RETURN

To an Address of the Legislative Assembly for copies of all correspondence between the Superintendent of Education, the Deputy Superintendent of Education, and the Trustees of the Cache Creek Boarding School, relative to the dismissal of the Teacher of that School.

By Command,

A. C. ELLIOTT,

Provincial Secretary.

Provincial Secretary's Office,
9th April, 1877.

Deputy Superintendent to the Superintendent of Education.

CACHE CREEK, B. C., March 20th, 1877.

DEAR SIR,—I intended writing last week, but certain disclosures recently made with respect to the immorality of some of the scholars here led me to postpone my letter until the Trustees should have met and considered the question.

The immoral acts complained of have stretched over a period commencing about Christmas last, and closing some short time before the matter was brought to Mr. Irwin's notice, which occurred during my absence—I think on the 22nd February.

Hoping that the unfortunate business might not become public, Mr. Irwin thought it advisable to defer consulting the Trustees till their regular meeting, which ought to have taken place on the 3rd inst. There was no quorum, however, and the opportunity was not afforded Mr. Irwin of bringing the subject before the Board. Since that time the Trustees have held two special meetings, the first being for the purpose of deciding upon such steps as might be considered necessary to mitigate, if not to obviate, the harm likely to spring from the scandal becoming widely spread.

The majority of the Trustees present (Messrs. Sandford, Parke, Semlin and Barnes) decided, Mr. Parke opposing, to call upon Mr. and Mrs. Irwin to send in their resignation—a course which, in my opinion, will have a tendency to injure the school rather than to satisfy the public mind. At that meeting I gave my view as to the proper course to be pursued, viz., to expel such of the scholars as, after a thorough investigation, should be proved to be the ringleaders, letting it be known that these scholars were expelled in order to protect the interests of the school.

I felt convinced then, and am strengthened in my opinion by the expressions of public feeling that I have since heard, that the general sense of the community would endorse such a course; but the Trustees took a different view and deemed it imperative on them to suspend Mr. and Mrs. Irwin, charging them with neglect of duty and want of proper supervision.

Now, as a resident at the school during the greater portion of the time covered by the immoral acts admitted by the children, and as having a grave responsibility resting upon myself in the matter, I consider myself to be guilty of the very faults laid to the charge of the Teacher and Matron.

The specific complaints urged by the Trustees may be briefly stated thus:—1st. Neglect of duty in not locking the door of the girls' dormitory every night. 2nd. Want of proper vigilance as evinced by the fact of the long continuance of the immoral practices. 3rd. Breach of duty in failing to report to the Trustees at once.

With regard to the first charge I may say that I consider it a very dangerous and imprudent step to keep the door locked. In case of fire breaking out in the dining-room at night, the most difficult place to reach, if the flames gained much headway, would be the very door which should be first opened ; and, certainly, if I were teacher of the school, I should decidedly refuse to lock the door on my own responsibility. If there is anything blameworthy in leaving the door unlocked, which I do not for a moment admit, then the Trustees clearly must be the guilty parties, since they never instructed Mr. Irwin to do anything of the kind ; and I am convinced that, had any accident occurred through the door's being locked, the Trustees would have been the first to censure the Teacher.

Taking the second charge, I can only judge Mr. and Mrs. Irwin by myself. In fact, it is plain enough that, as my bedroom was closer to the dormitory than the bedroom occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Irwin, and since, on that account, I was in a better position to detect any surreptitious action on the part of the pupils, I am much more culpable than the Teacher and Matron. Now, as the outer doors of the building were locked, and also the door leading from the dining-room to the boys' staircase, the latter door being fastened from the girls' side, it was considered perfectly safe, as nothing wrong could be done without the co-operation of the girls, who must of necessity pass from their room, with such chances of detection as would have been deemed sufficiently deterrent, even if any idea had been entertained that the improprieties would have originated with the girls.

