

hind the poor peasants, ruined by war, left with a debt from France of 20 million francs, a whole cloud of adventurers came to this country and continued on the ruin of the poor settlers who were left behind. Then contrary to the Act of capitulation and the treaty of Paris, the Catholic institutions were taken away from the French people. The system of schools we had then were taken from us. I should like to give my hon. friend a history of the school system in the province of Quebec if it were possible to enlighten him, because although he tells us he has spent much time in that province, it is quite evident that he has not learnt much. From 1760 to 1800 the French Canadian refused to participate in the schools then existing, because it was against their conscience to do so, and I consider that their ignorance was a glorious one. In 1800 there was a school system established for which the French Canadians were taxed; the Royal Institution, in which the money was given to the Protestant schools and to them only. Again the French Canadians refused to attend those schools, because it was against their conscience to do so, and they remained in their glorious ignorance. In 1824 we had the first schools worthy of the name, but as there was no public money given them, they could not work very well. In 1837 our rights were still not recognized and the Protestant minority had still control of the public funds. In 1841 the first move was made towards giving our people a schools system which they could support, and in 1846 we had our separate school system established, and our French Canadian people could go to schools where their rights were recognized and which they could attend without a blush of shame. Considering that we started our school only in 1846, we have made marvellous progress and to-day our system is at the head of the whole confederation.

Mr. SPROULE. Is that so? I understand the hon. gentleman to say that their school system is at the head of the confederation to-day, and I assume that refers to the intelligence of the people.

Mr. A. LAVERGNE. If my hon. friend would take the trouble to look into the reports of public instruction of Quebec he would learn many things which he will never see in the Orange 'Sentinel.'

Mr. SPROULE. May I ask the hon. member, if I am not improperly interrupting him—and I do not wish to do that—to explain one point? He speaks of what he calls the superior educational system of Quebec. And, if I followed him closely, this system has been in operation since 1846—that is, for two generations at least. How is it, then, that in spite of the excellence of the system, statistics show that while the number of those who can read and write is, in the province of Manitoba, 72 per cent; in Prince Edward Island, 75

per cent; in New Brunswick, 70 per cent; in Nova Scotia, 72 per cent; and in Ontario, 80 per cent, Quebec has only 67 per cent—only 67 out of every 100 people who can read or write? These figures do not indicate that this system has succeeded very well in doing away with illiteracy in the province of Quebec.

Mr. A. LAVERGNE. I am very glad that my hon. friend (Mr. Sproule) has asked me that question. I will try to enlighten him a little further. I said that our system of schools in Quebec was started in 1846. But it was not in full operation until 1855. And then, as my hon. friend from Labelle (Mr. Bourassa) has rightly put it, the people were for a long time very cautious about the schools. They had long been tyrannized over, and they saw in the schools, as they thought, an instrument to rob them of what they held dear—their language and their institutions. Therefore, it was only slowly and with great caution that they accepted the work of the schools. But in 1855 the system was at work almost as completely as it is to-day. As to overcoming illiteracy, we have made greater progress in Quebec than in any other province. Let me give the hon. gentleman (Mr. Sproule) the figures. In 1871, in Quebec, there were of illiterates—people who could neither read nor write—35·93 per cent of the population. In 1891 only 29·05 per cent of the population were illiterate. Thus in the twenty years we have made progress to the extent of 6·89 per cent. In Ontario, in 1871, there were 7·90 per cent of the people who could neither read nor write. In 1891 this had been reduced to 7·05 per cent, showing progress to the extent of only 0·85 per cent. In New Brunswick, where there are no separate schools, they had, in 1871, 14·45 per cent of illiterates, and in 1891 the proportion was 14·90 per cent, or an absolute retrogression to the extent of ·54 per cent. I do not say that we lead confederation in the proportion of our people who can read or write; but I do say that we lead in the progress that we have made in extending the blessings of education.

Hon. gentlemen opposite tell us that we should have in the Northwest a national system of schools. Sir, do you call it a national system of schools which is opposed to the conscience of 40 per cent of the nation? Do you call those national schools against which 40 per cent of the nation have fought for more than a century? I say that what these hon. gentlemen call national schools are anti-national schools, because they are forced upon 40 per cent of the people against their will; I say that what you call free schools are the exact reverse of free, because they deny the liberty of the individual and make him a slave in the hands of the state. The hon. member for North Toronto (Mr. Foster) told us that in the province of Quebec a Protestant boy was obliged to go to a Catholic school. But

Mr. A. LAVERGNE.