

Cultural Survival and Social Control: The Development of a Curriculum for Upper Canada's Common Schools in 1846

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In 1846, the Department of Education for Canada West introduced for use in common schools the first authorized set of textbooks, the "Irish National Series of School-books". Although usually treated by historians as an aspect of the bureaucratization of the education system in this period, the Textbook Policy was indeed designed to counter perceived social and cultural problems, as the research upon which this paper is based reveals. Among these, most significant were official concerns that disruption caused by recent Irish immigration, coupled with increasingly aggressive American cultural and political imperialism represented serious threats to the stability of British Canada.

En 1846, le Département d'Éducation du Canada-Ouest introduisit dans les écoles publiques l'usage de la première collection de manuels scolaires autorisés, la «Irish National Series of Schoolbooks». Habituellement présentée par les historiens comme l'un des aspects de la bureaucratization qui toucha alors le système d'éducation, cette politique des manuels scolaires n'en visait pas moins à résoudre un certain nombre de problèmes sociaux et culturels, comme l'indique la recherche sur laquelle se fonde le présent article. Dans les milieux officiels on craignait particulièrement que l'immigration irlandaise, ainsi que l'impérialisme de plus en plus agressif pratiqué par les États-Unis en matière culturelle et politique, ne viennent gravement menacer la stabilité du Canada britannique.

Egerton Ryerson's textbook policy was a direct outcome of the comprehensive education policy which he, as Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada, drafted in 1845-46 and used as a basis for the Education Act of 1846.¹ In the *Report* of 1846 he both noted the inadequacies of American school-books² and extolled the virtues of the books used by the Irish National Board of Education.³ The policy from this time was directed toward the elimination of American textbooks from Upper Canadian schools and the introduction of government-approved and standardized texts of quite a different character in the form of the "Irish National Series of School-books".

The factors which most influenced Ryerson's 1846 policy decision on school-books emerged in the preceding decade and built to

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¹ Egerton RYERSON, *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847).

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

a climax, forcing the issue in 1846. Many of these factors have been examined by historians looking at the general education reform movement of this period.⁴ What has not been attempted previously, and what forms the subject-matter of this article, is a detailed analysis of a particular policy (i.e., textbooks) in relation to specific cultural and social concerns of the time.⁵

It was actually a new policy only in the degree to which it was elaborated and implemented. Well before Ryerson's time, concern had been repeatedly expressed regarding the political implications of school-books of American origin used in Upper Canada, and recommendations for a consistent government policy had been made. This is not surprising given the central place of the textbook in the school of the time. In the absence of formalized teacher training or government-authorized courses of study, the textbook virtually represented the curriculum of the school. Pupils were expected to acquire its content by rote and teachers were expected to drill pupils to this level of mastery. In early nineteenth-century Upper Canada, where American texts were in common use, concern for the political and social ideas which might be transmitted by such books was a recurrent theme, varying with the intensity of animosity existing between the two countries.

The theme of the dangers associated with American influence on and in Upper Canadian schools had been played out several times prior to Ryerson's textbook ban, and was always associated with periods of international tension involving the United States. Fears of American influence early convinced both Upper Canadian educators and political leaders of the need for schooling to deal with issues of political and social morality, and textbooks were frequently seen as the appropriate medium for accomplishing this. For example, attempts were made to regulate school-books after the War of 1812, under the Education Act of 1816.⁶ An abortive attempt to replace

⁴ Among these, significant contributions have been made by Robert Gidney, Donald Wilson, Alison Prentice and Susan Houston. Gidney and Wilson focus on the nature of political and economic factors in education reform. See particularly Robert D. GIDNEY, "Elementary Education in Upper Canada: a Reassessment", *Ontario History*, LXV, 3 (September 1973): 168-86; also, his "Upper Canadian Public Opinion and Common School Improvement in the 1830's", *Histoire sociale — Social History*, V, 9 (April 1972): 48-60. Donald WILSON's most detailed work in this area is "Foreign and Local Influences on Popular Education in Upper Canada, 1815-1844" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1970). Prentice and Houston have both very thoroughly considered the role of immigration in influencing the thinking of education reform leaders. For example, see Alison PRENTICE, *The School Promoters* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), and Susan HOUSTON, "The Impetus to Reform: Urban Crime, Poverty and Ignorance in Ontario, 1850-1875" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1974).

⁵ Some aspects of the topic are dealt with in the author's unpublished doctoral thesis, "Anti-Americanism, Local Concerns and the Response to Social Issues in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canadian School Reform: The Niagara District as a Case Study" (University of Toronto, 1978), especially Ch. III, "Anti-Americanism and the Textbook Question", pp. 80-122.

⁶ "Form of Town or Township School Reports", in *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, 1792-1876*, ed.: J. G. HODGINS, 28 vols (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, 1893), I: 150.

the common schools with a national school system in 1821 had, as one of its aims, the elimination of American textbooks,⁷ and the General Board of Education, established in 1823, had the power not only to regulate textbooks, but to supply them in order to counter "the mischiefs which may result from the introduction of Schoolmasters and School Books from the United States".⁸ That concern existed, at least on the part of authorities, regarding the use of American books in Upper Canadian schools is clear. However, factors of cost and availability and frequently, no doubt, the direct preference of parents, ensured their continued use.

The summary overview of the textbook question in Upper Canada before 1837 indicates a more or less consistent official position. There was concern regarding the potential negative influences of American books, and this concern tended to increase sharply during periods of heightened international tensions, as during and immediately after the War of 1812. Moreover, concern as to the political nature of school curriculum may have increased after 1816 in which state-supported common schools were more and more seen as agents of social control, or "social harmony" to use an expression of the time. Finally, there was demonstrated in the period a real reluctance on the part of government to intervene directly in the operation of an essentially locally controlled school system. As a result, government policy, as such, rested on admonition and advice, and the careful avoidance of any direct action to impose the desires of central authorities on apparently reluctant local trustees. It would take a series of massive threats to the political and social fabric of Upper Canada before local interests were persuaded to accept both the attitudes and the direction of the central government.

The Rebellion of 1837, like the War of 1812, produced a major reaction against American influence in Upper Canada. The establishment of William Lyon Mackenzie's provisional Republic of Upper Canada on Navy Island, the flocking of American volunteers to Buffalo, and increasing Hunters' Lodge and other "Patriot" activities generated widespread fears of American intervention. These seemed confirmed by news of the raids on Sandwich and Short Hills, and the amount of Canadian support that the Patriots seemed to attract. To many political leaders in Upper Canada, it seemed obvious that American seditious influences had successfully penetrated parts of the province and subverted a considerable number of its inhabitants. Earlier suspicions of the role of school-books in this subversion seemed confirmed by post-Rebellion testimony and investigation.

The Tory Toronto *Patriot* expressed a vehement viewpoint on the relationship between school-books and disloyalty, and offered a solution. Besides procuring teachers who were loyal, the editor re-

⁷ Public Archives of Ontario (hereafter PAO), C.O. 42, 366, Maitland to Bathurst, 4 January 1821.

⁸ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, II: 3.

commended that the books used should be such as would enable them to furnish proper instruction. At present, he said, most books in use were both published and written in the United States, were American in tone, and never omitted an opportunity to inculcate an American spirit, as the example cited from a speller, "We do not like Kings and Queens", illustrated. "Every Canadian school book ought to be *written* by a Briton, *printed* by a Briton, and *sold* by a Briton", said the *Patriot*. Upper Canadian school books should be British both outside and inside, said the *Patriot's* editor. Every school should have elementary history of Britain and a geography which would develop the might of Britain and supersede Yankee geographies presently in vogue.