With regard to the third charge, I have already spoken of Mr. Irwin's intention of bringing the subject before the Trustees at their first meeting. Knowing the members of the Board as thoroughly as I do now, and guided by the imprudent and unfair behaviour of one of them since the meetings, I feel quite satisfied that their outcry against Mr. Irwin on this score was prompted more by an unworthy feeling of pique than by any sincere conviction that there had been remissness on the Teacher's part.

In summing up the whole subject, I wish to draw your attention to the feelings and opinions that have actuated myself and the Teacher and Matron in our management of the school. Viewing the question from a higher standpoint than the Trustees seem capable of reaching, it has been our object, by every means in our power, to arouse a deep sense of self-respect in the breasts of the children. We considered that, apart from giving religious instruction, which we did not feel ourselves at liberty to impart, the wisest plan, and that most calculated to raise the moral tone of the pupils, was to create the strongest possible convictions of the absolute necessity, at all times, of avoiding even the appearance of evil ; and to awaken any sense of honour they might possess by showing confidence in their good intentions, rather than by chilling and repressing them by any distinct and palpable sign of suspicion and mistrust. Instead of degrading ourselves and the children by what might have been unworthy and unjust expressions of doubt, we endeavoured to foster a feeling of confidence in ourselves by showing that good conduct would invariably lead us to repose confidence in those under our charge. In spite of the unfortunate check to our hopes, which had been raised by the improved appearance and deportment of the children, I yet hold that we adopted the only system calculated to turn out good and reliable men and women from the school ; and whatever betrayal of our trust has been displayed by the pupils, must, I think, and I am sure you will think, be imputed to outward influences and not to any defect in our management.

I have no intention of saying anything that may seem harsh or overdrawn, but I cannot close my eyes to the effect that the horrible state of social life here must have upon the children brought up under its influence ; and there is no doubt in my mind that the Trustees should have exercised sufficient self-denial, if it required any self-denial, to have allowed their children to remain at school during the whole of each term, and then the rule could easily have been made general. This continued absence from the hurtful and polluted influences surrounding the home life of many of the children must have had a much stronger tendency to eradicate evil impressions and to build up the higher and nobler life of the scholars than the present pernicious system could possibly exert.

Our school is now reduced to fifteen, a falling off of eleven since my last mention of the attendance. Two of the absentees we expect to return, as they have been taken away to assist their father. Of the others, three were removed on account of being required at home ; five were taken away without any statement on the part of their

parents, although I think the present difficulty was not the prime cause of their leaving; the remaining pupil was one of the ringleaders in the improper practices and, in my opinion, should have been expelled.

While I hold myself and Mr. and Mrs. Irwin to be perfectly clear of any blame respecting the alleged neglect, yet, after the action of the Trustees towards Mr. and Mrs. Irwin, I have no alternative but to resign, for I most distinctly and emphatically refuse to be associated any longer with the members of the Board. No one can be more ready or willing than myself to accept any legitimate responsibility, but I strongly object to be, by implication, identified with deeds that I neither endorse nor in the remotest degree countenance.

With regard to the future management of the school, I am of opinion that the direct control should be vested in the Teacher and Deputy Superintendent of Education; or, in case of a continuance of the Trustee system, the Board should be reconstructed and the personnel raised by the selection of men, not only of experience, but of sufficient independence of thought to place them beyond the influence of mere expediency.

I am quite aware that, in my Report, I spoke of the Trustees in terms of praise; but further experience has satisfied me that, no matter what amount of interest they may take in the welfare of the school, they are not the men qualified, by social standing, by soundness of judgment and thorough discretion, to discharge successfully the duties of their position.

In justice to Messrs. Walker and Parke, I am bound to say that they differed totally from the other Trustees on the subject of Mr. and Mrs. Irwin's resignation, and have carried their disapproval so far as to express their intention of terminating their connection with the Board.

I have, etc.,
(Signed) R. M. Clemitson.

Mr. A. Irwin to Superintendent of Education.

Cache Creek, B. C., March 21st, 1877.

Dear Sir,—Yours of 2nd March, with enclosed salary for February, came duly to hand.

