

THE LEGISLATURE.

THE PRICE OF SCHOOL BOOKS DEBATED ALL DAY.

Mr. Preston's Motion the Excuse for a General Attack on the Education Department—Hon. G. W. Ross Makes a Vigorous Defence.

MARCH 6, 1889.

Mr. Preston's innocent-looking resolution regarding school books brought on a debate that occupied nearly all day. It was made an excuse for a very warm attack on the Minister of Education and the school book system of the Province generally. Mr. Ross made an able and vigorous defence, and Mr. Harcourt came in as a good second, but beyond this the bulk of the speaking was done by the members of the Opposition and contained nothing particularly new or interesting.

THIRD READINGS.

The following bills were read a third time:—

To amend the Ontario Shops Regulation Act, 1888—Mr. Fraser.

Respecting the St. Andrew's church, Darlington—Mr. McLaughlin.

THE REGISTRY DIVISION.

Mr. H. E. Clarke (Toronto) asked whether the Government have received copies of any resolutions passed by the Bar Association of the County of York, or the Canada Land Law Amendment Association, or any other bodies or meetings of citizens of Toronto, and from whom, protesting against the proposed division of the City of Toronto registry office.

The Attorney-General, replying, said the resolutions referred to had been received. As to the Land Law Amendment Association, it had been organised for the purpose of introducing the Torrens Act. It was opposed to the division of the registry office because it thought the division would interfere with the working of the Act. The objections urged by the York County Bar Association now no longer existed.

SCHOOL BOOKS.

A LONG DEBATE OVER A MOTION BY MR. PRESTON.

Mr. Preston moved for an order of the House for a return showing the names of all publishers of Public school text books, with the respective books published by them and the prices thereof; also for copies of all correspondence by or with the Minister of Education or any officer of his department respecting the price or publication of Public school text books subsequent to that already brought down. The hon. gentleman discussed his motion at considerable length. He retailed the old story of the alleged school book monopoly and proved to his own satisfaction that should the alleged monopoly last out the entire contracted term of ten years it would entail a loss upon the Province of \$1,300,000, owing, he said, to the excessive prices charged for the books. The prices were very high, he insisted. He produced a cheaply-bound, green-clad book used in the National schools of Ireland, and sold, he said, for 6½d., or 13c., with as much or more reading matter than a similar book used in Ontario and sold at \$1, counting in the 50 cents asked for the commentary required with the book in question. He alluded to the Fourth Reader. Why, he asked, could not the Ontario school books be sold at as low a figure?

The Minister of Education remarked that he was a little surprised at Mr. Preston bringing up the old "chestnut" relating to the high price of the reader. He referred to the fact that when he assumed office there had been three series of readers in use, and that there was now but one. The price of the single series now in use, and sold under the alleged monopoly, was lower than those of either of the preceding three series.

He referred Mr. Preston to his report on education for 1887, in which a good deal was said concerning the reductions made in the cost of text books. Some of these he quoted, referring particularly to High schools (first form). The present High school reader, for instance, costs but 60c, whereas the books formerly used to cover the same subject amounted to \$1 85. This was a saving of \$1 25 to each pupil and of \$12,500 to the Province. Another instance was that of orthoepy and spelling. The books used formerly in this department cost \$1 30; the book now in use cost but

50c, a saving to each person of 80c. and to the Province of \$8,000. On the work of the first form altogether the difference in the prices formerly in vogue and those prevailing at the present time in consequence of the system introduced by the present Minister amounted to \$6 25, which, multiplied by the number of pupils in the first form, came to \$46,824, which amount is now saved to the country on the first purchase of one year's supplies of text books for the first form of High schools. In the higher forms, too, the reductions had been considerable. They were here brought about principally by decreasing the prices of the books formerly authorised and continuing the books in use. Ayre's Orthoepist, for instance, for which \$1 used to be charged because the book had to be imported from the United States, was now printed in Ontario and cost but 35 cents. The hon. Minister quoted similar several instances where very large reductions had been made.

Comparing the Ontario books with those published in the United States, Mr. Ross gave the following statistics:—

Authorised.	Pages.	Price.	Cts. per 100 pps
Wilson Series.....	911	\$1 79	19½
Sheldon's, New York....	890	1 92	21½
Appleton's, New York....	694	1 72	24½
McGuffey's, Cincinnati..	656	1 39	21
Barnes' New Readers....	294	1 75	19½
Ontario New Readers....	976	1 35	13½

Showing that the Ontario books compare more than favorably with those most used in the United States.

As to the cases of the isolated Irish text book which Mr. Preston had fetched from so far to overthrow his position, he was aware that books could sometimes be produced far more cheaply in England, and, he supposed, in Ireland, than in Canada; but things were cheaper there. All the materials entering into the manufacture of a book were much cheaper. Were it not for the National Policy of the hon. gentleman's friends, all these materials could be purchased at a much lower price in Canada than they are at present produced at. In comparing books manufactured in this country with those of a Free Trade country, though it was done only in a particular instance, he was condemning the duties imposed by his friend at Ottawa. The hon. Minister proceeded to defend the get-up and contents of the books in use in the Public schools. Their contents, he insisted, compared favorably with those of the school books of any country, while the binding was much ahead of that in general use elsewhere. This, perhaps, made the prices a little higher than they would otherwise be, but the wisdom of insisting upon this excellence was seen in the fact that the books lasted far longer than they otherwise would do. Two of the publishers of books used in the Ontario Public schools at present had assured him that not more than a third as many books were sold now as were sold under the old system, and the difference, they said, was due to the fact that the books at present used lasted about three times as long as the old ones.