Not only should Upper Canadian education have a British orientation, the *Patriot* argued, it should be nationalistic as well. The government should offer a sum for the best history of the two Canadas to be written and published for use in the common schools, in which book the capture of Detroit and the battle of Queenston, Wolfe and Brock would be emphasized to the pupil, in order "to engraft upon the gratitude which he feels for being born a Briton, an enthusiastic affection for his native soil".⁹

In an analysis of the causes of the Rebellion which R. B. Sullivan, a member of the executive council, submitted to the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir George Arthur, references to the negative influence of United States textbooks in Upper-Canadian schools echoed the *Patriot's* charges:

The books they use are all American filled with inflated accounts of American independence and the glorious wars with England. The exploits of General Jackson and the heroes of '76 fill the youthful mind to the exclusion of everything glorious or interesting in English history.¹⁰

The author next proceeded to give his opinion regarding the danger in the situation:

The young man grows up without a single preposion [*sic*] in favour of his country, he looks upon a British soldier as a person whom it would be honourable and glorious to oppose with the rifle. The British Government in his mind is a chimerical monster 4,000 miles off, which notwithstanding it has been beaten by American ingenuity still drags on an antiquated existence, which it holds almost at the will of the United States.

It was not only this extreme version of history but geography as Americans taught it which aroused Sullivan's biting sarcasm:

The boy gains a smattering of Geography out of an American compilation in which the state of Rhode Island occupies as much detail as the Eastern Hemisphere and in which England appears as a pitiful little island filled with tyrannical landlords and very fat clergymen, and a great number of squalid tenants and labourers. Ireland is a joyless land of bogs, pigs and catholics, and Scotland an out of the way place in which the mountains and the men have a national and barbarous prejudice against decent governing.

⁹ *Patriot and Farmer's Monitor*, 7 December 1838.

¹⁰ Sullivan to Arthur, 1838, in C. R. SANDERSON, ed., *The Arthur Papers*, 3 vols (Toronto: Toronto Public Libraries, 1959), I: 151-52.

Somewhat ironically, Sullivan turned to the United States for a proposed solution to these difficulties:

It is strange to observe that while in the State of New York, the course of instruction and the books which are used are under the strictest surveillance and direction of the Government, all this is in Upper Canada left to the care of few illiterate, ignorant and sometimes disloyal local Township trustees.¹¹

Relatively prompt political action regarding the textbook question followed. A legislative committee to enquire into the state of education in Upper Canada tabled its report in 1839. The committee based its recommendations on regional reports of the grammar and common schools for 1838 and 1839. The report for 1838 had included a plea for uniformity in textbooks and an adjuration that "those Republican productions that tend to poison the minds of the youth of the country, should be driven out of the Province".¹²

Second only to the improvement of the quality of teachers through training, the committee members stressed the need for standardization of textbooks.¹³ Both measures, it was argued, were necessary to counter "evils arising from the want of a uniform system of instruction". They went on to state that they considered "the introduction of uniformity, [both as to system adopted, and textbook used] to be of the utmost importance". Most important, however, was the question of the content of school-books, which the committee report stated in a section entitled "Evils of Permitting American Books to be used in the Schools".

Great care should be taken in the selection of Text Books. Your Committee regret to find that editions published in the United States are much used throughout the Province; tinctured, as they are, by principles which however fit for dissemination under the form of Government which exists there, cannot be inculcated here without evil results. They, therefore, recommend that some means be taken whereby the Schools here may be provided with Text Books at a cheap rate from Great Britain, or that a series of compilations or republications should be prepared and reprinted here, as the School Books appointed to be used in all the Schools throughout the Province.¹⁴

Appended to this report was a survey of books used in the common schools of the province. It was incomplete because three districts made no return at all and two others did not report the books used. It sufficed, however, to show that a large number of American texts were used in the schools. It was inferred from this survey that American influence through textbooks was widespread. Further testimony presented by individuals seemed to support both this view and the committee's recommendation for provincial authorization of school-books.

R. C. Horne, writing to the Hon. John Macaulay in 1839, warned that reports on the subject of education in the province were not to be relied on

¹¹ Ibid., Sullivan to Arthur.

¹² "Report on the State of the Grammar and Common Schools in Upper Canada", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, III: 215.

¹³ "Special Report on the State of Education in Upper Canada, 1839", in *Historical Educational Papers and Documents of Ontario, 1792-1853*, ed.: J. G. HODGINS, 3 vols (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, 1911), I: 120.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 121.

because of the existence of a general bias toward republican principles, "which requires the most assiduous attention to the selection of masters and books". Horne recommended that the Secretary to the Board of Education "select, compile, abridge, or compare popular works for the elementary schools, upon sound British principles, and in the cheapest form". It was important, he said, that the price of American books be undercut even if some outlay by the province was required. He advised making up books in separate parts so that they would not be worn out before being used. "The acquisition of British principles should be sedulously attended to, particularly in the selections for History and Geography, and a 'Provincial Reader' containing essays or sketches ... would be highly beneficial."¹⁵

A memorandum on education by the Rev. Patrick Colin Campbell, a Presbyterian minister and later the first professor of Classics at Queen's University, suggested that

a set of school books approved for use under the Normal System should be gradually introduced and not only American Books, but American editions of British schoolbooks should be strictly prohibited. It is impossible without a visitation of the Schools, to prevent this. I could instance American editions of British school Texts, particularly books of Geography in common use, in which the original has been shamefully altered.¹⁶

In spite of such evidence of the extent of the use of American books and the suggestion of their link with the frightening events of 1837-38, no government action immediately followed these reports. Reasons for this apparent laxity lay in part in reduced tensions between Upper Canada and the United States after this time. More importantly, they lay in the control exercised by local authorities over education matters, for the creation of municipal councils in 1841 empowered these bodies to administer schools. Moreover, until 1841, no central education agency of the public service existed, a factor which reduced initiative for policy-making as well as making the required level of supervision impossible. Even when the Rev. Robert Murray was appointed Assistant Superintendent for Education, Canada West, he was given no staff assistance, and the Act of 1841 produced so much chaos in the administration of the education system that Murray was fully occupied in the struggle to establish order and provide the basis for new legislation, without being concerned with specific details such as textbooks.¹⁷

By 1843, however, Murray was ready to suggest the kind of changes which he thought necessary for an effective school law. He placed top priority on establishing greater curriculum uniformity. Under the existing system, he said, the township commissioners had failed in their responsibility to select proper textbooks; they had instead left the choice to the teachers,

¹⁵ Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), RG 5, B 11, Miscellaneous Records Relating to Education, 1791-1843, Horne to Macaulay, 6 April 1839. Dr Robert Charles Horne was Chief Teller of the Bank of Canada; Hon. Justice John Macaulay was Provincial Secretary and a member of the 1839 Commission of Enquiry.

¹⁶ P. C. CAMPBELL, "Memorandum on Common Schools", *The Journal of Education of the Faculty of Education*, University of British Columbia, No. 154 (April 1969): 71.

¹⁷ Robert D. GIDNEY, "The Rev. Robert Murray: Ontario's First Superintendent of Schools", *Ontario History*, LXIII, 4 (December 1971): 198-99.

which meant in practice whatever books the parents chose to send with their children, including American texts. In other instances elected school commissioners had actually introduced American books.¹⁸ He emphasized the need for a more carefully organized curriculum, rather than one where the pupil might "commence his studies wherever he has a mind, and prosecute them in whatever order he pleases", and he recommended a strong superintendency sanctioned by law to enforce the new measures. The Act of 1843, however, left texts and courses largely in the hands of the local trustees, and did nothing to strengthen the hand of the superintendent.¹⁹

Murray's concern with the educational disadvantages of the multiplicity of textbooks was echoed by teachers who, when faced with the problem, had no recourse but to teach on the basis of "individual instruction". This system, so much lauded today, achieved little but frustration in a one-room school with thirty, forty or more pupils in attendance. The reminiscences of teachers who were active in this period are revealing of the problems which they faced.

