

before the House. I think it is necessary for me to explain, as briefly as possible, the reasons which have led me to oppose the amendment which has been offered to the main motion for the second reading of this Bill. I will do so as briefly as I possibly can. I feel very little guilt in connection with what, to my mind, has been a very needless agitation over this question. After the general election of 1896 the Conservative party held a meeting in the city of Montreal, of which some notice was taken in the Montreal 'Gazette' on the following morning. At that meeting, held subsequent to the general election, I declared for my part I would not in the future discuss the school question. I have adhered to that resolution, and on no occasion, at any meeting which I have attended, and I have attended a great many in the province of Quebec and elsewhere, have I ventured to mention that much vexed question.

It has been discussed in my presence by representatives of both parties, but I have stood firm to my resolution. I have not discussed it on any occasion; and if, indeed, it were not necessary that I should state what are the reasons which have separated me on some points from the majority of those who sit on this side of the House, I would be perfectly satisfied to give a silent vote on this question; because, Sir, I consider that it is an unfortunate thing that this question has been discussed with so much passion in public. I believe that many of the mischievous—I cannot call them by any other term—mischievous utterances which have been made on the subject of these Bills, have been the result of ignorance as to the real state of affairs in connection with the proposed legislation; and I sincerely believe that when the question has been fully looked into—I agree to that extent with my hon. friend the Minister of Finance—and all sides of it properly weighed, at any rate as regards the educational aspect of the question, the people of Canada will come to the conclusion that in the concessions granted, and the effort made by this parliament to create conditions of justice and equity in the Northwest, the practical result is not one of very great importance. That, at any rate, is my view of the subject. It is, I admit, an important subject in the principles which are to govern us in our decision of the question. It is important, no doubt, that one should state for what reason one gives a vote which may appear strange; but at the same time I think a great deal too much has been made of the extent to which parliament has been asked to go in connection with this legislation. Let me at once call the attention of the House to the seriousness of a statement made last night by the Minister of Finance. To my mind this is a question upon which every man can have a free and independent opinion without in any way alienating his co-religionists of different

creed. I am pleased to say, and I desire to acknowledge, that in the words that fell from the hon. leader of the opposition last night—and I followed him very attentively—there was not one word which it seems to me could shock any man of any creed in the province of Quebec or elsewhere. He was led by logical deductions to the conclusions at which he arrived; and, Sir, I am proud to say, so far as I may represent public opinion in my own province, that there is one thing which we learn early in our schools, and that is, to respect absolutely the convictions of all of our fellow citizens. I am sorry to say that I do not think that part of our curriculum is to be found in all the other schools of the country. But when the Minister of Finance went so far as to say that in the event of the Prime Minister not being able to carry this measure through the House, and of my hon. friend the leader of the opposition being called upon to form a cabinet, the cabinet which he would form would necessarily have a purely religious colour, and would be a Protestant administration, I do think my hon. friend the Minister of Finance went quite beyond the bounds which anything which my hon. friend the leader of the opposition said could in any sense justify.

Hon. W. S. FIELDING. Will my hon. friend permit me to say that I did not attribute any remark of any kind to the hon. leader of the opposition in that relation. I expressed my own opinion as to the circumstances surrounding the whole case.

Mr. MONK. My hon. friend spoke of that conclusion to which he himself had arrived as being the legitimate conclusion of the observations made by the hon. leader of the opposition.

Mr. FIELDING. If my hon. friend will allow me, I will at once say that I certainly did not mean to do so, and I am satisfied that I did not do so. I had no such thought, for I was not referring to anything the leader of the opposition said in any way. I am sorry to interrupt my hon. friend.

Mr. MONK. I am glad to hear my hon. friend say so. My hon. friend no doubt sympathizes with those who, perhaps not very readily, have arrived at the conclusion to which he arrived yesterday, to support this educational measure; because, if rumours are well founded, my hon. friend himself experienced very great difficulty in arriving at that conclusion before he spoke.

Mr. FIELDING. Not the least.

Mr. MONK. There was nothing in what my hon. friend said which indicated that state of mind; but my hon. friend knows what has been the public rumour. One of my hon. friend's friends stated to me