

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE ON THE NEW SCHOOL ACT.

EDUCATION OFFICE,
Toronto, 7th December, 1849.

SIR.—As it is provided that the new Common School Act for Upper Canada, which passed the Legislature at its last Session, shall have force after the first day of January next ensuing, I desire most respectfully to submit to the consideration of the Governor General in Council, what appear to me to be the vital interests of our Common Schools in respect to that law.

1. I observe, in the first place, that the new Law (see last Section.) repeals the very Law by which Legislative aid is now granted to Common Schools in Upper Canada; that it makes no provision whatever for enabling Municipal Councils to establish Common School Libraries; that it makes no provision whatever for enabling the contemplated County Boards to perform the duties imposed upon them; that it provides no security or means by which the diversion, in any case, of any part of the Legislative School Grant from the objects contemplated by the Legislature can be prevented; and that it provides none of the means essential to acquiring the needful information in regard to any matters relating to the operations or administration of the law or the expenditure of moneys in particular cases in any Township in Upper Canada, as it does not authorize even the slightest correspondence, on either side, between the Provincial Superintendent and any Township Superintendent, leaving the Provincial Superintendent no means whatever of acquiring local information of any kind except by application to the Clerks of the County Councils. With such omissions in the general provisions and great essential parts of the School Law (without adverting to numerous details), it is obvious that its introduction must issue in a rapid decline, instead of advancement, in our Common Schools.

2. But there are many provisions of this Act still more injurious than its omissions. I will mention some of the more general. (1.) It abolishes all that has been done by the Board of Education, with a view of introducing a series of suitable Text-books in the Common Schools of Upper Canada—an event which I can look upon as little less than a calamity to the Schools and youth of the Province. (2.) It must also impair, to a considerable extent, the usefulness of the Provincial Normal School, as one object of the training of Teachers in that Institution is not only to qualify them to teach generally in the best manner, but to teach the National School Books to the best advantage, and to organize Schools according to them,—an object which is, in a great measure useless, when the authority which manages the Provincial Normal School is denuded of all right to say any thing respecting the School text-books. Scores of testimonies have been given in Official Reports and in the Correspondence of the "*Journal of Education*," as to the benefits already resulting to Schools from the labours of the Board of Education in regard to Text-books as well as in respect to the Normal School. The most useful recommendations of the Board are not even perpetuated until the action of other Boards, while its authority, in respect both to Text-books and Books for libraries, is abrogated. (3.) The new law alters the constitution and system of managing the Normal School,—repeals provisions to which that Institution owes its very existence, and, to a great extent, its harmonious and economical management—and contains provisions which will add considerably to the expense, and deduct from the efficiency of the management of that Establishment—changes that were introduced not only without consulting the Superintendent of Schools and the members of the Board of Education, who had established and matured the operations of the Normal School but against their judgment. (4.) What has been done during the last two years for improving the system of Schools in our Cities and Incorporated Towns, is also to be abolished, and instead of giving the Boards of Trustees in those Cities and Towns authority to impose rate-bills, they are to be set aside, and a retrograde movement is to be made back to the old system, which has long since been abandoned by every City and Town in the neighbouring States as one of the relics of stationary ignorance and the monumental barriers against all School improvement in Cities and Towns,—as experience has shown in the Cities and Towns of Upper Canada for the last twenty years. (5.) Those who have voluntarily fulfilled the office of School Visitors during the last two years and upwards, are likewise denuded of their character as such, while corresponding classes of persons in Lower Canada are retained as School

Visitors, and while the Clergy there are not only continued in the office of School Visitors, but are invested with the absolute and exclusive authority to select all books used in the Schools "*relating to religion and morals*"—a power that it was never thought of conferring upon the Clergy of Upper Canada. They have not been invested with authority to interfere in respect to a single regulation or book used in the Schools. The School visits of the Clergy of the several religious persuasions (besides 1,459 visits of Magistrates and 959 of District Councillors,) have amounted during the last year to 2,254—exceeding an average of five School visits for each Clergyman in Upper Canada; nor have I heard of an instance of any thing unpleasant or hurtful resulting for such visits; but, on the contrary, the most abundant proofs have been given of the salutary, social, and educational influence arising from enlisting so vast a moral power in the cause of popular education. The repeal of the legal provision by which Clergymen can, in their official character and as a matter of right, visit the Schools, is, of course, a Legislative condemnation of their acting in that capacity; nor can any Clergyman be expected to visit the Schools or regard them with interest, after having been denuded of the right of doing so except by sufferance and as a private individual, while the Clergy in Lower Canada (where a different form of religion most widely prevails,) are placed in so very different a legal relation to the Schools. I felt satisfied at the time, as I have since learned, that the members of the Government generally, were not aware that the provisions of the new Act involved such an insult to the Clergy of Upper Canada, and the severance from the Schools of a cordial co-operation and influence most important to their advancement. (6.) The new Act contains provisions relating to the ground and manner of admitting into, and excluding books from the Schools, which appear to me fraught with the most injurious and painful consequences, and to which I do not wish to make further reference in this place. (7.) While the present law protects the School Fund against the loss or application of a sixpence for the entire administration of the School system, the new Act permits the whole expense of the local superintendence of Schools to be deducted from the School Fund, and authorizes the alienation of *one-fourth* of the entire School Fund from ordinary apportionments to the establishment and support of Pauper Schools. The discretionary alienation of so large a portion of the School Fund cannot but be injurious to ordinary Schools and their Teachers; and I think the introduction of a class of pauper Schools in the country is most earnestly to be deprecated. I can show that I have not only had regard to feeble and needy School Sections, but that under the provisions of the existing Law, I have invariably met the case of such sections; so that not one of them, as far as I have been able to ascertain, has been deprived of the advantages of the School system on account of its poverty; nay, that such Sections have been aided in a way most effectually to prompt and encourage local exertions, to exempt them from the baneful influence and degradation of constituting a distinct class of pauper Schools, and not to deduct a farthing from the ordinary apportionments to Teachers and Schools. (8.) The new Act requires conditions and forms of proceedings from School Trustees unnecessarily onerous and burdensome; and imposes restrictions and obstacles upon Trustees in providing for Teachers' salaries, which cannot fail to cause losses to Teachers and trouble and discouragement to Trustees. This is one point on which the present Law has been justly complained of; but the new Act provides for greatly multiplying those grounds of complaint, rather than removing them. (9.) The method (as provided by the new Act) of getting up local Reports through the medium of County Clerks, who have no practical connection with, or knowledge of the operations of the School Law, has been tried in the State of New-York, and has been found utterly abortive, as I can show from statements on the subject by the State Superintendent.

Such is a summary statement of those provisions of the new School Act which, I feel satisfied, must render its operations a source of incalculable injury to the Schools, and of great dissatisfaction to the people. I can adduce facts and authorities to illustrate and establish any or all of the points above stated, whenever desired. What has been referred to as the popular and remedial features of the new Act—such as the County Boards for the examination of Teachers, Schools for the children of coloured people, the apportionment of certain sums for the establishment of Libraries, extending the facilities of the Normal School, the establishment of a School