Alexander Rogers, who taught in Peterborough, noted that there were so many textbooks in use that he was able to do very little classification of his pupils.²⁰ The experience of Edmund Harrison, a teacher in Middlesex County, was somewhat different: he recalled that, while there were different kinds of books in use and no uniformity, each school tried as much as possible to achieve the latter. He remembered that a meeting had been called in 1845 in an attempt to achieve uniformity, but that this attempt failed as some teachers were "wedded" to a particular set of texts and would use no other. Parents were also a problem, one family sending a child to school with an old *Aberdeen Almanac* as being quite sufficient for learning to read and spell! Harrison had been faced with the difficulty presented by using two different readers, three spellers, three grammars, and no less than five arithmetic books. Similarly, J.W. Poole, whose experience was in Lanark County in 1843, had used a great variety of books, both "home" and foreign, with the added problem that some of the latter were American and "the teaching of these Books was decidedly anti-British". Pupils brought such books as they chose to use, rendering classification impossible and so individual teaching was necessarily the rule.²¹

Egerton Ryerson, in his official protest at the Cameron Bill of 1849, described the importance of textbook uniformity in terms of pedagogical practice. In claiming that "the use of a uniform and suitable series of Text-Books is one of the most important features of a good School System", he attacked the policy of leaving the choice to county boards. This, he said, would open the schools "to the introduction of every kind of book-trash" and make impossible the important practice of having

¹⁸ "Report of a school meeting in Markham Township, 16 January 1842", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, IV: 225.

¹⁹ GIDNEY, "The Rev. Robert Murray", pp. 201-2.

²⁰ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, V: 280.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 275-76.

normal schoolteachers trained in the books they were to use in their future schools.²² The situation would revert to that of a few years before when Ryerson had said that the schools were filled with "a pernicious variety of heterogeneous and unsuitable books which prevent all classification and arrangement in the Schools, and, in some instances, almost paralyze their usefulness".²³

From the viewpoint of those seeking practical educative benefits, the introduction of uniform textbooks would have two advantages: it would facilitate the transfer of pupils from one school to another, and it would allow their placement in classes for group instruction, with common examinations and graded promotion. The first objective really only applies when there are numerous instances of people moving, and this may well have been a feature of Upper Canadian society in the 1840s as towns grew, attracting people from rural areas, and as landless and transient farm labourers increased in numbers.²⁴ However, the establishment of standardized books throughout the province was not a principal objective of the new policy, although it was undoubtedly a long-term goal. As the Education Office stated, the principle of a system of uniformity was not so much that one set of books be used in the province, but there be one uniform set used in each school, and next, in a district or city.²⁵

More important was the consideration that uniform texts would allow a re-organization of the teaching method, and bring this into line with the accepted concepts of the time. The classing of students according to capabilities and achievement would be the main advantage gained, one that, it was argued, would "double the value of the teacher's time to his employer", and "replace the most unpleasant part of his duties by a comparatively pleasurable and successful labour as well as advancing the success of students".²⁶ It would also aid the superintendents by facilitating inspection of schools and so "increase the means of forming an accurate judgement of their real and comparative progress, and of giving useful suggestions to Teachers and Visitors".²⁷ A prospectus distributed by Armour and Ramsay, the Montreal publishers of the "Irish National Series", stated the faults of a system employing heterogeneous books.

The consequence was that the labour of the teacher was much increased while the progress of the pupil was proportionately retarded. Being obliged to adapt his explanations and illustrations to the principles contained in the different Books in use, he was unable to classify his pupils, and was, therefore, obliged to repeat the observations to every individual pupil.²⁸

²² "The Abortive School Legislation of 1849", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VII: 235-43, Ryerson to Members of the Government, 14 July 1849.

²³ "Annual Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools for 1845-1846", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 248.

²⁴ L. A. JOHNSON, "Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793-1851", *Ontario History*, LXIII, 1 (March 1971): 60.

²⁵ "Circular to District Superintendents, 1846", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 267.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Ryerson to D'Everardo, 30 October 1846.

²⁸ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 245.

Moreover, there was an expectation that the textbooks would serve to improve the quality of the teaching carried on. Not only would teachers be relieved of the problems of teaching individual students from a multiplicity of texts, they could learn better pedagogy from the books themselves. In 1846 there was as yet no normal school to provide teacher training, nor were there set courses of study to outline the aim and content of the curriculum or to suggest teaching methods. This last was regarded as a pressing necessity, and the preface of a textbook might be the only place to impart such ideas and suggestions. The importance of the textbook lay in the fact that teachers of the period almost invariably taught by having their pupils memorize lessons directly from the book, and its quality, therefore, determined that of the education received by the pupil. As Thomas Donnelly, the Prince Edward District Superintendent, wrote, "the Schools are in general almost destitute of Books ... and with such Teachers, as are generally found in the Province, this is a great evil".²⁹ Where teachers were so often incompetent, any means of upgrading their abilities was to be promoted.

Uniformity, then, was seen as a desirable feature in itself, but there were other reasons for pressing for state-authorized texts. Extracts from American school-books in use in Upper Canada were frequently cited as evidence of the dangerous influence of such works. Pringle Shaw, a teacher who had come to York County from New Brunswick, found that most of his colleagues were from the United States and that "their School Books were all Yankee, and so was their pronunciation. The geography was Morse's, in which Canada was barely alluded to; ... Their history was of the United States, in which the battle of Lundy's Lane was a grand 'American' Victory".³⁰

Another teacher in 1845 pointed to *Peter Parley's Geography for Children* as an example of the many "pernicious and objectionable United States School Books" used in the common schools. He drew attention to references to the Revolution wherein it was stated that the English Colonies had been unjustly treated by the King, and that ever since the Revolution, the country had been generally prosperous and happy. In reference to the Irish, the book claimed that "they have suffered greatly from the bad government of the Country by the English." Kingdoms were charged with engaging in wars, which were the greatest calamities which could afflict nations and it was held that "the happiest and best kind of government is a free government. In the United States the government is free, and is called Republican ... There is no country so happy in all respects as our own."³¹ Olney's *School Atlas* was pointed to as another example of bad influence, since it contained maps showing American victories in 1776 and 1812, including frigate victories marked on a world map. From Sanders' *American Reader*, Macdougall enclosed examples of

²⁹ Donnelly to Ryerson, 16 December 1846, in *ibid.*: 285.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 309.

³¹ PAC, RG 5, C 1, Provincial Secretary's Correspondence, Macdougall to Daly, 6 September 1845.

songs of a patriotic nature, with titles such as "The Constitution", "Patriotic Song" and "Independence Day".³²

The presence of American books and the lack of uniformity in the books used presented one set of problems, which were compounded by the publication of new books, often Canadian in origin, in the 1840s. Naturally, in the case of the latter, there was considerable pressure for official recognition and approval for their exclusive use. The difficulty in making a selection involved the thorny question of patronage.

A major example of this sort of issue was the case of Alexander Davidson who was the author of the *Canada Spelling Book*, which had been published in 1841. According to the practice of the day, Davidson solicited recommendations for his work, and these were printed in conjunction with advertisements for the book. In this instance, the recommendations were well-calculated to put pressure on the government, for they appealed to the interests of both religion and loyalty. One endorsement, that of the Rev. A. M. Bethune, a prominent Anglican minister, head of the Diocesan Theological Institute and editor of *The Church*, included the statement that "a very positive inculcation of the duty of loyalty, and of that great obligation upon which loyalty and every other sound principle is founded, religion, is diffused throughout the work". Bethune added: "On these grounds, and from its general simplicity and cheapness, I cannot but express a strong hope that it will entirely supersede the use, in any of our Common Schools, of that very questionable work Webster's *Spelling Book*".³³ Another Church of England minister, the Rev. Thomas Green, recommended the book to "public patronage" in order to supersede "foreign Spelling Books now too generally used in Common Schools". The *Christian Guardian* (Methodist) liked it because it was thoroughly Canadian, while the *Commercial Herald* pointed out that "this book, unlike the School Books which have deluged Canada from the United States, is adapted to our situation, our own institutions, our own feelings, and our own interests".³⁴ By 1844, Davidson could advertise that 32,000 copies of his book had been published, proof of its wide acceptance by the public,³⁵ and sometime thereafter he began to petition the government for official approval of its use. The appointment of his friend, Egerton Ryerson, to the post of Assistant Superintendent of Education for Canada West, was probably a factor in his request.

