

Globe, April 9th

66

High Schools.

Mr. Ross, on rising to propose the second reading of the bill consolidating and re-amending the High School laws, was received with cheers. He reminded the House that six years ago when he proposed some important amendments to the High School law he had expressed the hope that the act would then be so complete that further changes would not be required for five years at least. He had not been able quite to live up to that idea, but the changes made were not of a very grave nature. After the lapse of six years he came before the House again with amendments which it seemed to him important to have made. He then went rapidly over the principal changes proposed under the bill, giving brief explanations of their character and the main reasons for them. The first change is as to the mode of dissolving union boards, commonly called Boards of Education. Formerly dissolution could be carried only by majority vote at a meeting specially called to consider the question. This is regarded as a hardship, and in future a two-thirds vote of either section of the board (High and Public School sections) will be sufficient to carry the dissolution. As the law is now, no High School can be established except on resolution of the County Council, concurred in by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. It is said High Schools have been established in too many cases. He would not give that as his view, but it would be strange if High Schools had not been established in some cases in which there was not sufficient to maintain them in efficiency. The changes proposed in the curriculum of collegiate institutes were such as he had indicated the other day. Under the old act four specialists were required in a school; but it was intended to establish a department for the study of commercial subjects, so that hereafter five specialists would have to be engaged. It was intended in the case of High Schools to make better provision for the study of commercial subjects. Section 11 makes some changes in the mode of appointing High School Trustees. Where the High School district is composed of one municipality, that municipality appoints three trustees; where of two, each appoints two, and where it is more than two each municipality appoints one trustee. There was no special virtue in the number "six," the Minister said, to cause them to overlook the sound principle of representation by population. If a High School in a city or town, separate from the county, refuses to accept county pupils, there is no reason why the county should be represented on the board. Where they do receive them, the County Council is to appoint three additional trustees. Under the old act the County Council and City Corporation could agree as to the amount to be given by the county to the city, and in that case the county might appoint three trustees. Under this bill the voluntary principle is preserved, and the possibility of confusion is avoided. Under the bill the right of representation on the High School Board now possessed by the Separate School Board will be extended to the Public School Board. The rule of the Municipal Act against municipal councillors being High School trustees is practically evaded in case of Boards of Education by municipal representatives being elected to the School Board. The bill bars municipal councillors from being members of the School Board. It has been found that persons are appointed to the High School Board, not for merit, but as a solatium for defeat in municipal elections. The bill prevents this by leaving the appointment with the outgoing instead of the incoming Council. The process by which