The speaker showed that the introduction of the new books in place of the old was not done hurriedly, so that its expense became a burden, but slowly and at the discretion of the trustees. It was useless to contend, as many members of the Opposition contended, that the newly authorised books were introduced at the instance and pleasure of the teachers, and that the trustees had nothing to do with it. He quoted the 206th and 207th sections of the Revised Statutes and Regulations respecting Public and High schools in Ontario, as follows:—

Any authorised text book in actual use in any Public or Model school may be changed by the teacher of such school for any other authorised text book in the same subject on the written approval of the trustees and the inspector, provided always such change is made at the beginning of a school term, and at least six months after such approval has been given. In case any teacher or other person shall negligently or wilfully substitute any unauthorised text book in place of any authorised text book in actual use upon the same subject in his school, he shall for each such offence, on conviction thereof before a police magistrate or justice of the peace as the case may be, be liable to a penalty not exceeding \$10, payable to the municipality for school purposes, together with costs, as the police magistrate or justice may think fit.

Concerning the alleged monopoly of ten years, Mr. Ross pointed out that the first five years of the period named will elapse within a very few months, and that then, according to a written contract, the publishers are to have their prices submitted to arbitration and severely tested as to the point of fairness as compared with prices of other school books. How could a system so hedged and guarded by the Government in the interests of the public be called a monopoly? He wanted the House particularly to bear in

mind the point he had last mentioned, for it was a very important one and showed how careful the Government had been to protect the public. The Minister of Education sat down amid a burst of warm applause.

Mr. Clancy said the announcement of Mr. Ross concerning the intended arbitration amounted to a declaration that there would be no decrease in the prices charged for school books during the coming five years. The publishers would be encouraged by his speech. He also deprecated leaving so much liberty to school trustees as was the custom of the Government in the matter of school books.

Mr. Harcourt defended the policy pursued by the Government, and suggested that he did not know a single place where there was any excitement on account of school books. True, it figured now and again at an interim election, but as soon as the election was over the question died and was buried. Moreover, there were 7,000 teachers in the Province of Ontario, and he had yet to hear of any condemnation of the system pursued by the Department of Education in regard to school books on the part of any one of the many institutes that met year by year. Yet school teachers were experts on the subject, and the opinion of any one of them would really be of more value to him than that of either Mr. Clancy or Mr. Preston. As to the cheap Irish book exhibited by Mr. Preston, the point that gentleman had endeavored to make in connection with it had been fully answered by the Minister of Education. It could have been answered more cheaply still by the question, "How is it we can get a suit of clothes for £2 or £2 10s. in England, and would have to pay £8 or £10 for the same in this country?"

Mr. A. F. Wood took up the discussion. He admitted that he knew comparatively little about the merits of the school books used, but he insisted that there was a very general feeling that too much was being paid for school books. He insisted further that there was nothing in the argument that the N. P. so greatly increased the cost of school books.

Mr. Creighton said he would like to call attention to the fact that the publishers have to pay the costs of preparing the books, the Province having to pay \$18,376 to the companies for preparing the books. He would not repeat the arguments against the monopolies of readers, but he would like to say a few words about the drawing books. The arbitration clause inserted by the Minister of Education in the contract with publishers was a failure. The publishers will not, according to a recent case, relinquish their claims without a law suit. If these books are published at such a cheap rate why do they go to the expense of engaging the ablest counsel to preserve for them the rights given them by the Education Department? At this stage the Minister of Education was called to the door of the House, seeing which Mr. Creighton said, "I hope the Minister is not running away."

Mr. Ross—Oh no; I won't go far away from your melodious voice. (Laughter.)

The member for North Grey continued for some time afterwards to inveigh against the price of drawing books.

Mr. Stratton does not speak often, but it is evident from the attention which he gets from the Assembly that he always speaks of what he knows. He maintained that owing to the duty imposed free competition in the publication of school books would result in throwing on the country inferior articles in that line. He had occasion to handle the present books, and he had not come across a single school teacher who did not approve of the text books now in use in the Public and High schools. (Cheers.)

Mr. Drury, in behalf of the trustees of the Province, rose to say that the present school text books are selected by them, after being thoroughly convinced that they are the cheapest and best that can be produced. It was unfair for Mr. Clancy to insinuate that trustees were not competent to exercise the power given to them to say what text books shall be used in the Public schools. (Cheers.)

Mr. Meacham said that the school book question had as much to do with his election as anything else, having been very much discussed. He always felt these books could be produced at a cheaper rate, and the House should see to it that an investigation be made into all the arrangements for the arbitration between the Minister of Education and the present publishers.

Dr. Wylio defended the National Policy, declaring that it had nothing to do with the present price of school books. The text books were good enough, but they were too dear, and that was all he had to say about