By the time that Ryerson had returned from his European tour and assumed his duties as Chief Superintendent, it was apparent that some decision would have to be made on the textbook question. The evidence indicates that he had already worked out a plan for dealing with it. Writing to the provincial secretary early in 1846 regarding Davidson's letter requesting patronage for the *Canada Spelling Book*, Ryerson advised that

³² Ibid. "Independence Day" contained the lines, "The brave of heart, bore well their part, Oppression's hand to stay".

³³ *Niagara Chronicle*, 13 May 1841.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Niagara Argus*, 20 November 1844.

he was busy preparing a measure for the government more suitable than the decision of one individual would be, and that until a general system was adopted he could not "recommend any course as to an individual publication which may interfere with any measures, both as to the use of books, and the general method of instruction, which the Government may hereinafter deem it expedient to adopt".³⁶ What these measures should be, he had already suggested in a letter describing his visit to Dublin in 1845. He noted that the books authorized by the Irish National Board of Education for use in the "Poor Schools" of that country were "coming into extensive use both in England and Scotland, as well as in Ireland, ... and thus tested and recommended, they may be safely and advantageously introduced into our Canadian Schools".³⁷ On 3 January 1846, he answered a query regarding textbooks by stating that he had made arrangements to procure the Irish National Board books at a rate cheaper than they had yet been sold in the province, and that they were the best series yet to have appeared in the English language.³⁸

The evidence suggests that Ryerson had been convinced of the suitability of the "Irish Series" during his visit to Dublin in the previous year, but other factors, including the knowledge that Armour and Ramsay were already publishing reprints in Canada, may have influenced his choice. Ryerson's predisposition for the adoption of a British series may have been influenced by the specific recommendations to that effect in the Special Education Commission Report of 1839.³⁹ Also, Ryerson's visit to Ireland in 1844 had impressed him with the activities of the Irish National Board of Education and with its books. He chose a Dublin Model schoolmaster as first principal of the new Toronto Normal School and, when Mr Rintoul could not come, took an Irish board inspector instead, which suggests that the choice of textbooks may have been influenced by the decision to base teacher training in Upper Canada on the Irish system. Moreover, the "Irish National Series" was obviously popular generally, being used extensively in Scotland and England as well as in Ireland.⁴⁰ However, it undoubtedly also reflected Ryerson's innate conservatism, typical of many Canadians of the time, who saw themselves primarily as British North Americans loyal to the "old Country".

Local educational leaders who possessed Irish background or teaching experience influenced Ryerson's decision to select the "Irish National Series". The Rev. William Hamilton of Picton and William Hutton of Belleville are cases in point. The former, who had been headmaster of the Royal Academical Institution, Belfast, had already influenced Ryerson in his decision to promote the idea of a provincial normal school.⁴¹ Hutton,

³⁶ PAO, R.G. 5, C 1, Ryerson to Hon. D. Daly, 28 January 1846.

³⁷ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, V: 246.

³⁸ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Ryerson to Wm Hutton, Superintendent Common Schools, Belleville, 3 January 1846.

³⁹ HODGINS, *Educational Papers*, I: 120 ff.

⁴⁰ PAO, R.G. 2, B, Letterbook A, Ryerson to the Secretaries, Education Office, Dublin, 24 July 1846.

⁴¹ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to Wm Hamilton, 27 January 1846.

who was Common School Superintendent for the Victoria District and had been educated in Ireland, revealed his interest in the Irish National Books in a letter to his mother in Ireland in 1845, before Ryerson's return from abroad. Hutton stated that everywhere schools were badly off for books, having nothing but trash, and that he wished some of the wealthy associations at home would take pity on the poor Canadians and send out a supply of the Irish National Books, as "it would tend *wonderfully* to our improvement here". And he added, "I mean to apply to the Government to expend some of their annual revenue for that purpose."⁴² It is likely that the interest of such men accounts for the existing familiarity with the Irish National Books in parts of the province, and that this influenced Ryerson's decision to select them as the authorized texts.

Hutton stated in his report for 1845, that the greatest disadvantage reflected by the schools in the Victoria District arose from the want of good textbooks, the *English Reader* being too dull and uninteresting and American grammar and geography texts being frequently used. He called for the use of the "Irish National Series" to correct the "dull and senseless method of reading now too prevalent".⁴³ Political objectives which could also be met were cited. Firstly, and one which must have had a considerable appeal for Ryerson, he suggested that this would allow the employment of American teachers, as these could not exert an evil influence if their textbooks were removed. The clause in the Act of 1843 which prohibited the employment of such teachers could be removed, and the acute teacher shortage in the district thus relieved. As well, the Irish books' stress on the fundamental principles of Christian truth and morality would help to elevate the moral level of the populace and, lastly, the imperial tie would be promoted through the emphasis on British nationalism. Hutton recommended government subsidy as the means of promoting the purchase of the "Irish Series". Like Ryerson, he regarded schools as vehicles for encouraging loyalty, fostering self-reliance, and insuring domestic tranquillity.

Ryerson's response to Hutton's suggestions was encouraging. Writing on 25 December 1845, the latter again strongly urged the adoption of a uniform set of books, citing the "Irish National Series" specifically.⁴⁴ Ryerson replied that he concurred entirely in all views that had been expressed, and added that he had already taken steps to carry these into reality.⁴⁵ Ryerson's *Report* of 1846 included the recommendation first made by Hutton a year earlier.

Another factor, and one which made a quick decision necessary, was the Education Act of 1846 (drafted by Ryerson) which excluded the use of foreign books after 1 January 1847. This regulation, which also

⁴² Hutton to his mother, 12 January 1845, in G. E. BOYCE, *Hutton of Hastings. The Life and Letters of William Hutton, 1801-61* (Belleville: Belleville Intelligence, 1972), p. 125.

⁴³ Hutton to Victoria District Council, "Report on District Common Schools", 24 March 1845, in *ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁴ Hutton to Ryerson, 25 December 1845, in *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁵ Ryerson to Hutton, 3 January 1846, in *ibid.*

prohibited alien teachers, was an attempt to reshape the political orientation of the schools, but the Act did not specify the precise means of accomplishing the proscription. Section XXX, "General Provisions", included a clause that it "be enacted, that no foreign Books, in the English branches of Education, shall be used in any Model, or Common School, except by the express permission of the Board of Education". In addition, Section XIII stipulated that it was the duty of the district superintendents "to prevent the use of all unauthorized foreign School Books in the English branches of education — to recommend the use of proper books for Schools".⁴⁶ Ryerson expressed his concern in a letter to James Hopkirk, the Assistant Secretary, Canada West, and suggested his solution to the problem of implementing these terms of the Act.

The proposed arrangement in respect to School Text Books, a matter of extreme delicacy and difficulty, — will, I hope, be an essential improvement on a vitally important feature of the proposed System of Public Education. Nothing can be worse than the present state of things in respect to School Books.⁴⁷

Ryerson added that "every communication" with the Education Office spoke of the necessity of something being done, but that none suggested what this should be, except the achievement of textbook uniformity. He noted that a New York State law of 1843 allowed state and county superintendents to reject any school library book and that all such had to be chosen from the university regents' list except by special permission. Such power, he felt, could not be given to superintendents in Canada as he did not propose even that much for the Board of Education. He proposed, instead, two lists for trustees, one of those being of books recommended and one of those not permitted.

That Ryerson had already determined what books were to be on the approved list is shown by his previous letters to Daly and Hutton, but he did not make formal arrangement for the "Irish National Series" until September 1846, although an understanding was likely arrived at during his visit the previous year. On 21 July, the "Minutes of the Board of Education, Canada West", record that it was

ordered that, in his Communication to the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, the Chief Superintendent of Schools shall enquire at what prices they would engage to furnish this Board with their series of National School Books, and also to request, that they would grant permission to this Board to reprint editions of their works, if required.⁴⁸

A meeting of the Commissioners of National Education at Dublin noted that Rev. Egerton Ryerson, Superintendent of Schools in Upper Canada, "with a view of establishing a Normal School there and introducing a plan of education for the poor similar in its leading principles to the national system for Ireland", had requested both a suitable person as Normal School headmaster and permission to publish part or the whole of the Irish

⁴⁶ "Common School Act of 1846, 9 Vic. cap. 20", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 67.