Since I last wrote to you, school matters, I regret to say, have assumed a retrogressive rather than a progressive aspect. I will give you, as minutely as space will permit, the events which have led to this very undesirable change. About three weeks ago I made the discovery that the girls had, on at least two occasions at the dead of night, left their dormitory, passed down stairs, unfastened the door between the dining room and the passage leading to the boys' dormitory, and entered the boys' dormitory; and that they had as often admitted the boys into their dormitory. (I may here explain that the door before alluded to was fastened from the inside of the dining room so as to prevent the boys reaching the girls' room. I never for a moment supposed that the girls would be the aggressors.)

The first offence happened some time before Christmas; and it was repeated some six weeks ago. I may also explain that the discovery was made through a quarrel arising among the girls. Some of the smaller and not guilty ones, through spite, informed Mrs. Irwin on the guilty ones. Otherwise, I am convinced, from the slyness with which these irregularities were carried on and from the untruthfulness of the children when previously questioned, that they might have continued for a much greater period undetected.

After making these discoveries I meted out such punishment to the guilty parties as was at my disposal, and purposed bringing the matter before the Trustees, and having the ringleaders expelled. The Trustees were to meet the following Saturday, (it was Thursday I became acquainted with the above facts), so I mentioned the matter to no one. However the Trustees failed to meet. I then told Mr. Clemitson, who was as much surprised as I had been. He decided to call a meeting the following Saturday. In the meantime James Uren was taken from school to assist in collecting his father's cattle, and as soon as possible he made the affair public. Only for this occurrence, I am convinced that it would have been kept from the public ear, until after the

Trustees had met and investigated the matter. The Trustees, hearing such reports, met sooner than the time proposed by Mr. Clemitson. They questioned several of the girls, and afterwards called upon myself to answer to the charge of neglect in not locking the girls in their dormitory. I replied that it was a precaution I had never been instructed to take, and a precaution that I would not take on my own responsibility, on account of the danger from fire, sickness, etc., and that it was opposed to my ideas of inculcating the higher principles of trust and morality,—principles which, if inculcated by recourse to lock and key, are not likely to withstand the temptations which are likely to assail them on their leaving school. I was then dismissed from their council, and on the following morning was requested to tender my resignation, which I did, to take effect on the first of April next. Mr. Clemitson will, no doubt, give you a fuller account of the Trustees' proceedings in this matter, as he is in a position to know more than myself.

I purpose returning to Nicola if the schools there are yet unoccupied.

I would like to hear from you at as early a date as possible, and would be glad to hear any suggestions or instructions you may have to offer or communicate.

Yours, etc.,

(Signed) A. IRWIN.

Deputy Superintendent to the Superintendent of Education.

CACHE CREEK, B. C., March 21st, 1877.

DEAR SIR,—I am instructed by the Trustees of the Boarding School to request you to take the necessary steps for engaging a married couple to act as Teacher and Matron of the school—duties to commence as soon as they can arrive here.

In case of any trouble in securing a married couple, the Trustees think it might be as well to appoint a single man as Teacher, and allow Mrs. Schubert or some other person to act as Matron.

The Trustees also consider it advisable to obtain the services of a middle aged woman as cook at $40 (forty dollars) per month, and I have to request you to see what can be done in that respect.

Owing to the action of the Trustees, I have been compelled to take charge of the school from the 1st of April, the date on which Mr. Irwin's connection with the school ceases. Mrs. Schubert has consented to act temporarily as Matron at $50 per month.

The Trustees intend having another meeting on the 31st instant, and as it is just possible that they may rescind their previous resolution, it would be better for you to defer taking any decided steps towards engaging any person until after the meeting, the result of which I shall telegraph at once.

Mr. and Mrs. Irwin are exceedingly popular up here, and I think the tide of public opinion, which acquits them of any blame, will have some effect on the Trustees.

I am, etc.,

(Signed) R. M. CLEMITSON.

Mr. Chas. A. Semlin to Superintendent of Education.

CACHE CREEK, March 17th, 1877.

