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THE
REV. EGERTON RYERSON, D.D., LL.D.

BY J. GEORGE HODGINS, M.A., LL.D.*



THE REV. EGERTON RYERSON, D.D., LL.D.

*For a quite complete and admirably arranged Exhibition, illustrating the Ontario system of Education and its excellent results; also for the efficiency of an administration which has gained for the Ontario Department a most honourable distinction among Government Educational agencies."—*Award of the American Centennial Commission, 1876.*

SUCH was the gratifying tribute which a number of eminent American educationists unconsciously paid to the distinguished founder of the Ontario system of Education, in estimating the results of his labours, as illustrated at the Centennial Exhibition.

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Although it is difficult to sketch, with freedom, the life and career of distinguished men, while living, yet it can, nevertheless, be done; and there are cases in which it is desirable and fitting that it should be done as fully as possible. Such a case is that of the Rev. Dr. Ryerson, whose official career as the founder of our educational system was so honourably and successfully closed in 1876. The history of Dr. Ryerson's life and labours has yet to be written. The conflicts of his noted and eventful career have been so many, and have been more or less so severe that it would be a difficult and delicate task just now to describe them, or to discuss the motives and proceedings of the principal actors with the judicial calmness which would give to such a work an impartial character. The materials are, however, abundant; and the writer of this sketch hopes that it may yet be in his power, from his long and intimate knowledge of the facts relating to these events, to be able to perform this filial duty, and to do justice to the noble qualities, statesmanlike views, and comprehensive grasp of mind of the distinguished man who, while yet in the vigour of a "green old age," has reared for himself so enduring a monument as the Public School System of Ontario, and has enshrined his name in the hearts and affections of his countrymen.

In seeking to account for the great success which has attended the labours of the late Chief Superintendent of Education, in founding our system of public instruction, it is desirable to enquire into the causes of that success. Energy and ability will do much in any great work, and they are essential to its successful accomplishment; but many a man of untiring energy and undoubted ability has failed, because he had overrated his own powers, or had lacked tact and judgment in their exercise. Dr. Ryerson may have erred now and then in these particulars; but such errors were with him the rare exception and not the rule. He wisely laid down certain great principles which he believed to be essential to the success of his labours. These general principles may be thus summarized: 1. That the machinery of education should be in the hands of the people themselves, and should be managed through their own agency; and that they should, therefore, be consulted in regard to all school legislation. 2. That the aid of the Government should only be given where it can be used most effectually to stimulate and assist local effort in this great

work. 3. That the property of the country is responsible for, and should contribute towards, the education of the entire youth of the land; and that as a complement to this, "compulsory education" should necessarily be enforced. 4. That a thorough and systematic inspection of the schools is essential to their vitality and efficiency. 5. That Christianity should form the basis of the whole system. These, with other important principles, Dr. Ryerson kept steadily in view during the whole thirty-two years of his administration of the school system of Ontario. Their judicious application has contributed largely, under the Divine blessing, (which he ever sought) to the wonderful success of his labours.

The Rev. Egerton Ryerson (or, as he was baptized, Adolphus Egerton Ryerson), was born in the Township of Charlotteville, on the 24th of March, 1803. His father, Colonel Joseph Ryerson, a United Empire Loyalist, in the British service at the time of the American Revolution, was born in New Jersey in 1760. He first joined as a cadet, and was one of the five hundred and fifty loyal volunteers who went to Charleston, South Carolina. For his good conduct in bearing despatches nearly two hundred miles into the interior, he was promoted to a lieutenancy in the Prince of Wales' Volunteers by Sir Guy Carleton (Lord Dorchester). Subsequently he was engaged in six battles, and was once wounded. At the peace of 1783 he was exiled as a loyalist, and went to New Brunswick, thence to Upper Canada—he and his family enduring very great hardship in penetrating into the interior of the then unbroken wilderness of western Canada. He settled in Charlotteville, and lived there until his death. In the war of 1812 he and his three sons again joined the British standard, and acquitted themselves bravely. During his life he held various appointments under the crown. He died in 1854, at the venerable age of ninety-four years, after having enjoyed his half-pay as a British officer for the unprecedented period of seventy years. Dr. Ryerson was the fourth son of Colonel Ryerson, and was named after two British officers who were intimate friends of his father.

Dr. Ryerson's habits of study at this time were characteristic of his practice in after life. He was an indefatigable student; and so thoroughly did he ground himself in English subjects—grammar, logic, rhetoric—and the classics, and that, too, under most adverse circumstances, that in his subsequent active career

as a writer and controversialist he ever evinced a power and readiness with his tongue and pen which has often astonished those who were unacquainted with the laborious thoroughness of his previous mental preparation.