⁴⁷ "Ryerson to Jas. Hopkirk", in *ibid.*: 73.

⁴⁸ "Minutes of the Board of Education, Canada West", in *ibid.*: 234.

National Books, or to be allowed to buy them at the reduced rate for the colonies.⁴⁹ On 14 September, a letter was sent to Ryerson, which he received in time to read at the 9 October board meeting. It stated, in part, that

it affords the Commissioners much pleasure to grant the required permission to reprint the Books published by them, for the use of the Schools to be established in Canada, — or, if you prefer it, the Commissioners will supply such Books, or other requirements, as are mentioned in the accompanying list at the prices therein stated.⁵⁰

At this meeting, the Board ordered Ryerson to enquire as to the terms on which Toronto booksellers would act as agents for the sale of the Irish National Books. It then passed formal approval of the books, and recommended them, as well as Lennie's *Grammar*, for exclusive use in the common schools of Upper Canada. Tenders were ordered to be let for either the publication or importation of the "Irish National Series".

Ryerson often cited cost as having been a major factor in his choice of books, an argument which he used in the "Special Report" in 1846. Since, he said, it was the duty of the Board to recommend or disapprove of books, he had presented ones which, through personal conversation with the commissioners in Dublin, he was sure could be obtained on the most advantageous terms. He noted that he had got their permission to reprint the books, as well as an offer to supply the Dublin editions at cost, or "nearly one hundred per cent below the retail price to the British public".⁵¹ In an address to the trustees of common schools in 1848, Ryerson assured them that "in no one particular, can Trustees more effectually secure a saving in time of their children, and of the Teacher, and, ultimately, saving of money than by not consenting to the buying, hereafter, of any other than the cheap and unrivalled Irish Books".⁵² The Armour and Ramsay prospectus, already referred to, expands the argument based on cost.

The unnecessary expense to purchasers was another objection to the use of so great a variety of Class Books. Had publishers and Booksellers been sure of obtaining a sale from one kind of Books, they would have been satisfied with a much smaller percentage than they were compelled to charge. To suit the taste of different persons, they were obliged to keep constantly on hand assortments of every kind of School Books used throughout the Country. The consequence was, that ... to protect themselves from loss, they were under the necessity of raising the price of those that continued in demand, to the manifest disadvantage of the purchasers.⁵³

Another attractive feature of the "Irish National Series," aside from their low cost, was the fact that their adoption by the provincial board

⁴⁹ National Library of Ireland, "Minutes of the Commissioners of National Education", 3 September 1846.

⁵⁰ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 242.

⁵¹ "Special Report on the Operation of the Common School Act of 1846", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VII: 106.

⁵² "Address to Trustees of Common Schools, 1848", in *ibid.*: 226.

⁵³ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 280.

allowed Ryerson to sidestep the very thorny issue of patronage. As previously noted, Governor-General Lord Metcalfe had already given his approval to the Irish National Books, on Armour and Ramsay's petition. Ryerson had campaigned for "Governor and Loyalty" in the Tory cause prior to the election of 1844, and it was Metcalfe who had given him his appointment. It might have been in Ryerson's private interest to support the Irish books for this reason, but public considerations explain his decision more clearly. He undoubtedly believed that the "Irish National Series" was best suited to Upper Canada's needs. In addition, the choice allowed him to avoid the necessity of selecting from among the numerous Canadian textbook authors and publishers who were appealing for official patronage.

That Ryerson wished to avoid such a decision is shown by his leaving competition open after considering the tenders of publishing firms. He had stated that his decision regarding publications of textbooks had been based on the fact that there was virtually no difference in the tendered bids, and that the principal publishers had pressured the Board to leave competition open.⁵⁴ One publisher, however, Armour and Ramsay of Montreal, was incensed at the decision. Arguing that they had incurred great costs in getting out their editions of the "Irish National Series", they protested the Provincial General Board of Education's granting reprint rights to any other firm. "In the present case", their letter said, "we think we have reason to complain that, after going through the heat and struggle of the fight, others should step in and secure the advantages of our labours."⁵⁵ Ryerson's reply stated frankly that the decision had been taken to avoid creating greater dissensions among Canadian publishers and making the Board's functioning impossible, and that any loss incurred by a publisher who was already printing the books was unavoidable.⁵⁶ The firm was further informed that they could only gain approval from the Board if their reprints were as high in quality and as accurate as the imported versions, as well as being cheaper.⁵⁷ Armour and Ramsay in fact did win control of the reprint business, as they had already stereotyped a number of the Dublin editions, and had large stocks on hand, as well as established contracts with booksellers. However, Ryerson's position appeared, at least, to put the Board above a patronage decision which might have resulted in some impugning of its motives. The threat of competition also forced Armour and Ramsay to improve the accuracy of the editions, a weakness of which Ryerson had complained previously.⁵⁸

Although all of the foregoing were factors in the selection of the "Irish National Series", they were probably less influential than others which related to the character of the books themselves, and their perceived relationship to Upper-Canadian needs. It is important to keep in mind

⁵⁴ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VIII: 90.

⁵⁵ "Armour and Ramsay to Ryerson, 3 November 1846", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 277.

⁵⁶ "Ryerson to Armour and Ramsay, 11 November 1846", in *ibid.*: 278.

⁵⁷ "Ryerson to Armour and Ramsay, 30 November 1846", in *ibid.*: 275.

⁵⁸ "Ryerson to Armour and Ramsay, 11 November 1846", in *ibid.*: 278.

that the textbook policy was only a part of a much broader one, that of establishing a universal programme of elementary education which would serve certain definite social interests. This is hinted at in a reference by Ryerson that private individuals ought not to be depended on to supply books to public schools.⁵⁹ The overall plan had been enunciated in the Act of 1846, and involved common school reform, teacher training, and provincial administrative reform as well as the standardization of textbooks.

As far as school-books were concerned, one of the main considerations was that they provide a system of moral and political values appropriate to the Canadian community, but on a non-sectarian basis, as the agitation for religious separate schools was already a source of division in the common school movement. The religious content of the Irish National Books was designed to be neutral, the books having been originally drafted and approved by a committee of religious leaders representing all major denominations. There were, in Ireland, relatively few complaints on this score, at least at first, although the volume entitled *Sacred Poetry* and Archbishop Whateley's *Scripture Lessons* had definite Protestant overtones. Moreover, by the very fact of its inclusion, the religious content of the books encouraged the teacher to impose his particular interpretation on the material, and so neutral religious education remained an ideal rather than a reality.⁶⁰

The *Report* of 1846 declared that the curriculum should be non-sectarian, but should contain a general system of truth and morals based on the Holy Scriptures. Sectarian religion, Ryerson warned, ignores this and so raises up "pugilists and persecutors", creates controversy, and is "inimical alike to good government and public tranquillity".⁶¹ On the other hand, Godless education would lead to the development of factions and "isms" as in the United States, as well as to vice and crime.⁶² He cited the success of Prussia, Switzerland and Ireland in developing non-sectarian religious instruction, making particular reference to the Irish National Board's scriptural histories and books of "Lessons on the Truth of Christianity".⁶³ Since Canada contained many different sects, all deserving of protection, education must be free of sectarian bias. The "Irish National Series" might serve to counteract the problem of sectarian influences in books then in use, and to heal social division arising from this source. This concept of promoting an inter-denominational Protestantism in schools, of teaching morality without alienating specific groups and thus promoting a unified and stable society was not unique. Ryerson was following the example of many parts of the United States which, like the European countries referred to, were attempting something similar. For

⁵⁹ PAO, R.G. 2, B, Letterbook A, Ryerson to the Secretaries, Education Office, Dublin, 24 July 1846.