DEAR SIR,—I have to thank you for a copy of your report for 1876, containing matter of special import to myself. I had intended to have replied to your strictures on myself as Secretary and Treasurer through the press, that my friends throughout the country could judge how much fairness there was in your assertion that my neglect "had ruined the reputation of the school, and almost brought the finances to a state of bankruptcy." Individually I care but very little about the matter, but I cannot afford to have my friends suppose that I have neglected anything of a public trust; my own conscience is clear in the matter. I say I had intended to defend myself so that the public might judge between us, but recent developments of a most painful nature

regarding the neglect of those in charge of the school has so far taken up my attention that I have had no time to devote to the press. It is, in my opinion, an unfortunate circumstance that the few men in the country who take probably the greatest interest in education, must agitate the public with charges and recriminations. You say that my neglect of duty from midsummer of last year, 1875, was one great cause of decline of Cache Creek school. Now, sir, your memory must have played you false in this matter, for during a personal interview I told you I had not been appointed by the Board of Trustees to the position of either Secretary or Treasurer, and it was not until after this conversation, or until the Board met in the beginning of 1876, that I was appointed Secretary, and not until May, 1876, that I was appointed Treasurer; and I can satisfy anyone that the duties of these offices were amply filled under the circumstances until I was superseded by the Deputy Superintendent. I have always looked upon you, sir, as a friend of our school, and felt that we were under no inconsiderable obligations for your assistance, and it is therefore an unpleasant duty to attack your report through the press. You have no doubt through the proper channel heard of the doings at the school. It seems to me that the three people in charge have been so taken up with themselves or each other, that they have allowed things to come to a pretty pass. They seem to have been sleeping all winter serenely oblivious to the most scandalous conduct on the part of some of the larger pupils. And when at length they found out what was the state of affairs, it seems to me that they tried to conceal from the Trustees the state of affairs. We were not made aware of the state of things until Uren's boy left school, when he spread far and wide the news that startled the community. The Trustees met and at once proceeded to investigate the charges, which unfortunately we found too true. Prompt measures were at once adopted. The Teacher and Matron resigned. We have again engaged Mrs. Schubert as Matron, and (the only redeeming feature in the whole affair) Clemitson has volunteered to undertake the teaching for a time. Now I think we will do well to try some steady unmarried man as Teacher, and retain the old lady as Matron; in which case the parlour will not be the only attraction about the place. A single man as Teacher can sleep in the boys' dormitory, and thus prevent such carryings on as has prevailed this winter. If anything can save the school, this may. Our enemies (educational) will claim a fulfilment of their prophecy, and doubtless renew their efforts to break down the system; but with honest, careful supervision, I still think we are right. But I am tired of parlour supervision; sitting in the parlour and looking pretty cannot fill the bill as Teacher and Matron here. It requires constant, earnest care, and nothing less will give the system a chance to succeed. We have a harder task now than when we began, for those who opposed us then and predicted all manner of evil, will claim that they were right. A number of pupils have been withdrawn, and more I fear will be taken away when reports now current reach the ears of parents at a distance.

With Mrs. Schubert as Matron, I am satisfied that the Matron's duties will be well filled, and hers is really the most responsible place.

I remain, etc.,

(Signed) CHAS. A. SEMLIN.

[TELEGRAM.]

Deputy Superintendent to the Superintendent of Education.

CACHE CREEK, April 2, 1877.

Leduc is engaged as Teacher; Mrs. Schubert as Matron.

(Signed) R. M. CLEMITSON.

Superintendent of Education to Deputy Superintendent.

EDUCATION OFFICE, VICTORIA,
April 5th, 1877.

DEAR SIR,—The painful and unlooked-for information contained in your communications of 20th and 21st ult., and one from Mr. Irwin of the latter date, is a source of much anxiety on the part of all the authorities here.

As the correspondence was moved for in the House to-day, and will probably be forthcoming to-morrow, I shall at this late hour of the evening do nothing more than acknowledge receipt of these letters, and your telegram of 2nd inst.

Cheques for March salaries of yourself and Mr. and Mrs. Irwin are enclosed.

Yours, etc.,
(Signed) JOHN JESSOP.