

Irregularity of School Attendance.

In the schools of Nova Scotia for 1898, "the average of quarterly percentage of attendance" was only 66. That means that in a school of one hundred pupils, thirty-four were absent every day. Or to put it another way, every pupil on an average lost over a day and a half each week. About half the pupils enrolled attended but two days per week. There were 20,000 pupils who went as low on an average, as one day per week. The attendance in the schools of New Brunswick was no better.

Every teacher knows that irregularity of attendance is one of the worst evils against which he has to contend. At the beginning of the term he carefully classifies his pupils. He goes to school on Monday morning with his lessons carefully prepared. Those present in the various classes are deeply interested, understand the lessons fully, and are prepared to make fresh advances in the different subjects. On Tuesday morning some absentees turn up. If the teacher goes on with the work they are unable to follow, not having learned the preceding day's lessons, and not being interested they soon infect adversely the other members of the class. If, for the benefit of the irregular pupils, the teacher goes over yesterday's work, the regular pupils, being compelled merely to mark time, lose interest. In the majority of cases the irregular pupils are those who can least afford to lose any part of the teaching. It is evident then, that the tardy or irregular pupil, not only ruins himself, but that he inflicts a serious injury upon every other member of the school. School trustees are therefore justified in taking severe measures to protect the schools under their charge from so great an evil.

But there is another line of argument that leads to the same conclusion. The state, assuming that ignorance and illiteracy are dangerous elements, says that all property should be taxed to support education. It accordingly provides teachers and school accommodation for all the children, but out of every one hundred pupils thirty-four are absent. In Central Europe, and in such cities as Worcester and Cambridge, Massachusetts, only ten are absent. Now there can be no valid reason why in a city like Halifax, there should be in the hundred, say twenty-six absentees, while in Worcester there are but ten.

It is evident that the amount of time and money spent upon the schools might be productive of sixteen per cent more good than at present, if parents were only conscious of the loss their children suffer by non-attendance and the equally great loss they inflict upon others.

A man is taxed to educate his neighbors' children, under the pretence that the value of his property will be increased by the general intelligence produced. Teachers and school accommodations are provided for *all* the children, but every day many of the seats are vacant because of the carelessness of parents who permit their children to wander in the streets and drift into criminal habits. In these circumstances the schools can do but little to give the tax-payer the protection for which he pays. Evidently the state must do its duty and compel the attendance at school of those children whose ignorance is most likely to become dangerous to society.

Influenced by these considerations the school commissioners of Halifax obtained at the recent meeting of the Legislature, the most complete compulsory attendance act that has yet been enacted in America, except perhaps in New York. It provides that every child between six and fourteen shall attend school during the regular school hours, every school day. If a child is absent five days without excuse, his parent or guardian is to be notified in writing, and for a second offence he is liable to a fine of from one to twenty dollars, or to imprisonment.

If this law is honestly carried out, it will be of very great benefit to the schools of Halifax, in raising the school attendance to the high average of the most favored cities of the world. It is not wise, however, to rely wholly upon compulsory laws to secure good attendance. Teachers should make their school-rooms attractive; they should be sympathetic with their pupils, in their play as well as in their work; and they should always keep in touch with the parents in all that relates to the education of their children.

Minimum Salaries.

Considerable alarm is being manifested in various quarters as to the tendency of teachers' salaries to decrease. In nearly all parts of the Dominion the rate of salaries paid to them has year by year shown a decrease until in Quebec the average salary of elementary teachers has fallen to \$102 per year. The logical result has followed. The Principal of the Jacques Cartier Normal School says: "The pupils who received academy diplomas were desirous to teach, but up to the present time only three have been able to procure tolerable situations." In other words the province is spending money to train teachers but has not the benefit of their services because they can not make a living at teaching.

What effect has the cheap teacher upon the schools? In the same Province of Quebec, while there is an increase in the enrolment of pupils in the lowest grades,