⁶⁰ D. H. AKENSON, *The Irish Education Experiment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 237.

⁶¹ RYERSON, *Report*, pp. 22-23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

much the same reasons Horace Mann had in 1838 resisted the efforts of the American Sunday School Union to introduce its own textbook series in Massachusetts schools.⁶⁴

Political and social ideas, as well as religion, were divisive forces in Upper Canada, and one of the gravest of dangers was considered to be that body of ideas emanating from the United States. There is no doubt that Ryerson's textbook policy was largely concerned with counteracting pro-American attitudes by the inculcation of what were termed "British principles". As his 1846 "Circular to the Superintendents" stated, "as many Foreign, and other inappropriate textbooks have found their way into our Schools, it is a work of some delicacy and difficulty to supersede them. This must be the work of time, as well as of prudence and perseverance; but the object to be accomplished is worth all the labour necessary for its attainment."⁶⁵ Many of the early books had been from the United States, and were suspected of being pro-Republican and anti-British. Only Woodbridge's *Geography* had been in any way adapted to use in the British North American provinces and there was no history of Canada in general use. In these politically sensitive areas of the curriculum, the strongly American-biased Morse's and Olney's geographies and Webster's *History* dominated. Ryerson noted in his "Annual Report" for 1847 that American geographies were unfit for use in Canada "especially as they are generally not only exclusively American, but even partial and anti-foreign, particularly hostile against everything British; as if their own youth could not be well educated without being taught to hate and condemn British institutions and people". No American geography, he added, was more objectionable in these respects than Olney's "which has found considerable circulation in Canada, though it contains very little respecting Canada, and that little is to a great extent, false and slanderous. Such a book should forthwith be excluded from our schools."⁶⁶

Ryerson outlined the extent of the problem in his "Special Report" in 1846, in response to attacks on the textbook policy. "I believe", he said, "that nearly one half of the Books used in our schools are from the United States."⁶⁷ He went on to say that he had been informed by a gentleman who had attended a public examination in the Home District that twenty-five out of some twenty-seven of the books in the school were American. The reason for this popularity, he suggested, was that American books had an attractive style and were cheap, in comparison with books printed in Canada. Moreover, many persons had become

⁶⁴ Raymond CULVER, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929).

⁶⁵ "Circular Addressed to Superintendents", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 267.

⁶⁶ "Chief Superintendent's Report for the Year 1847", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VII: 164.

⁶⁷ "Special Report ... 1846", in *ibid.*, VII: 110. J. G. Hodgins added his own impression in a postscript, stating that "this significant statement of the evil effects of the use of the United States Books in U.C. was abundantly verified by the facts, which were patent to those, like myself, who lived in the troublous times of 1837." (p. 110) Hodgins, sixteen at the time, had served in a local militia unit.

concerned in the trade of these books and many teachers had acquired a partiality for them. Nevertheless, Ryerson asserted, the use of such books was not prohibited by the Act because they were foreign, but because they were anti-British.

They are unlike the School Books of any other enlightened people ... with very few exceptions they abound with statements and allusions prejudicial to the institutions and character of the British Nation ... and as to the influence of such publications, I believe, though silent and unperceptible in its operations, it is more extensive and powerful than is generally supposed. I believe such School Books are one element of powerful influence against the established Government of the Country.

From facts, which have come to my knowledge, I believe it will be found, on inquiry, that in precisely those parts of Upper Canada where United States School Books had been used most extensively, there the spirit of the insurrection in 1837 and 1838, was most prevalent.

Ryerson's implication that the influence of textbooks had been a factor in the Rebellion of 1837 was never substantiated, but his attitude is at least understandable. In writing of the American Revolution, he had attributed the massive change — from a traditional love for Britain to hatred and republicanism — to Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, and he quoted from Fotheringham's *Rise of the Republic of the United States*, which said that, by such influences, "in the short space of two years, nearly three million people passed over from the love and duty of loyal subjects to the hatred and resentment of enemies."⁶⁸ Similar anti-American attitudes were widely shared in British North America, where the Loyalist tradition had been reinforced by the War of 1812, the Rebellion and border troubles of 1837-39, and later, the Oregon Crisis of 1846.

To some extent, the charges against American school-books were true; the nationalism of that country had produced a situation where, as Ryerson said, "you can scarcely take up an American schoolbook, from a Primer to History, which does not contain passages exalting American institutions at the expense of the institutions of other countries, and even philippics [*sic*] against the institutions and government of Great Britain".⁶⁹ Before 1820 there had been little difference between most American and Canadian texts, Lindley Murray's readers having dominated in both countries. Afterwards, however, the introduction of the nationalistic McGuffey readers had set the United States in a pattern of its own, with their stress on the Union and on tastes and a viewpoint distinctly American.

Ryerson's opposition to American books on a political basis was, although heated, somewhat ambivalent. In a letter to A. S. Barnes, a New York publisher, Ryerson disclaimed any anti-American prejudice and stated that he was opposed to those who held such. He remarked that he hoped to purchase American books for school libraries.⁷⁰ To some

⁶⁸ Egerton RYERSON, *The Loyalists of America and Their Times*, 2 vols (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1880), II: 66, 70, 71.

⁶⁹ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to G. Hendry, 1 February 1847.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Letterbook D, Ryerson to A. S. Barnes and Co., 24 February 1849.

extent, a cautious policy regarding textbooks was dictated by circumstance in that it would be premature to ban American books until an alternative supply was available, no matter how much he was "impressed with the magnitude of the evil arising from the indiscriminate use of United States Books". Ryerson felt, however, that it could be carried out in the current year, and that all parties in the legislature would "agree with the propriety and expediency of using our own books in our own Schools".⁷¹

Results of Ryerson's arrangement for adoption of the Irish National Books were apparent almost immediately. Booksellers and publishers alike hastened to obtain selling and reprinting rights for the new books, and their low price effectively eliminated would-be competitors. There was a time-lag, of course, before existing books in use in the schools were all replaced, but the ban on foreign books which began on 1 January 1847, served to accelerate the change. A uniform set of pro-British books was gained, incidentally, at the expense of what had been a burgeoning Canadian textbook writing and publishing business. That this was noted at the time is revealed by a protest from the *Hamilton Spectator* that the Irish National Books were *not* universally accepted in Ireland, that some were, in fact, very poor and that their choice had served to eliminate many good Canadian books.⁷²

If one of the main objectives of the introduction of standardized uniform texts was to help teachers and to improve education generally, the evidence would, in part, indicate that this occurred. American books were largely done away with; Adolphus Andrews, who taught in Middlesex, remembered replacing the *English Reader*, the *New Testament*, and Mavor with the "Irish National Readers", Daboll's with the *Irish National Arithmetic*, and Kirkham's with Lennie's *Grammar*. Patrick Downey, a teacher in Eramosa Township, near Guelph, said that the Irish National Books were introduced shortly after he commenced work there in 1845, "and they certainly proved a valuable aid to Teacher and pupil, in Reading, Spelling, and Ancient History". Patrick O'Sullivan, who had emigrated from Ireland to Toronto in 1845, recalled that Dr Ryerson had obtained the copyright for the Irish National Books and had "formed a good School System" which, he averred, became the best in the world, better even than Ireland's. J. W. Poole of Lanark County noted that after heterogeneous and foreign books gave place to the "Irish National Series", individual and routine teaching was replaced by classification of pupils and competitive examinations.⁷³ However, it must be kept in mind that the reminiscences cited above were collected by J. G. Hodgins in 1896, long after the event, and that they may not be very reliable as a true indication of the reaction at the time of the inception of the new policy. From sources other than teachers, as will be seen, there was considerable opposition.

Even before 1846 it was evident that introducing the new textbooks would meet with considerable difficulty, and that compromises would have

⁷¹ Ibid., Ryerson to Daly, 23 June 1847.

⁷² *Toronto Globe*, 6 February 1847, reprinted from the *Hamilton Spectator*.

