

But the point of capital importance, and which cannot be disproved by shutting one's eyes to its undesired existence or by shouting bravely that it does not exist, is the unmistakable fact that not in Toronto alone but in scores of centres throughout this province the sanest and steadiest and most intelligent men cannot bring themselves to approve of the Dominion parliament, on any pretext whatsoever, interfering in the educational affairs of the new provinces. The men who make this objection are not Tories. They are not Orangemen. They are Liberals. They are, some of them, the men who give virility and prestige to Liberalism in their constituencies, and without whom there would be no Liberal party worthy of the name. To ignore the fact of their opposition, to minimize its significance, or to misunderstand its quality is to play the part of children in a situation which demands the wisdom and courage of men.

As a Conservative of the school of Lafontaine and Baldwin, I wish to enter my protest against these attacks and insults on the part of certain Ontario Conservative newspapers. Quite as deplorable as this campaign carried on in Ontario, are the efforts made by the Liberal papers in Quebec to indispose the French and Catholic population of that province against the Conservative party. I protest against such conduct on the part of both. I am acquainted with the political history of our country, especially within the last thirty or forty years, and I suppose every hon. member in this House is also acquainted with it. Well, that history shows that the Conservative party was formed through the union of the English-speaking Tories of Ontario and of the French-speaking Liberals of Quebec. It is through that alliance that this country has been built up within the last thirty years and has reached its present status. Present day politicians should be satisfied thereby that the best policy to follow is that which makes for the union of all nationalities and all creeds in a common effort to ensure the greatness and prosperity of our country, Canada. They should be satisfied that no party will ever gather, in appeals to religious and racial passions and prejudices, sufficient strength to enable it to control and manage public affairs in this country.

It is also incumbent upon me to protest most energetically against that other insinuation made on several occasions by some Liberal newspapers in Quebec, that we, Conservative members from that province, are going to vote against the amendment of the leader of the opposition only through fear of the coming elections. I may state at once that in voting as we intend to vote we do so because we are satisfied that this parliament has the right to add to the Bill now before the House a clause providing for the establishment of separate schools. I must state at the same time that I have not received from my constituents any petition, any instruction whatever regarding the vote I am to give to-night on this question.

Mr. LEONARD.

I am left perfectly free to act as I think best.

I shall not undertake at this late hour to discuss the various questions brought up by this Bill, reserving my right to do so when we are in committee. I shall be content just now with stating that I am in favour of the establishment of these new provinces, and that, in my opinion, this parliament has the right to insert in their constitution clear and definite enactments stating, in accordance with the provisions of the British North America Act, that the people of those provinces will be entitled to separate schools; or, in other words, that the father of a family will have the right of giving to his child that education which he thinks proper.

There is no doubt as to the right of provincial legislatures to make such laws as they deem proper for the carrying on of their system of education, but they are bound to respect in every case the natural right of parents to give to their children the education which they think best, provided always, that it conforms to public morals and to existing laws.

I know that in the mind of its promoter, the amendment introduced by the leader of the opposition has not for its object to deprive the minority of their right to separate schools, but solely to assert the principle of the unrestricted autonomy of the provinces in educational matters. Unfortunately, those who are seeking to wipe out the French language and the Catholic religion will take advantage of this amendment to attain their object. To these people, Mr. Speaker, let me suggest, with calm and moderation and in the best of spirits, that they should study the true facts of the country's history. They will find that a powerful oligarchy that governs, that the Colonial Office and British cabinets have made similar attempts, at a time when we were weak and in small numbers, and have only succeeded in wearing down their claws and teeth in the act.

Our English-speaking fellow-citizens may well absorb and assimilate sparse groups of Scandinavians, of Mennonites and Doukhobors; we do not object in any way, and do not envy them that increase of strength; but as regards ourselves, never will they succeed in doing so. We were Canadians before Canada was ceded to England. A Canadian who settles in France or in the United States remains a Canadian. That is why I say we form a distinct nationality, having preserved and being still anxious to preserve our language, our faith, our aspirations and our notions.

So-called national schools are wanted; and it is on us original settlers of this country that an attempt is made to fasten these inefficient, Godless schools contrary to our aspirations. And do those who wish to rivet such schools on us know what a school is? Ninety-nine per cent of those who make the