On his twenty-second birthday (24th March, 1825), Dr. Ryerson was ordained deacon in the M. E. Church by Bishop Hedding. His diary during the first years of his ministerial life shows how devotedly he applied himself to the culture of his mind, although his valise often contained the chief part of his library, and the back of his horse frequently afforded him the only place of study. His first literary effort was put forth in 1826—being the review of Ven. Archdeacon Strachan's sermon on the death of Bishop Mountain, and it at once established his reputation as an able controversialist. In 1828 he again wrote a series of letters criticising Dr. Strachan's famous "Chart" of the various religious bodies. Both series were republished in separate pamphlets. In 1829 the *Christian Guardian* was established, and he was appointed its joint editor. In 1833 he went to England, and again in 1835. In the latter year his mission was to obtain a Royal Charter and subscriptions for "Upper Canada Academy," (founded in 1832) now Victoria College, Cobourg. He also induced the Home Government to recommend the Upper Canada Legislature to grant \$16,000 to the Academy, which it did against the personal wishes of Sir F. B. Head, the then Governor.

In 1841 an Act of Incorporation was obtained from the Legislature of United Canada, erecting the Academy into a University under the name and style of the "University of Victoria College at Cobourg." Doctor Ryerson (who that year received the title of D.D. from the Wesleyan University, Middleton) was unanimously chosen its first President. In 1844 Dr. Ryerson was appointed Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada, by His Excellency the Governor-General, with an understanding that he would re-lay the entire foundation of the system, and establish it on a wider and more enduring basis. The instructions which he received on his formal appointment were contained in the following words: "His Excellency has no doubt that you will lose no time in devoting yourself to devising such measures as may be necessary to provide proper school books to establish; the most efficient system of instruction; to elevate the character of both teacher and schools; and to en-

courage every plan and effort to educate and improve the youthful mind of the country; and His Excellency feels assured that your endeavours in matters so important to Western Canada will be alike satisfactory to the public and creditable to yourself." In 1846 he submitted an elaborate and able report on his projected system of public schools for Upper Canada.

Notwithstanding the zeal and ability with which Doctor Ryerson had collated and arranged his facts, analyzed the various systems of popular education in Europe (largely in Germany) and America, and fortified himself with the opinions of all the most eminent educationists in those countries, yet his projected system was fiercely assailed, and was vehemently denounced as embodying in it the very essence of "Prussian despotism." Still, with indomitable courage he persevered in his plans, and overcame the chief opposition to them. In 1846 the legislature passed the School Act which he had drafted. In 1849 the administration favourable to Dr. Ryerson's views on responsible government went out of office, and one unfavourable to these views came in. Hon. Malcolm Cameron, a hostile member of the cabinet, concocted a singularly crude and cumbrous school bill, aimed to oust Dr. Ryerson from office, which was, under a misapprehension, passed into a law. Dr. Ryerson at once called the attention of the Government (at the head of which was the late lamented Lord Elgin) to the impracticable and un-Christian character of the bill, as it had covertly excluded the Bible from the schools. Rather than administer such an Act, Dr. Ryerson tendered the resignation of his office to the Government. The late Honourable Robert Baldwin, C.B., Attorney-General (the Nestor of Canadian politicians, and a truly Christian man), was so convinced of the justness of Dr. Ryerson's views and remonstrance, that he took the unusual course of advising His Excellency to suspend the operation of the new Act until Dr. Ryerson could prepare a draft of a bill on the basis of the repealed law, embodying in it, additional to the old law, the result of his experience of the working of the system up to that time. The result was that a school law was passed in 1850, adapted to the newly-formed municipal system of Canada, popular in its character and yet so comprehensive in its provisions that it is still (in a consolidated form) the statute under which the Public Schools of Ontario are maintained.