⁷³ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, V: 277, 279, 308.

to be made. The vice-president of the Gore District Teachers' Society wrote to Ryerson that, although the majority of teachers in the District preferred the Irish National Books, Mr Patrick Thornton, the Superintendent, was trying to press on their students books written by his brother and had made unjust and envious remarks in reference to the Irish National Books.⁷⁴ More serious was the protest from the influential Niagara District superintendent, Dexter D'Everardo, that the prohibition of certain American books in his area would meet with great objection. Apparently as a result of this protest, the Board of Education passed a motion that, "as uneasiness had been manifested by some Teachers of Schools, who have been in the habit of using foreign books", Morse's and Kirkham's texts could be used until after 1 January 1847, until the Board approved of a geography and grammar better adapted to Canadian schools.⁷⁵ On the same day, 29 September, Ryerson notified D'Everardo that the Board of Education agreed to continue to authorize the use of the two books, and explained his own position on the question:

It has never been my wish, nor is it the intention of the School Act — to preclude the use of foreign books, as such — but to make a safe and proper selection of them — even to prefer them in cases when they are unobjectionable in their contents, and cheaper and better than those which can be produced in the Province, or be obtained elsewhere, and that Teachers in using such foreign Books will not be liable to invidious suspicions or insinuations, but act under the protection and sanction of the Provincial Board of Education.⁷⁶

The correspondence between Ryerson and D'Everardo is significant in revealing the argument in favour of American books, as well as in demonstrating the pragmatic approach adopted by the chief superintendent in working out a textbook policy. D'Everardo, American in origin himself and a consummate politician, presented his case forcefully but ever so urbanely. In his response to the concession granted by Ryerson, he referred to the fact that "it gave much satisfaction to be able to announce to Teachers and Trustees that the Board of Education had, through your intervention, decided upon authorizing the continued use of Morse's *Geography* and Kirkham's *Grammar*, those works being in general favour here." He went on to explain why no "invidious suspicion" should be attached to this preference.

It is doubtless known by the head of the Education Department that the new School Act has been, and is, quite unpopular with a large number of the inhabitants of this District, one of the principal objections being the anticipated prohibition of the use of foreign books.

The preference given to School books published in the United States does not here, I am inclined to think, arise from any political bias, but from the peculiar geographical position of the locality in relation to that Country which naturally led to frequent intercourse with each other for the purpose of trade, etc. by the people of the two Countries.

The results of this intercourse have been among other things to familiarize Canadians with their Common school laws, their school books and in short with every matter connected with their system of elementary American books in the schools.

⁷⁴ PAO, R.G. 2, C-6-C, Joseph Fenton to Ryerson, 21 September 1846.

⁷⁵ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 241-42.

⁷⁶ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Ryerson to D'Everardo, 29 September 1846.

D'Everardo expressed the belief that these were better adapted to the uses required than any other Canadian or foreign books "although in almost all of those works there are some portions to say the least of them evidently not intended for Canadian pupils". He also pointed out that parents who had supplied their children at considerable expense with new books were not prepared to lay these aside and adopt a change, without more apparent advantages, but that Ryerson's communication with its "liberal views" had allayed that fear. D'Everardo summed up by saying that there were numerous arguments in favour of the control of books and that these, in his mind, were conclusive, but that it was something new, and therefore would be necessary to convince people before any changes could be made. Time, he warned, would be required to remove existing views and opinions, and it would therefore be best to make changes gradually, "to follow rather than precede convictions". He concluded by apologizing to Ryerson for this giving of advice which had not been requested.⁷⁷

Ryerson's answer indicates a considerable deviation from the original wording and intent of the textbook enactment. Regarding the uniformity of books, he said that he had only meant this to apply within one school, not necessarily overall.

In regard to American Books, when we come to consider the subject of School Libraries, I propose to bring under the notice of the Board and thus before the public, many useful American publications. And in regard to the use of American Books I do not intend to recommend any other than the gradual introduction of our own books as those now in use become worn out, and new ones are required, and until we can provide for the people an adequate and satisfactory supply. I desire to do nothing on this subject which will not be in harmony with the general convictions of all persons, informed in any tolerable degree, in every District in the Province, and which will not, as soon as understood, command general support, if not general public gratitude.⁷⁸

On the same date as this letter, the Board of Education ordered that delicacy be used in any communication regarding existing books.⁷⁹ In a similar vein, the draft of a circular letter to the municipal councils, informing them that a board had been appointed which would be responsible for books, advised that it was "not our intention to employ any coercive means to effect our recommendations: but that an attempt would be made to recommend books which were the cheapest as well as the best".⁸⁰ The most significant change illustrated by these communications is that Ryerson had altered his position from authorizing or prescribing certain books to only making recommendations. As will be seen, however, Ryerson was far from being defeated on this point, and the reference to "cheap" books in his "Circular" is an indication of the direction he intended to take. As the textbook policy developed, it became apparent that the inten-

⁷⁷ PAO, R.G. 2, C-6-C, D'Everardo to Ryerson, 12 October 1846.

⁷⁸ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Ryerson to D'Everardo, 30 October 1846.

⁷⁹ HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 245.

⁸⁰ "Letter to the Municipal Councils of the Several Districts and Cities in Upper Canada, 10 November 1846", in *ibid.*

tion was to introduce the "Irish National Series" through competition rather than compulsion.

The new programme was finally announced in an Education Office circular dated 15 December 1846.⁸¹ In this, the regulations regarding textbooks were clearly spelled out. The law prohibited the use of foreign books in the English branch of elementary schools, unless specially sanctioned by the provincial Board of Education. Further, the Board was authorized to recommend books for use in the schools, and the trustees were to select from this list. A coercive aspect entered in at this point, as the legislative grant was to be withheld from any common school in which texts which had been publicly disapproved by the Board were used. However, the circular hastened to add that there had been, as yet, no disapproval of any book published in the British dominions. The Irish National Books were specifically recommended, and it was announced that the Board had adopted measures to secure their importation as well as the production of correct reprints at lower prices than had hitherto existed in Upper Canada, although these were already lower than that of many school-books now in use. To those who might prefer it, Lennie's *English Grammar* was also approved, as were two American texts, namely Kirkham's *English Grammar* and Morse's *Geography*, both being referred to as "in substance, excellent elementary works".

The textbooks policy, once ratified, was carried into effect remarkably quickly. The Board of Education received tenders for reprinting the Irish National Books on 22 December, and the chief superintendent was authorized the same day to grant permission to any responsible person to publish the same. Apparently on his own initiative, Ryerson prepared a communication on 6 January 1847 to those who had tendered bids notifying them that this was to be left open, giving as reasons that "there is scarcely a shade of difference in the Tenders", and "the principal publishers in Upper Canada have expressed a wish that the Board would leave the business open."⁸² They were informed that the Board would reserve the right to recommend or disapprove of any reprint according to its accuracy and quality, and reminded them that the low price of imported books would regulate that of the reprints. Booksellers were also told that the Board would supply the Irish National Books at reduced prices, namely the same as for poor schools in Ireland, "which are one half the number of pence in sterling of the number of pence of currency for which, — as the maximum prices, — they are permitted to be sold in Upper Canada". These prices were included in circulated Education Office forms and regulations, and any bookseller agreeing to the prices could apply to the Board for reference to obtain them at the reduced rate from the Irish Board, on a payment-on-demand basis.

Despite the compromises which he made on the textbook question, it seems clear that Ryerson shared the general anti-republican attitudes

⁸¹ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, "Circular Addressed to District Superintendents of Schools by the Chief Superintendent of Education".

⁸² HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VII: 90.

of his time. It was believed, by Tories and Reformers alike, that democracy led to factionalism and social chaos, and that it was incompatible with true liberty, orderliness, and the preservation of the rights of person and property. He recognized, in this connection, that school-books were the most widely read books and, in an age when there was not competition from other media, books may have had considerable influence on the attitudes of children. Backed by the authority of the school, they were likely to be most influential in shaping the way particular nations were seen, especially if these were distant from the child's experience and no contraventions emanated from the home.⁸³

Opposition to American books was not based solely on the grounds of the values extolled in them, but also on educative grounds. One of their characteristics was their adaptation to a system of rote learning which Ryerson opposed as "word-mongery" unlikely to develop or "nourish" the mind properly.

