

F. Henry Johnson

The First Canadian Journal of Education: an Historical Review

The first French language newspaper in Canada, *Le Canadien*, announced on its mast-head the slogan, "Nos institutions, notre langue et nos loix." Had Egerton Ryerson cared to paraphrase this text and express it in English, our first *Journal of Education* might very fittingly have announced that it stood for "Our schools, their institutions and their laws."

The first issue of the *Journal of Education For Upper Canada* appeared in January 1848. The title page announced that it was "Edited by the Reverend Egerton Ryerson D.D. (The Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada) assisted by Mr. John George Hodgins." The subscription price was "five shillings per annum in advance." For thirty years this journal appeared regularly each month as the voice of the Department of Education, devoted, as the Prospectus in the first issue announced,

to the exposition of every part of our school system; to the publication of official papers on the subject of schools; to the discussion of the various means of promoting the efficiency of schools and the duties of all classes of persons in respect to them; to accounts of systems of public instruction in other countries, both European and American; and to the diffusion of information on the great work of Popular Education generally.¹

editors ryerson and hodgins

Initially, the major portion of the editorial work was borne by Ryerson himself but after a few years, as the burdens of his office piled up, he had to rely upon his faithful and indefatigable deputy, John George Hodgins, to assume the edi-

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torship. Nevertheless, when Hodgins' name replaced Ryerson's on the *Journal*, there was added the qualifying statement "under the direction of the Reverend Egerton Ryerson." The hand may have been the hand of Esau "but the voice was the voice of Jacob."

In the Ontario Archives, there is a manuscript written by Hodgins in later years. In this he recounted the history of the Education Department and stated, "For the last twenty-five years of its [the *Journal's*] existence — it ceased in June 1877 — the writer of this 'retrospect' was its sole editor and, as such, was gratified to find not only that it was highly appreciated within, but also outside of our country."

In 1846 when Ryerson first proposed the publication of a *Journal of Education* "to be devoted among other things to the exposition of every part of our school system and to the discussion of various means of promoting the efficiency of the school," the Government was unwilling to authorize it. Ryerson then, according to Hodgins, "undertook the expense and responsibility of the publication himself in January 1848. And it was not until years had demonstrated the practical value and success of the proposed agency, that the expense of the publication was provided for by an annual vote of the Legislature."³ This was done in 1850 after the Government's Finance Committee had looked into Ryerson's operation of the *Journal*. He had told the committee at the time that most of the work on the *Journal* was done outside office hours, neither the clerks nor himself having "received a farthing's remuneration except the pleasure and hope of doing good."⁴ Although he charged a subscription fee, this did not meet the expenses and at the conclusion of each year he had himself paid off the *Journal's* indebtedness. The Government, therefore, granted him \$1800 annually to help cover the costs of publication and mailing.

In 1851, when Ryerson was in Europe, the *Journal* was left entirely in Hodgins' capable hands and Ryerson wrote him from Paris expressing his gratitude and appreciation of Hodgins' work:

I admire the tact and energy you have shown in promoting the circulation of the *Journal of Education* and preventing it from entailing a heavy loss upon me. When I was of your age I could write three editorials as easily as I can write one now, on any subject that interested my feelings. You have only to stir up your 'inner man' a little and the Editorials will come forth à la Junon de la tête de Jupiter.⁵

why a journal?

Why did Ryerson feel that he needed a *Journal* of this type even to the extent of paying its deficits from his own pocket? The reasons perhaps are to be found both in the man and in his times. As a man, Ryerson no doubt had his faults (and he did not lack for detractors to point them out), but no one doubted his sincerity and complete devotion to the cause of public education. Like Horace Mann, his close counterpart in the United States, he was an enthusiast for this cause almost to the point of fanaticism and, like Mann, he was a terrific worker. He also understood the climate of opinion of his fellow Canadians, from the backwoods farmer to the merchants of the towns and, again like Mann, he knew that he could not legislate educational reforms without first preparing the public mind to accept them. Had he lived to-day, he would have approved strongly of the idea of "Information Canada." As early as 1845, writing to the Principal of Victoria College, Ryerson had stated his belief in the importance of communications with the public: "I see clearly that no system of public instruction can be carried into operation in Canada and become general in the esteem and feelings of the people without its being explained and spread out before them in each district of the province, and in many cases again and again."⁶ Ten years later he had written to Prime Minister W. H. Draper for permission to launch his *Journal of Education* and to conduct a personal speaking tour of the province: If he could "visit each district personally and devote one or two days in a full conference with the principal educational persons on school matters," the school system "would become popularly as well as legally established."⁷ It was clear to Ryerson, the Methodist minister, that if the gospels required missionary endeavour so also did education and he was prepared to take this cause to the people both in person and through the medium of the printed word.

Another reason for the *Journal*, understandable but perhaps not so laudable, was his need for a means of defending himself before the public against criticism of his "Prussian despotism" made in the legislature and in the press. He was fond of quoting Macaulay's statement that "No misrepresentation should be allowed to pass unrefuted." Since his Department was not represented in the cabinet or in the legislature, as he would have liked, he had to have a voice of some kind

and the *Journal* was one answer.⁸

The articles in the *Journal* would hardly win laurels to-day for fascinating interest or sparkling wit. To most mid-Victorians "life was real and life was earnest" and education was a serious matter to be read in no lighter vein. However, the editors had a style which was straightforward and did not pollute the Queen's English with the pedagogue corruptions of our modern era.

contents and controversies

In perusing the pages of the *Journal* one notes, particularly in the early years of its publication, Ryerson's concern to convince the trustees and the general public of the paramount importance of a good public school system. In his lecturing tours of the province one reads of him declaiming over and over again to rural audiences his famous lecture on "The Importance of Education to an Agricultural People." If any Ontarian missed hearing it delivered in person he could read it in the pages of the *Journal*.⁹ The theme of the desirability of self-imposed local property taxes to help finance the schools and thus make education free and available to all children was constantly stressed by the editor.

