

times before, the time of the House has been taken up in dealing with these question which are really extraneous to the legislation before the House, and the bringing up of which here can serve only one purpose, and that purpose is the continuance of the agitation and excitement amongst the people and the stirring up of prejudice on these questions.

At six o'clock, House took recess.

After Recess.

House resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. W. F. MACLEAN (South York). Mr. Speaker, in taking up the special subject of debate this evening I intend to read another document in order to place it on record, a document which bears very pointedly on the question that has been raised. It is a letter that was sent to His Holiness the Pope by the members of the government and by the members of parliament, and which was referred to in the remarks which I made yesterday. That document, which was sent, I believe, in 1896 or 1897, was as follows:—

Most Holy Father.—We, the undersigned, members of the Senate and members of the House of Commons of Canada, and representing therein the Liberal party, present ourselves before Your Holiness as respectful and devoted children of holy church, to complain of the existence of a state of things which, if allowed to continue, must be extremely dangerous to the constitutional liberties of this country, as well as to the interests of the church itself.

Your Holiness has already been made aware of the conduct and attitude of certain prelates and of certain members of the secular clergy who, during the general elections in this country, in the month of June last, intervened in a violent manner in restraint of electoral freedom, taking sides openly for the Conservative party, and going so far as to declare guilty of grievous sin those of the electors who would vote for the candidates of the Liberal party.

Sincerely attached to the institutions of our country, which ensure to us Catholics the most complete liberty, we respectfully represent to Your Holiness that these democratic institutions under which we live, and for which Your Holiness has many times expressed sentiment of admiration and confidence, can only exist under perfect electoral freedom.

Far be it from us to refuse to the clergy the plenitude of civil and political rights. The priest is a citizen, and we would not, for a single instant, deprive him of the right of expressing his opinion on any matter submitted to the electorate but when the exercise of that right develops into violence, and when that violence, in the name of religion, goes to the extent of making a grievous sin out of a purely political act, there is an abuse of authority of which the consequences cannot but be fatal, not only to constitutional liberty, but to religion itself.

If, in a country such as ours, with a population consisting of persons of various creeds, and

wherein the Protestant denominations are in a majority, Catholics did not enjoy, in all matters relating to legislation, the same political freedom as their Protestant fellow-countrymen, they would ipso facto be placed in a position of inferiority, which would prevent them from taking the legitimate part which they are entitled to take in the government of the country, with the possibility, moreover, of conflicts between the various groups of the population, which history shows to be ever fraught with danger.

Then again, an active and violent intervention of the clergy in the domain of political question submitted to the people must, of necessity, produce against a great mass of the Catholic population a degree of irritation manifestly and prejudicial to that respect which religion and its ministers ever inspire and command. Some twenty years ago, His Holiness Pius IX, your illustrious and lamented predecessor on the pontifical throne, acting through the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, deemed it his duty to put a stop to certain abuses of a similar character, and forbade the intervention of the clergy in politics. This prohibition was generally respected so long as His Eminence Cardinal Taschereau was able to guide the church in Canada, but since old age and infirmities have paralyzed his guiding hand, the abuses to which your illustrious predecessor had put a stop, have begun again, and threaten once more to create trouble among us, and to compromise, not only Catholic interests in this country, but the peace and harmony which should exist between the various elements of our population.

Again affirming our absolute devotion to the faith of our fathers and to the church of which you are the supreme head, affirming our respect and attachment for the person of Your Holiness, our attachment to the interests of our country and to the Crown of Great Britain, its aegis and protector, we beg that Your Holiness will renew in our behalf the most wise prescriptions and prohibitions of your predecessor protect the consciences of the Catholic electors, and thus secure peace in our country by the union of religion and of liberty—a union which Your Holiness has many times extolled in those immortal encyclicals whose precious teachings we desire in all things to follow; and lastly, grant to the children of the church now addressing Your Holiness the apostolic benediction.

Hon. Wilfrid Laurier, Premier of Canada; Hon. Joseph Israel Tarte, Minister of Public Work; Hon. Charles Fitzpatrick, Solicitor General; Hon. R. W. Scott, Secretary of State; Hon. C. A. Geoffrion, Minister without portfolio; Hon. C. A. P. Pelletier, Speaker of the Senate; Hon. J. R. Thibaudeau, senator; K. Préfontaine, M.P.; O. E. Talbot, M.P.; C. R. Devlin, M.P.; L. B. Brodeur, M.P.; L. A. C. Angers, M.P.; T. M. Guay, M.P.; F. Langelier, M.P.; C. Beausoleil, M.P.; R. Lemieux, M.P.; A. A. Bruneau, M.P.; J. A. C. Ethier, M.P.; B. Monet, M.P.; M. E. Bernier, M.P.; J. A. C. Madore, M.P.; P. V. Savard, M.P.; H. G. Carroll, M.P.; T. Fortin, M.P.; P. A. Choquette, M.P.; O. Desmarais, M.P.; C. J. Rinfret, M.P.; G. Turcotte, M.P.; J. H. Legris, M.P.; H. S. Harwood, M.P.; Joseph Lavergne, M.P.; H. Dupuis, M.P.; C. Bazinet, M.P.; Joseph Gauthier, M.P.; T. Proulx, M.P.; N. A. Belcourt, M.P.; J. B. R. Fiset, M.P.; J. H. R. Bourassa, M.P.; R. M. S. Mignault,

Mr. FISHER.