The superficial and pernicious system of teaching and learning thus exposed and deprecated, forms the basis on which a large portion of the American Elementary School Books are composed — professing to be so constructed as to require very little intellectual labour on the part of either Teacher or Pupil.⁸⁴

He said that many such books had been introduced in Canada with "pernicious influence", and advocated the Prussian "inductive method" in which the child was taught to think, and the "whole individual" educated. In conclusion, he quoted the London *Westminster Review* which advocated education of the people to give them full command of every faculty of mind and body, to allow observation and reflection, and to make them into thinking and reasoning creatures rather than those of impulse, prejudice and passion. Such education should give them moral objects of pursuit conducive to their own happiness as well as that of the community instead of vice and sensuality, and, most important, it would teach them to identify their individual interest with the general interest.⁸⁵

On a more practical level, the introduction of British books might obviate the necessity of banning American teachers. As William Hutton had pointed out,⁸⁶ if the textbooks were based on correct values, the teacher's bias, whatever it might be, would be overcome. This had a very practical purpose in a situation where, as he had shown, the acute shortage of teachers caused many trustees to hire Americans. Even Ryerson admitted that the text, not the teacher, was the critical issue,⁸⁷ and had not pushed enthusiastically the ban on teachers enacted in 1847.⁸⁸

⁸³ For an excellent analysis of the potential impact of textbooks, see R. M. ELSON, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. viii.

⁸⁴ RYERSON, *Report*, pp. 53-54.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁸⁶ BOYCE, *Hutton*, p. 132.

⁸⁷ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Letterbook D, Ryerson to Daly, 23 June 1847.

⁸⁸ PAO, R.G. 2, C 1, Letterbook C, Ryerson to G. Hendry, Superintendent of Common Schools, Brock District, 21 April 1846.

It is the emphasis on the socializing role of education which offers perhaps the most convincing explanation for the textbook policy of 1846. Anti-Americanism was an important factor accentuated as it was by the tensions related to Oregon which had led to renewed fears of invasion or annexation. If these dangers were to be averted, a strong feeling of loyalty to Britain should be created. Another element was the hope that the Union of 1841 would result in the eventual Anglicizing of the French population, something which might be achieved by a uniform and non-sectarian school curriculum. Although the "Irish National Series" was approved only for Canada West, it was anticipated that its use might be extended, as Armour and Ramsay had suggested.⁸⁹ Their prospectus contained the statement that the "Irish National Series" appeared "to be better adapted to the peculiar wants of the mixed population of these Colonies, than any other in existence".⁹⁰

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there was the immediate question of dealing with the problem of massive Irish immigration. Although this did not reach a peak until 1847, already there was considerable concern directed at a group which congregated in urban slums, seemed to spread diseases such as cholera through its lack of hygiene principles, was partly non-English speaking, and Roman Catholic in religion. Fear of an urban poverty-stricken mass was recurrent among property-owners ever since the French Revolution, and Canadians were not exceptional in this regard. In Canada there may well have been a fear that there might be an expansion of Catholicism through education as a result of increased Irish immigration. Protestant groups would be more willing to co-operate to resist such and so overlook their differences to allow inter-denominational Protestantism in the schools in order to counter such a development. The growing support of free schools after 1846 is also indicative of a similar feeling that a need existed to preserve a stable society against threats of division, and, perhaps, rescue the children of the Irish poor from popery and barbarism.

That crime and poverty were commonly associated with the Irish and that the correction of these evils was one of the principal aims of the education policy of 1846 are evident. "By education", Ryerson explained in his *Report*, "I mean not the mere acquisition of certain arts, or of certain branches of knowledge, but that instruction and discipline which qualify and dispose the subjects of it for their appropriate duties and employments of life." This should be graded to the level of all classes, the *Report* went on to say, and whatever knowledge was needed should be taught to all, and forced on the careless if need be. Education of the lowest classes is justified by "considerations of economy as well as of patriotism and humanity" because "first, such a system of general education amongst the people is the most effectual preventative of pauperism, and its natural companions, misery and crime." To a young and growing

⁸⁹ "Armour and Ramsay to Ryerson, 9 December 1846", in HODGINS, *Documentary History*, VI: 279-80.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 276.

country which was the retreat of so many poor from other countries, this consideration was of the utmost importance. As the *Report* warned, the "gangrene of pauperism" in either cities or states is almost incurable, and is "hereditary as well as infectious — both to perpetuate and to propagate itself, — to weaken the body politic at its very heart, — and to multiply wretchedness and vice". In this statement⁹¹ there is a clear indication that the education reforms inaugurated in 1846 were directly related to problems of immigration which had become critical in that year.

In this respect, the Irish National Books had a definite appeal. Initially, they had been designed to avoid any stimulation of Irish nationalism, and this explains their careful religious neutrality as well as the fact that they contained no specific Irish references. This may have been an attractive feature for those who saw immigration as bringing Irish political radicalism to Canada, as part and parcel of popery, poverty and "ship-fever". Moreover, the non-nationalistic character of the books seemed to make them suitable for Canadian use, both as a means of refuting American or French-Canadian values, and allowing the addition of a British North American outlook in using the books in the schools.

The textbook question of the 1840s may be related to the more general question of the nature of innovation and change. To achieve change, it is necessary for the new ideal to be held by only a small group, as long as that group can exert influence on society at large, and as long as a climate of opinion conducive to change exists. For this reason, changes normally occur after a time-lapse, during which information regarding the innovation is diffused and a consensus is created to support it. This does not seem to have taken long in the case of the introduction of the Irish National Books, the length of time between the introduction of the idea and its widespread acceptance being remarkably brief. This can be explained by reference to the fact that these books were already familiar to Canadians through the agency of publishers and booksellers prior to this time, but may also relate to the urgency which people felt regarding the situation in 1846.

The concern for the efficiency of common school education, already a part of the intellectual climate of the period, was accentuated by the American threat and immigrant pressures. Uniformity in textbooks would allow classing and thus group rather than individual instruction, something which reflected the pedagogy of the time, but which could also be seen as a response to a public demand for larger and more efficient schools, perhaps at proportionately lower cost. Again, it was also designed to facilitate movement of families, recognizing the high degree of transiency in pre-industrial Upper Canada. Education reform, including that of textbooks, was perceived as necessary in dealing with the essentially urban problems of slums, variable employment, crime and vice. As Marx and Engels were observing at the same time in Europe, in these lay the seeds of social upheaval, of revolution, even the destruction of capitalism. These measures, designed as answers to problems in parts of the world

⁹¹ RYERSON, *Report*, pp. 142, 195.

troubled by incipient industrialization, were eagerly seized on by Canadians who saw themselves as part of the broader society.

An important factor was that of removing the influence of American books, something which must be seen in the context of the strains of the period from 1837 to 1846 in American-Canadian relations. It had a positive side as well, namely the indication of the development of a distinctive Upper-Canadian identity as British North Americans, a product of the province's successful survival of this period, and of the expansion and rising prosperity of the 1840s. A desire to proselytize this outlook may have encouraged acceptance of a school curriculum based exclusively on British values. The same emphasis would serve another purpose, that of integrating dissident elements in the population into a common value structure. If not the French of Canada East, then at least immigrants from the United States and Europe might be socialized in this way.

Finally the question was a political one, involving the role of the state in Upper-Canadian society. By authorizing school textbooks, the government firmly established itself as the arbiter of the education of the people. In successfully introducing the "Irish National Series", Ryerson effectively appropriated what had been formerly a voluntary right of parents, that of textbook selection. By this measure, the school curriculum, a powerful vehicle for influencing the cultural and social values of the people of Upper Canada, passed into the hands of the central government.