

2. COUNTY SCHOOL CONVENTIONS.

The Chief Superintendent has issued a Circular calling the attention of all interested in educational affairs—and who is not?—to his proposed visit to the different Counties of Upper Canada. These visits of the Superintendent are of the greatest importance, and should not be overlooked or neglected by any intelligent voter, more especially those directly interested in the management of school matters.—*Canada Christian Advocate*.

The Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada, Dr. Ryerson, has issued a circular intimating his intention to hold County School Conventions, in each County in the Province, during the present and following months. There is much in his circular for serious thought and reflection on the part of those who have had any experience in school matters or in the management of our public schools, and we hope to see a large attendance.—*Belleville Intelligencer*.

3. PRIZES IN SCHOOLS.

The first subject suggested by Dr. Ryerson, in his circular announcing the holding of conventions throughout Upper Canada, on the subject of the School system and its improvement, is "To consider any suggestions which may be made for the amendment of the School law, for the improvement of the schools, for the diffusion of education, and for the extension and usefulness of prize-books and public libraries." This subject takes a very wide range, and may, in fact, be said in its terms to include all the other topics suggested. Under it, almost all subjects connected in any way with the School system of the country might be introduced, and we doubt not that the discussions upon it will prove of very general interest.

We purpose, however, to-day to notice that particular suggestion which has relation to the distribution of prizes in the schools—a subject which has excited a good deal of attention among educationists, and upon which the weight of evidence is pretty equally divided. There is no question that those who oppose the giving of prizes to those scholars who, in a competitive examination exhibit the greatest proficiency, are not without solid argument by which to maintain their views. It is contended that very often the lads who are really the hardest workers, and who make the best figure in the world in the long run, are not the most successful at those examinations; and that mere smartness often takes the prize from the more industrious and meritorious; and that, in such cases, the tendency is to discourage that spirit of plodding industry which at school, as in the sterner duties of after-life, are the most to be encouraged. Where the prize is awarded solely to the most successful at the competitive examination there is no question that this is too often the case. At school, as in life, mere self-possession, we might perhaps say the force of impudence, often carries off the prize against merit and modest worth. The reports of local superintendents of schools, published in the annual reports from the Educational Department, bear evidence that this fact has often militated against the usefulness and fairness of the prize system.

But these arguments, after all, apply rather to the mode of distributing prizes than to the system of prizes itself. The great danger to be avoided is in ignoring the general conduct of scholars during the entire term, and leaving to the accident of the examination the determination of the question of merit. Distributed upon a well-considered principle, which would recognise fully the steady every-day industry and attention of the pupil, they are undoubtedly of great advantage. It is simply carrying out in the school the principle which obtains through life. We all work for prizes. It may be that the particular prize which is sought after and daily struggled for may differ, in the case of different men. But all who are not mere useless drones have a prize which they keep steadily in view, and to which, with plodding labour, they daily aspire to. It furnishes the incentive to exertion, and when attained constitutes its sweetest reward. And as the great object of any educational system must be to fit boys and girls for the duties of men and women, the earlier this spirit of emulation is implanted in their minds the better. The prize at school furnishes the incentive in many cases to that exertion which ultimately becomes a part of the scholar's very nature, the habit of his every-day life, and fits him all the more for the performance of the more practical and severer duties of life's great battle. Many a lad has been impelled to exertion by the prospect of the distinction which the prize confers, who would, without that motive, remain inert and careless in his studies; and the habit acquired in the hard work of the term will become to him the capital for future usefulness and proficiency.

But how to distribute the prizes so as to secure this object is the practical question for discussion in connection with this subject. To be useful, it must, as we have said, have reference not merely to what may be the accidental success on examination day, but to the entire every-day conduct and studious proficiency of the term; and it may even be questioned whether, with that object well at-

tained, the examination as a test of merit, and a basis for the distribution of the prizes, might not with advantage be dispensed with altogether. This subject, we are glad to know, has occupied the earnest thought of the indefatigable head of the Educational Department; and the suggestion which is contained in a recent circular, that the use of merit cards would accomplish this object, is well worthy the attention of School Trustees. These cards are divided into four classes, one, ten, fifty and one hundred merit cards, and the mode of distribution is as follows:—"The one merit cards should be given daily or weekly, at the discretion of the teacher, to pupils who excel in punctuality, good conduct, diligence, or perfect recitation. Ten of the single merit cards entitle the holder to a ten merit card; five of the ten merit cards to a fifty merit card; and two of the fifty merit cards to a hundred merit card. If given daily no pupil should be entitled to a certificate or prize at the quarterly examination who had not received at least fifty merits of all classes; if given weekly, from fifteen to twenty should be the minimum number of merits of all classes, which would entitle the holder to a certificate or prize at the end of the quarter. The value of the prize should in all cases be proportioned to the number or class of merit cards of all kinds received during the quarter."

We learn that this system is practically that which is adopted in the schools of this city. These merit cards are distributed, somewhat upon the principle laid down in the above extract, and at the end of the term, twelve scholars from each division, who have attained the greatest number of them, and by that fact may be presumed to be the most deserving, are selected for examination. On the result of that examination depends the distribution of prizes. But we would suggest to the Trustees that on this an improvement might perhaps be made. The value of a prize does not consist so much in the mere money worth of it, as in the distinction which it confers. The danger of the examination as a test is, that even with the care taken to select only such as during the previous months have shown the greatest proficiency, is that still the scholars of really greatest merit may be omitted altogether, simply from constitutional inability to acquit himself well at a competitive examination. It seems to us that the boys who have, by their general good conduct and industry, entitled themselves to the privilege of appearing before the examiners, should all receive some practical recognition; and the certificates prepared by the department, which are exceedingly neat, afford a good mode of granting such recognition. These certificates would be prized as highly by the recipient of them as if they were of far greater intrinsic value. They would be to them the mark of distinction, showing that their labour had not been in vain, and spurring them on to renewed diligence for the future. Altogether, the subject is one of very great importance; and is well worthy the consideration of such conventions as those proposed to be held.—*Hamilton Spectator*.

4. TOWNSHIP BOARDS vs. SCHOOL SECTIONS.

The second subject which the Chief Superintendent of Education suggests for the consideration of the approaching school Convention in this city, is "whether or not it would be desirable to have one Board of School Trustees for each Township as there is one Board of Trustees for each city, town, and incorporated village; and whether the Township Council should not be such Board of School Trustees."

We think there can be very little question that the change from half a dozen to one Board of School Trustees in a Township would be a very great advantage. The plan of school sections was perhaps advantageous in the earlier history of the school system.—It brought the system more immediately home to each ratepayer, and by limiting the area of each separate little school principality, tended to excite in the system a more general interest. But with the progress of the system, the school sections have we fear developed in very many instances into a nuisance. Quarrels between different school sections have arisen; and in many instances real hardship has been inflicted upon parents in compelling them to send their children to the section school, perhaps a mile or two distant, when the school of the adjoining section was almost at their door. In some cases this inconvenience has been found so great, that union between sections has been formed with a view to avoiding it.

And perhaps the most important object to be attained by means of the abolition of the school sections and the creation of a Township Board, will be the greater permanency which it will give to the situation of teacher. There is nothing more to be desired in connection with our school system than this. If we would encourage really clever men to take the office of teacher, and make of it a profession, we must attach to it some greater degree of permanency than has hitherto obtained. With reference to the female teachers the difficulty does not perhaps exist to the same extent, for with them teaching is a mere convenience until marriage comes to give them the more congenial and lasting duties of home life. But it is a fact