of population, in the country; because, in the former, where no special charges are made against teachers, it is usual to keep them on from year to year. People may endure an inefficient Teacher for one or two terms, without murmuring; but when such a one becomes a sort of fixture in the School-house, his presence must be really exasperating to those whose children are committed to his charge.

We must observe, however, that in thus alluding to general complaints which occasionally come to our knowledge, whether from town, or country, we are not in a position to refer them to any particular case. We may also take this opportunity of recording our high appreciation of the Teachers of Halifax, as a body. We believe that there are but few male Teachers employed in this City beneath the first class. We also believe that certainly

a large proportion of them, not only in acquired abilities, but, in skill, energy, faithfulness, and all the other requisites of their calling, stand at the very head of their profession, and are not to be surpassed, in this respect, by any in the Province, if, indeed, anywhere else.

We can readily understand how this unpleasant and unsatisfactory state of affairs above alluded to, may come about. A Teacher may pass the best of examinations and hold the highest class certificates; his moral character may be spotless and his manner agreeable; he may conduct his school operations with method and enforce its rules and regulations with strictness; yet withal he may be next to useless as a Teacher. In some cases—we cannot but think they are rare—this may be owing to an utter lack of the teaching talent. Some persons find it simply impossible to impart knowledge, or to educate other minds. But in most, if not in all, cases, this inefficiency of Teachers is owing to their indolence and indifference. *No man or woman, can teach whose heart is not in the work.* It would be better that the School-house be closed, than that it remain in charge of a so-called teacher who is not in thorough earnest in his work.

"The Teachers in the School which my children attend, are all of high standing," we heard of a gentleman saying, not long since: "the school, I have reason to believe, is managed very decorously and methodically; I myself see that my children carefully prepare all the lessons given them to learn out of school; but, at their rate of progression thus far, if they attend that school until they are grey-headed, they will not have acquired a fair education." This is a very provoking position for a parent to feel himself in. It is difficult too for him to put his grievances in a definite shape. He may not know who is the blameable individual. Whether so, or not, it is an unpleasant thing to make a formal complaint against a teacher in such a case. It may ruin the Teacher's prospects, as such, for life; it may make him the life-long enemy of the individual making the charge. What, then is to be done?

We cannot but think that Trustees should deal promptly and vigorously with such cases, without waiting to be urged thereto by ratepayers. It is their duty so to do; and if, in other respects they do their duty, Trustees cannot remain long in doubt as to whether Teachers are manfully doing the work for which they are paid, or only making a deceptive pretence of doing it. It must in the natural course of things, be specially unpleasant for those whose children are thus being trifled with, to feel themselves obliged to take the lead in measures to obtain justice; and it is unfair for Trustees to expect it of them. But we would fain hope that these words of warning will not be without their beneficial effect upon the Teachers themselves. The cause of complaint to which we have referred is one which cannot be wholly removed unless one and all determine that it shall be, and set vigorously to work with that end in view. We have no reason to believe that indolence, or indifference, or indifference to duty, is a prevalent weakness among the Teachers of this Province. It is doubtless true that the habit which leads to them, is a very insidious one; and Teachers may, by slow degrees, have rendered themselves liable to the charge of neglecting their duty before they are themselves conscious of it. We repeat that they must have their heart in the work, in order to be successful in their calling. We know that the School Teachers of Nova Scotia, as a class, are men and women of high moral worth, and of exemplary professional character; and if their reputation as Teachers is in any way affected by the deficiencies referred to, through their own honest and vigorous action, these blemishes will soon cease to exist.