

THE END OF A LONG FIGHT.

The Norris Government's Compulsory Education bill, the principal clauses of which appear in this issue, appears from the draft to be highly satisfactory. Evidently the various compulsory attendance measures in force in Canada have been consulted, and have been embodied in the Manitoba bill. The cardinal points are well preserved. There is to be no dragooning of children into the public schools, but if parents, for conscientious reasons, cannot send their children to these schools, they are made responsible for seeing that their offspring are educated elsewhere and at the public school standard of efficiency. This is a real measure, with provisions sufficiently stringent to reach the object desired, and it is, therefore, very different from the make-shift legislation resorted to at the last extremity by the late Government of this Province. This bill will pass the Legislature with probably no opposition, and will go on the Statute Book with the approval of substantially all the people of Manitoba.

Thus ends, in complete victory, a fight for reform which began just ten years ago, and which was carried on for years against odds which at times seemed to make victory impossible. It was in the year 1906 that the Winnipeg School Board, alarmed by the growing evidences of truancy in the city, drafted a measure intended to apply only to the city by which they sought power to enforce the attendance of pupils at the public schools. The representatives of Winnipeg in the Manitoba Legislature at that time were all supporters of the Roblin Government, and none of them would consent to introduce the bill when requested to do so by the Winnipeg School Board. The hostility of the Government to the proposition was thus made evident. The movement in favor of compulsory education in Manitoba dates from this incident.

It would take at least a page of the Free Press to tell the story of the ten-year battle for compulsory education; but some of the outstanding incidents of the campaign may here be indicated. The movement for a measure of compulsory education was vigorously supported by the Free Press. In season and out of season, for the best part of a decade, the Free Press fought for the placing upon the Provincial Statute Book of a genuine measure of compulsory school attendance. By the close study of educational reports, both of our own and of other Provinces, by the setting forth of conditions of school attendance elsewhere, by a comparison of school attendance laws in force in other Provinces, by first-hand investigations in Winnipeg and in the country districts, and in many other ways, the Free Press built up an overwhelming case for compulsory education in Manitoba.

The Liberal Opposition in the Legislature also displayed, session after session, a constant and active sympathy for this reform. In the General Election of 1907 the Liberals first openly declared themselves as believers in compulsory education. In the session of 1908 a resolution endorsing the principle of compulsory education was supported in the Legislature by the Liberal Opposition, but was defeated. In 1909 a bill providing for compulsory education, introduced by the Liberal Opposition, was rejected. In 1910 the matter was again brought up by way of a resolution, and was once more defeated. In 1912 a motion favoring compulsory education, moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Norris, was thrown out; and in the following year a Compulsory Education bill was given a six months' hoist. The member of the Opposition who was most actively identified with the movement for compulsory education was Mr. D. A. Ross, M.P.P., who, with the one exception already noted, fathered the Opposition measures or resolutions urging this change in the educational law of the Province.

In its opposition to this reform movement, the Roblin Government displayed much resourcefulness.

When the question was first raised by the Winnipeg School Board, the Government induced the Winnipeg members who were asked to intro-

duce the bill to write letters to the No
Winnipeg School Board informing Stat
them in effect that before this legis- Fra
lation could be enacted the Board este
must arrange to take over the tha
Roman Catholic parochial schools of kin
this city upon terms satisfactory to ligh
the minority. Thus, at the very out- and
set of the movement, the hostility peo
of the authorities of the Roman Am
Catholic Church was revealed; and abl
it continued without abatement circ
throughout the whole struggle. In cul
1907 the excuse given for refusal to ado
enact this legislation was that it was qua
unconstitutional and beyond the as
powers of the Province. This atti- H.
tude was maintained for a couple of sa
years, until it was rendered unten- ma
able by the opinion solicited by the for
Government itself of Donald Mac- the
Master, M.P., who found that the en- fro
actment of a compulsory education Lo
law was within the powers of a Pro- Lo
vincial Legislature. The Govern- ha
ment then switched to new ground, pu
taking the position that, while the Du
Province could enact a compulsory ma
education law, the effect would be a
re-open the school question and thus kl
give the Ottawa Government the ba
right once more to pass remedial of
legislation. The ingenious Mr. th
Rogers, at a meeting of the faithful th
in the Maw Block in 1908, elaborated th
the theory that the agitation by the at
Manitoba Liberals for compulsory ye
education was the result of a con- ba
spiracy between the Laurier Govern- h
ment, the Manitoba Liberals, and the w
Roman Catholic minority by which th
the closed door of remedial legisla- T
tion was to be re-opened by the te
enactment of compulsory education u
legislation. This remarkable argu- w
ment was freely used by Mr. Rogers N
on the platform in the Virdon and it
Birtle by-elections in 1909. A

The Roblin Government, upon this B
plea becoming stale, made the dis- n
covery that a compulsory education r
law was unnecessary, as the Pro- U
vince had an efficient substitute for I
it in the Children's Aid Act. This a
view, first advanced in 1909 by the o
then Attorney-General, was vigor- h
ously urged year after year as a o
reason why the Liberal proposal s
with respect to compulsory educa- J
tion should not be entertained by r
the Legislature. In November, 1913, r
Premier Roblin, speaking at Minne-
dosa, declared emphatically that the
truancy provisions of the Children's
of Aid Act were far more effective than
re any Compulsory Education Act could
possibly be. Nevertheless, his Gov-
ernment found it necessary, in view
of the pressure of public opinion, to
remodel these truancy provisions at
the following session of the Legis-
lature in an endeavor to make them,
at least in appearance, a substitute
to for a Compulsory Education Act.
to These new clauses, although falling
rd. far short of what compulsory educa-
to tion legislation should be, did un-
vi- doubtedly make the law effective in
of part, and its result was immediately
oba seen in an improved school attend-
ance throughout the Province.

The Norris Government, as the
of wayfaring man, though a fool, must
ory by now be convinced, is about to
nd- write important pages of Canadian
may history. It is doubtful if it ever fell
ment to any Canadian Government in the
lea- past to be responsible for such a
by quiverful of fundamentally progres-
out sive legislation. But in its furthest
de- ramifications and reverberations it
the may well be questioned whether any
tute portion of the Government's legis-
com- lative programme has greater poten-
the tiality for improved citizenship and
orts, for a higher social order than its
Pro- measure of compulsory education.
ondi- For the Liberal party of Manitoba
here it is an hour of deep congratulation