The *Journal* had no hesitation about lecturing trustees, teachers and parents in their duties and responsibilities. The desirability of Normal School training for teachers was impressed on the public in the early issues. The program of lectures and the first time-table for the Toronto Normal School was given in full detail in volume one.¹⁰ Since Normal School training as yet was not required of all teachers, and since many school trustees frowned on it as an extravagant and unnecessary thing, Ryerson felt that he had to "sell" his Normal School to the teachers and trustees both.

New legislation or new regulations of the Department of Education were announced and explained. Innovations such as Ryerson's Educational Museum, or his Public Libraries or the Book Depository were publicized, explained and defended. Educational developments in other countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Ireland and various American states were reported, particularly if they supported Ryerson's own policies of finance or educational philosophy. The thoughts on education of great men from Xenophon and Plutarch to Pestalozzi,

Thiers and Daniel Webster were quoted.

One of the lively issues of the day was that of the education of women. The *Journal*, of course, reflected Ryerson's views on the value of education to the fair sex. He was for it. He was most desirous that his own daughter, the charming and lively Sophie, should have a good education in both French and English. In his lecture on "The Importance of Education to an Agricultural People" he had made the point that not only would education be a great boon to the farmer's sons but would also be "equally applicable and equally important" to their wives and daughters — "those lights and charms of the domestic circle."¹¹ When the Normal School established a "female department" in 1848, the *Journal* hailed this as a very liberal and desirable move. "Experience has evinced the great advantage, as a general rule, of employing Female Teachers for the instruction of young pupils."¹² Although it was not until 1885 that the University of Toronto admitted women, Professor Daniel Wilson of that university had advocated their higher education in a public lecture in 1869, expressing the view that "woman's mental culture" was "inadequately provided for" and that "she is taught by all the conventional usages of society to regard education as a thing incompatible with womanhood."¹³ His lecture was printed, in abridged form, in the *Journal*.

While most of the early journals of education were primarily concerned with practical suggestions for teachers, Hodgins disclaimed any attempt to have his *Journal* adopt that role. "We have advisedly refrained from writing theoretical editorials on the details of school management and discipline and on the best methods of teaching the various branches in the schools."¹⁴ Nevertheless, the *Journal* did run a regular section, entitled "Papers on Practical Education," in which there were discussions and reprints of articles on teaching methods in various subjects, discipline, the use of grading, examinations, regularity of attendance, moral education, penmanship, vocal music, profanity in pupils and profanity in teachers. (The *Journal* disapproved of both.) The whole of the October 1865 issue was devoted to the teacher in recognition "of the increased importance and vitality of teaching in this province."¹⁵ The editorial policy of the *Journal*, however, was not to attempt to be a teachers' publication *per se* but to adopt a broader role, appealing to trustees, teachers, parents and all who had an interest in the school system.

politics and the end of the journal

Ryerson had many enemies in Ontario. His very position as superintendent placed him in the line of fire for political critics. Appointed by and answerable only to the Governor, he was neither in nor out of the Government — unable to defend his policies on the floor of the House and having no protecting Minister to take responsibility off his own shoulders. A number of his policies were continually under attack from one quarter or another, i.e. his stand on the separate schools, his campaign to make education free and compulsory, his strong control over the publishing industry through the adoption of school textbooks and books for the public libraries which also came under his Department. George Brown's newspaper, *The Globe*, was one of his frequent critics.

In 1869, Blake and certain other members in the House, when considering the estimates, attacked the *Journal's* appropriation of \$1800 annually as "a waste of money." The *Journal*, they claimed, was poorly edited and not read by the school trustees. Hodgins replied in his *Journal* to these charges:

In regard to the first objection, it may or may not be well founded, according to the variation in the taste and judgement of the objector. All we have to say is that we have endeavoured to discharge our duty in editing the *Journal* in the way which we believe will promote, in the highest degree, the interests of the schools... In regard to the second objection — that the *Journal of Education* is not taken out of the post office and read by Trustees — we believe that this general assertion is based solely on the individual exceptions to the rule.¹⁶

The opposition gave the *Journal* a stormy ride but the Government of the time defended it successfully and continued its subsidy for a few more years. Ryerson retired from the Superintendency in 1876 and the structure of the Department of Education was then changed to conform to that of other Departments with a Minister of Education, Adam Crooks.¹⁷ Hodgins was retained as Crook's Deputy but the *Journal* survived less than a year under the new Minister. One wonders why. Althouse suggested that it may have been dropped as an economy measure but "more likely, the *Journal* had been so closely identified with the Superintendent's policies that it was apt to prove embarrassing to the Minister, whose ideas were radically different."¹⁸

However as one considers in retrospect the reasons which

brought the *Journal* originally into existence — the need to provide a medium of communication with teachers, trustees and the general public, to arouse interest and sympathy and create popular support for the cause of free public education — one might explain its demise in 1877 in other terms. It had done its work well. By 1877, its major battles had been won although the long campaign for better schools is never-ending. But the schools were now free and tax-supported, the teachers better trained, the grammar schools had become high schools and part of a public system, and most of Ryerson's enlightened ideas on teaching methods and pupil-teacher relations were widely accepted.

From the side-lines Ryerson might have felt that the *Journal* had served him and the Department well and that it was now time that other journals, edited by the teachers themselves, should spring into being and carry his torch.

references

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