High School trustees can alienate property is now very cumbersome, and this bill reduces it to its lowest terms of simplicity as provided in the Public School law. The clauses relating to the assistance given by County Councils to High Schools are among the most important in the bill. The present law provides that the County Council shall contribute the equivalent of the Government grant. With the growth of Public Schools and the increase of county pupils this is found not to be a fair equivalent, so it is provided that the county shall pay according to the proportion the county pupils bear to all those attending the school, fees from county pupils being allowed for. The tendency of late in High Schools is to charge fees, the increase being from \$16,000 twenty years ago to \$70,000 last year, an average of \$4 per pupil. The County Council would have it in its power through these fees to make the county pupils bear up to half the amount to be expected from the county. The limit of fees allowed is \$10. The bill provides for the fair distribution of the cost where debentures have to issue in a High School district composed of more than one municipality. Hitherto this has been done usually by the municipality in which the school was situated issuing the debentures and getting allowances from the others as best it could. The time during which school debentures may run is extended from 20 to 30 years, making them the same in this respect as municipal debentures. The law respecting examiners for entrance examinations is changed so as to provide that the board shall be composed of the High School inspector and the principals of the High Schools of the county. This it is believed will lead to the maintenance of a higher standard than at present, not only in the High Schools but in the higher forms of the Public Schools. The expense would not be more, but perhaps would be less than the present system. In other matters the system of examination is to be improved. Mr. Meredith called attention to a section allowing appeal from the decision of the examiners to the Minister of Education with regard to reading and valuation of papers, all other complaints to be made to the Public School inspector and by him submitted to the chairman of the Public, High and Separate School Boards. Mr. Ross said there was little now in this section, and pointed out the value of a local adjudication of minor questions so that local circumstances could be given their due weight, the questions which could be better judged from the papers to be left to the Minister. Under the old law the High Schools opened 7th January and closed the first Friday in July, Good Friday and Easter Monday being the only break. It is proposed now to make the term begin 3rd January to the Thursday before Easter, re-commencing the second Monday after Easter and end 30th June. This will make a welcome break in the long term which under present conditions is apt to become wearisome and to tend towards breaking down both pupils and teachers. It will also give a needed opportunity for the teachers' associations to meet at Easter, at a time when they can get the benefit of the presence of university professors and others who now are often absent on vacation in the summer when these meetings are held. As to the length of holidays the increase would be very little at any time and in some years none at all. The present bill changes the academic year to make it coterminous with the High School curriculum. The course of study now begins 1st September and ends 1st July. In closing his address the Minister said there had been no wanton changes, and he hoped that before it passed the House the bill would be made so perfect that further amendments to the law would not be required for five years at least. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. Wood (Hastings) discussed briefly some of the questions raised by the bill, but withheld comment upon details until the bill should come up in committee of the whole. He thought some of the changes more radical than the Minister seemed to suppose. There was one matter conspicuous by its absence from the bill—the bringing of the High School Boards more in touch with the people. He contended that there was a feeling abroad that such a reform was necessary, and the Minister should address himself to it. He complained also of the action of some High Schools in seeking by such means as offering entrance without fees to attract pupils from districts naturally appertaining to other High Schools. He expressed himself as in favor of the entrance examination provisions.

Mr. Meredith wanted provision made for the re-establishment of a joint board after dissolution, should such be desired. He contended that there were disadvantages in allowing the moribund Council to appoint High School trustees, and failed to see that the Minister was right in barring municipal councillors from being members of Public School Boards, believing that the people were the best judges of their representatives. He thought the additional holidays were far from being an objection. The bill would have the effect of wiping out the preparatory classes still maintained and well attended in Toronto Collegiate Institute, and he did not see that that course was justifiable. These classes were doing good work and should be given a chance to continue.

Mr. Gibson (Huron) opposed the High School system as a system, but as he supposed his voice on that question would sound alone he did not wish to discuss the matter at length. The opinion of the country, he claimed, was that there were enough High Schools now. He did not accept the argument that these institutions opened the way for higher education to the poor man's son. This might be true of those in the towns where the High Schools were, but there were many from the townships who could not attend without the expenditure of considerable sums. He had figured out the cost of board of those from the country attending High Schools at \$640,000, a very serious tax. He quoted figures to show that the grants to High Schools were growing more rapidly than those to Public Schools. In opposing the High Schools he declared he did not oppose higher education, but he wanted the cost placed on the right shoulders.

The bill was read the second time.

Public School Law.

Mr. Ross rose at once to propose the second reading of the bill to amend and consolidate the Public School laws. He repeated the hope he had expressed in respect of the High School bill, that further amendments after this bill was passed would not be needed for years. The provision for dissolving union boards on two-thirds vote of either section is contained in this bill also, and in defending it Mr. Ross contended against the injustice of holding representatives of one or other section to account for their work while compelling them to work in association with those to whom perhaps a majority were opposed. As to the prohibition of municipal councillors becoming school trustees, Mr. Ross said experience had shown that the double relation was undesirable in the public interest. The principle of electing the servants of the people had its limitations even in the most democratic country, and the system of appointment in the case of the High School boards had resulted in getting upon the board many men whom it was most desirable to have. The school age is changed so that now all persons from 5 to 21 have a right to attend them, the kindergartens to be open to those of four years. It was believed, the Minister said, that four years was a young enough age even for the kindergarten. The secretary-treasurer of the school board, though a member, is allowed to receive remuneration for certain services in the way of looking after the school premises, etc. In rural schools it is found a hardship to live up to the rule against payments, and members of the board, in view