

We have seen the settlers who were there load their few effects on prairie schooners and drive out to the country; we have seen deserted homesteads by the score; we have seen merchants close their doors and leave the country; we have seen settlers on the verge of starvation; we have seen honest, industrious men forced to appeal to the government for assistance and we have seen improved farms sold in that western country at from one dollar to three dollars per acre. No sooner was the present immigration policy adopted and the late Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) placed in charge of immigration affairs than a change took place. Settlers began to flock into the country and to afford a market for what the earlier settlers had produced. Other markets were opened up. The merchants began to thrive. The price of land rose quickly from \$3 to \$4, from \$4 to \$5, from \$5 to \$6, &c., in many localities as high as \$30 per acre has been paid.

I think the west is practically solid in requesting that no change be made in the immigration policy. I was pleased a few days ago to hear the hon. the Postmaster General pay a high compliment to the late Minister of the Interior, and I want to assure that hon. gentleman that he was only voicing the sentiments of the west when he said the resignation of the Minister of the Interior was little short of a national calamity.

There is another reason why it is best for the federal government to administer those lands. It may not be considered a good reason by some, but I think the experience of most of the other provinces will give some weight to it. It is this. We might at some future time have a careless or extravagant government in one or both of the new provinces. If such a thing did happen our resources would rapidly disappear and we might in a very few years be compelled to appeal to extensive direct taxation.

There is still another serious obstacle in the way of the provinces administering the land. Some years ago very extensive grants of those lands were made to various corporations, railway companies and colonization companies. Now it happens that when those corporations selected their lands they chose the greater portion of it in the proposed province of Alberta. So, if the provinces received the lands within their own borders, they would not receive equal shares and an injustice would be done to the province of Alberta.

Some hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House would like to make the public believe that all the lands in these vast areas are agricultural lands. Such is far from being the case. In fact only a small portion of those lands will ever be fit for agricultural purposes. Many millions of acres are under water. Millions more consist of muskeg and slough, while millions

more are sand hills and barren. There is no doubt there is an immense quantity of good agricultural land in the country but it is only a fraction of the whole.

Now, what does federal administration of these lands mean to the provinces? In the first place, the provinces really get half the land, or all the even-numbered sections. These sections are reserved for free homesteads. Until entered for we have the use of them. Our stock will graze on those pastures. As soon as entered for, they become the property of our citizens who pay us taxes. And even with regard to the odd-numbered sections the same reasoning may apply because we hope that those may soon be thrown open for settlement at a low price. In the second place, we get this land administered for us free of charge. In the third place, we have an energetic immigration policy of a national character carried on for us without expense. In the fourth place, we get an annual subsidy, increasing as our population increases and sufficiently large to put us on a par financially with the most favoured of the other provinces. If all the members of the opposition would be as frank and as candid as the hon. member for Beauharnois, they would say with him, 'that as far as the financial terms are concerned, the government has treated the new provinces not only with fairness but with generosity.'

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to dwell on the other very important question involved in this Bill. It is certainly quite true, that the education question is a dangerous one to deal with. This question nearly prevented confederation. It caused the downfall of one federal government and our friends in the opposition fondly hope that it will cause the downfall of another in the not distant future. Nearly every province in the Dominion has experienced difficulty in dealing with this vexed question.

I will not attempt to deal with the constitutional question involved in this Bill. I have had no legal training and I frankly admit my inability to grapple with a question on which the best legal talent in Canada fail to agree. I want to say that in 1892 I gave this question a good deal of thought. I read over the British North America Act and the Northwest Territory Act of 1875, and I came to the conclusion that whatever privileges the minority had when we became a province these privileges would have to be continued. That conclusion may have been wrong, but I arrived at it notwithstanding the fact that I was then, as I am now, strongly opposed to separate schools in the usual sense of the term.

If I understand this Bill in its present form, it provides that the minority, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, shall continue to have the privileges they now have under the provisions of the Northwest Territories Ordinances of 1901.

Mr. P. TALBOT.