

which would command the confidence of this parliament. I make that statement after due deliberation. But, somebody will say: What of that; if you Liberals cannot form a government we Conservatives will take charge. Will you? I doubt it. I have no right to speak for my hon. friend the leader of the opposition, but if I know him at all I venture to remark that he would shrink from the formation of a government in which he would be obliged to draw religious lines. As a high-minded man, with due regard for the future of his country, he would shrink from the formation of a government under which he would be obliged to exclude from office and vote and power forty-one per cent of the people of this Dominion. The leader of the opposition has acknowledged to-day that there is no union among his party on that question. He chaffed the Prime Minister for a moment; he said this question was not making for the unity of the government. May I venture to suggest that it is not making for the unity of the opposition? The leader of the opposition acknowledged to-day—it was right that he should acknowledge it—that he and some of the men with whom he sits were not able to see eye to eye. He warned us that he spoke to-day for himself only and that he did not presume to speak in the name of his party. What does that show us? Does it not prove that if my right hon. friend shall be obliged to retire from office on this question, my hon. friend the leader of the opposition would shrink from the formation of a government under such conditions? The matter is too grave to permit of its being treated lightly for a single moment, but I venture to say that it will be impossible to repress a smile on both sides of the House when I suggest the picture that would be presented of my hon. friends from East Grey (Mr. Sproule), Jacques Cartier (Mr. Monk), Beauharnois (Mr. Bergeron), and Victoria and Haliburton (Mr. Sam. Hughes) sitting down to prepare a resolution with respect to separate schools.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. We could not make a much worse mess of it than the government has up to the present.

Mr. FIELDING. I think my hon. friend is entirely wrong. He will find, when the vote is taken, that we have a united government and a united party, and he will find, according to his own confession, that he will not have a united party supporting him. My hon. friend made merry at our differences a few days ago, but I suspect he has been having a few bad quarters of an hour himself. Let us not, in our momentary good nature, fail to see the gravity of the situation presented to the House. I say deliberately—and every hon. gentleman who listens to me knows it—that if this Bill be not passed, if we should be unable to carry a measure on this subject, then my right

hon. friend will be obliged to retire and no other government can be formed which will command the confidence of this parliament.

Mr. SAM. HUGHES. Is that the reason why the Finance Minister is back into line?

Mr. FIELDING. The only way a government could be formed by hon. gentlemen opposite would be by the hon. member for Victoria and Haliburton (Mr. Sam. Hughes) coming forward to sit cheek by jowl with the hon. member for Beauharnois (Mr. Bergeron) as an advocate for separate schools, and I do not think that my hon. friends would care for the combination. I am speaking in all seriousness. This is no matter for levity. I repeat that there is in a certain sense a crisis. There is no party crisis, but there is a crisis with regard to the administration of public business in Canada by any government and any party. If my right hon. friend should retire on an issue like this, then the only thing that could possibly happen, if my hon. friend the leader of the opposition should agree to form a government at such a time, would be that he must form a Protestant government and he must have a general election.

An hon. MEMBER. Shame.

Mr. FIELDING. Who says shame?

Mr. OSLER. This is the first time that the religious question has been introduced.

Some hon. MEMBERS. Order; sit down.

Mr. FIELDING. I do not think that the hon. member for West Toronto (Mr. Osler) has paid me the compliment of trying to understand what I was presenting to the House. Again I repeat—and I want to guard against any misapprehension, I want to give the hon. gentleman who said 'shame' an opportunity to say it again, because I want to state the situation as it actually exists. I say this is becoming a religious question. Who denies it? My hon. friend the leader of the opposition said as much to-day.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. I beg my hon. friend's pardon, I said nothing of the kind. If so understood, I desire to disclaim any such intention. I argued this question, as my right hon. friend the First Minister did in the first instance, on the constitutional ground because in his remarks to this House, both on the 21st February and again to-day, he put the question solely on that ground.

Mr. FIELDING. The point is not important. I understood my hon. friend, the leader of the opposition, to have spoken, in the course of his speech to-day, of the religious differences which unhappily would arise in this matter. I think that will be found somewhere in 'Hansard'; but it is