In 1850, Dr. Ryerson, while in England, made preliminary arrangements for establishing the Library, and Map and Apparatus Depository in connection with his Department; and in 1855 he established Meteorological Stations in connection with the County Grammar Schools. In this he was aided by Colonel (now General) Lefroy, R.E., for many years Director of the Provincial Magnetical Observatory at Toronto. Sets of suitable instruments (which were duly tested at the Kew Observatory) were obtained, and shortly afterwards a few of these stations were established. In 1855, the law on the subject having been amended, twelve stations were selected and put into efficient working order. In 1857 he made his third educational tour in Europe, where he procured at Antwerp, Brussels, Florence, Rome, Paris, and London an admirable collection of copies of paintings by the old masters; statues, busts, etc., besides various articles for an Educational Museum in connection with the Department. In 1858-60, Dr. Ryerson took a leading part in the discussion in the newspapers, and before a committee of the legislature, in favour of grants to the various outlying universities in Ontario. He maintained that "they did the State good service," and that their claims should be substantially recognized as colleges of a central university. He deprecated the multiplication of universities in the province, which he predicted would be (as has been the case) the result of a rejection of his scheme. In consideration of his able services in this contest, the University of Victoria College conferred upon him the degree of LL.D. in 1861.

In 1867 he made his fourth educational tour in England and the United States. On his return, in 1868, he submitted to the Government a highly valuable "special report on the systems and state of popular education in the several countries of Europe and the United States of America, with practical suggestions for the improvement of public instruction in Upper Canada." He also made a separate and extensive "Report on Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind in Various Countries."

For many years Dr. Ryerson had felt that our new political condition required a change in the management of the Education Department. He, therefore, in 1869 and 1872, urged upon the Government the desirability of relieving him of his arduous duties, and of appointing a Minister of Education in his place. Early in 1876 his recommendations were acted upon, and he

retired on full salary from the responsible post which for thirty-two years he had so worthily and honourably filled.

As to the estimate formed of his labours, I quote the opinions of two gentlemen, viz.: Bishop Fraser, of Manchester, England; and the Hon. Adam Crooks, Dr. Ryerson's successor. In concluding his report on our Canadian Schools in 1865, Bishop Fraser says: "Such, in all its main features, is the school system of Upper Canada. A system not perfect, but yet far in advance, as a system of national education, of anything we can show at home. It is indeed very remarkable to me that in a country, occupied in the greater part of its area by a sparse and anything but wealthy population, whose predominant characteristic is as far as possible removed from the spirit of enterprise, an educational system *so complete in its theory and so capable of adaptation in practice* should have been originally organized, and have been maintained in what, with all allowances, must still be called successful operation for so long a period as twenty-five years. *It shows what can be accomplished by the energy, determination, and devotion of a single earnest man.* What national education in England owes to Sir J. K. Shuttleworth, what education in New England owes to Horace Mann, that debt education in Canada owes to Egerton Ryerson. He has been the object of bitter abuse, of not a little misrepresentation; but he has not swerved from his policy or from his fixed ideas. Through evil report and good report he has resolved, and he has found others to support him in the resolution, that free education shall be placed within the reach of every Canadian parent for every Canadian child."

Before giving the remarks of Mr. Crooks in regard to Dr. Ryerson, I insert the following particulars from the Report to which he refers. They show what a wonderful advance our school system has made under Dr. Ryerson's administration from 1844 to 1875. In this connection I may say that few of the present generation can realize, not only the low status, but the positively inert condition of the Province in educational matters when the Rev. Dr. Ryerson took charge of the Department—thirty-two years since,—in 1844. Men who were fit for no other occupation were considered just the men to teach school; and houses which farmers of the present day would not erect as

outbuildings on their farms, were considered as the ideal country school-house.*

Mr. Crooks, in concluding his report for 1875, says: "During that year all these matters were under the control and supervision of the Rev. Dr. Ryerson; and this Report may be considered as a further testimony to the vigour and success of his long administration of thirty-one years; recording, as it does, the operations of the last complete year of his educational labours, and showing a further stage in advance in our educational progress. . . . My best efforts will be directed to secure and perpetuate the advantages which were gained for our system by the late Chief Superintendent, after many controversies and discussions."

* *Comparative Statement of the Condition of Public School Education in Ontario for the years 1844 and 1875.*

YEAR.	TEACHERS.			MONEYS.		PUPILS.	SCHOOL-HOUSES.				
	Total.	Male.	Female.	Salaries of Teachers.	Total Expenditure.	Total.	Total.	Brick.	Stone.	Frame.	Log.
1875	6,018	2,645	3,373	\$1,758,100	\$2,993,080	474,241	4,868	1,232	492	2,117	1,017
1844	2,706	2,060	646	206,856	275,000	96,756	2,505	49	84	1,028	1,344
Incr'se.	3,312	585	2,727	\$1,551,254	\$2,718,080	377,485	2,333	1,183	408	1,090	..
Decr'se	....	....	....	.....	.....	.....	..	..	..	..	37

