

**THE SCHOOL
SYSTEM OF THE
STATE OF NEW YORK**

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The school system of the State of New York by John Millar

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JOHN MILLAR

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THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

OF THE

STATE OF NEW YORK

(AS VIEWED BY A CANADIAN.)

*Prepared under the authority of the Honorable the Minister of
Education, as an Appendix to his Annual Report.*

BY

JOHN MILLAR, B.A.

Deputy Minister of Education.



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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

In the spring of 1897, at the request of the Minister of Education, I visited the City of Albany and other places in New York for the purpose of gaining a knowledge of the system of education in that State. A considerable part of my time was taken up in ascertaining from the Superintendent and his officers the methods adopted by the Department of Public Instruction in matters of administration, and in getting a knowledge of the extensive work carried on by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York. I visited a number of the leading schools in Buffalo, Syracuse, Albany, Poughkeepsie, West Point, New York

City and Brooklyn, and so far as time allowed endeavored to make myself acquainted with the systems of school organization, the methods of discipline, and the character and results of the teaching. I had also the privilege before returning of visiting some prominent educational institutions of Philadelphia and Washington.

It had been my intention to report simply what I had seen in the work of the Normal Schools, High Schools, Manual Training Schools, Public Schools and Kindergartens. On further consideration I felt it would be more serviceable to combine with this object some description of the educational system of the State of New York. Among teachers the study of the systems of education adopted in different countries has of late years assumed more than ordinary importance. Pedagogical methods are based on principles which, from the nature of children, have much in common all the world over. At the same time the practical educationist must recognize the differences in systems of government, religious convictions and social conditions, which have to be dealt with in framing legislation as well as in adopting methods of school organization and of discipline. For several years there has been much interest taken in American schools by many British and Canadian educationists. During more than a quarter of a century Ontario has repeatedly found it profitable to take notice of the school work done in many of the neighboring States. Frequently some of the most distinguished educationists from the other side have given valuable addresses to our teachers at a number of conventions. Toronto has been favored with several international gatherings at

which the presence of Americans has given much impetus to educational and philanthropic movements. My intercourse on several occasions with Americans at their educational associations and a perusal of the official reports that come regularly to this Department have given me valuable opportunities for gaining a knowledge of the school systems of several of the States. It is generally held by the people of this Province and acknowledged by many who are not Canadians that our system of education is, upon the whole, superior to the system which prevails in any one of the States. It would be folly, however, to infer either that our schools are perfect or that important lessons are not to be gained by examining the school systems of our neighbors. Self satisfaction is bad for the nation as well as for the individual. When no fault is found with our schools there is danger of educational stagnation. To hold fast that which is good and to add what may improve should be the aim of all persons who are interested in the work of education.

I think no part of the Republic, not excepting even Massachusetts, presents a more valuable study to the educationist than New York. That state may not have schools that have gained as much fame as some schools in a few other states. I believe, however, no other part of the Union has made so much progress in education within the last dozen years as the Empire State. The development in some directions will be regarded as wise by those who attach importance to some features of our own system. The wide area of the country, its immense population, its great resources,

and its many large cities with their extensive trade and manufactures, bid fair to put New York educationally in the front place in the United States, as it is already commercially and politically. That there are weaknesses in its system of education, those most closely connected with its schools are prompt to admit.

The educational system of New York State has many features which are worthy, I think, of imitation as well as of examination. It is difficult to describe the school system of another country without showing points of resemblance or difference between that system and our own. Indeed, any report to be valuable must afford an opportunity for comparisons. I am quite sensible, however, of the danger of arriving at conclusions without complete knowledge (which is not always available) of the facts. The school system of New York State, like that of Ontario, has been a matter of many years' growth. Its characteristics cannot be understood apart from the history of the political institutions of the country. Neither the United States nor Canada could adopt, without radical changes of another kind, some of the admirable features of the educational system that exists on the opposite side of the international boundary line. Our system of responsible government, principles of taxation and methods of municipal control are different from those to be found in the neighboring state. Much that I saw or became acquainted with I should like to see incorporated with our system, provided this could be done without disturbing certain principles of government to which Canadians, like other British subjects, are very much attached. Matthew Arnold used to say that he

saw much to admire in the schools and colleges of France, but that it was always an important problem for the Englishman to determine how far the introduction of what was peculiar to the genius of another people would be conducive to the educational interests of his own country. A similar reflection comes to Americans who, in the comparative study of systems of education, have been very ready to give praise to German methods. Even in the school matters of Ontario alone it is fully recognized that a change admittedly good in one direction cannot be introduced until its effect in other ways is carefully considered.

In my visit to the schools of the United States, I had constant evidences of the courtesy and kindness of the American people. To the Superintendents and Principals whom I met I am indebted for valuable opportunities for enabling me to see the actual work of several institutions. I wish especially to mention the Hon. Charles R. Skinner, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of New York; Mr. J. R. Parsons, who, under the Board of Regents, has charge of the work of examinations of the University of the State of New York, and Dr. W. T. Harris, Commissioner of Education, Washington, for important information regarding educational matters. The extensive reports and other official documents furnished by these gentlemen have aided me very materially in the preparation of this work
