

lands. The right hon. Prime Minister (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) admits that he has adopted this policy simply as a matter of policy. But the only colour of reason he has assigned for it is that he fears lest, in the future, these new provinces may, through stress of financial stringency, due to incurring debts not wisely but too well, resort to increasing the price of these lands, or may possibly do away with the policy of free homesteads which, up to this time, has done so much to attract immigrants to our shores, and to place settlers on our western prairies. But, Sir, surely the people making their homes in the western part of the Dominion, and those whom they select to administer their affairs, would be at least as anxious to bring people to settle on these lands as would the government here at Ottawa; and how much more careful are they likely to be of the character of these immigrants than this government has shown itself to be in the past. And, moreover, with how much greater advantage could these lands be administered by the local government through officials under their control than by a government at Ottawa two thousand or two thousand five hundred miles from the scene of operations. Evidently the Prime Minister and his colleagues have not confidence in the ability of the western people to legislate for themselves. When the question of granting autonomy to the Northwest was up for discussion in parliament two or three years ago the Prime Minister and his then colleague, the ex-Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton), took the ground that the people of the Territories were already in possession of practically complete powers of self-government save the power to incur debt; and they doubted the wisdom of granting them this power lest it might be utilized for unwise and unnecessary purposes. Apparently, that feeling has never entirely been overcome by these gentlemen, even to this day; otherwise they would have proposed the granting of a full measure of autonomy to the people of the Territories, including the power to manage their own lands and control their educational system. Two years ago, the Prime Minister expressed his dissent from the policy of granting autonomy for many years to come. But political exigencies forced him to abandon that position. In the midst of the last election campaign, it was suddenly brought to his memory—even in the turmoil and cares and worries of the occasion, he remembered—that he had left letters of the Prime Minister of the Northwest Territories unanswered for months. So he sent a letter giving a pledge—no doubt urged to by his candidates in the west, who had rightly gauged public opinion—that immediately after the election he would take up the question of autonomy and introduce a measure during the first session of parliament. I venture to say that had the people of the Northwest been aware of the

Mr. W. J. ROCHE.

character of the Autonomy Bill, and had they been informed of the restrictions to be placed upon their legislative liberty, the right hon. gentleman (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) would not to-day enjoy the support of such a large number of representatives from the west as he now has. And not only that, but he would not have been in the enjoyment of the support he receives from other provinces of the Dominion in this House. To-day we have a measure which, to use a common expression, grants autonomy with a string to it, one that says in effect: Thus far shalt thou go and no farther. The Prime Minister in effect says: We can trust you with powers of self government, including the power to tax yourselves for all necessary local purposes, we can trust you with the power of administering justice in these provinces; we can trust you with the working out of your transportation problem—provided, that is, you can do it dispoiled as you are of your chief asset, your public lands—we can trust you with the maintenance of law and order in these provinces; we can trust you with these things, and feel that you will acquit yourself in a creditable manner; but hands off the Dominion lands and the separate schools, though no person has threatened either one or the other, for these are preserves of the Dominion government upon which you must not trespass. He declares, in effect; We, the members of the Dominion government have not sufficient confidence in either your ability or your wisdom to control and manage your own lands in the interest of your own people; through your youth and inexperience as legislators you might adopt some policy that would conflict with the policy of this central government to your detriment.

It is true that the other provinces of the Dominion, save the province of Manitoba, are in the enjoyment of their public domain; it is true that your legislators in the past have given every evidence of capacity and statesmanship; it is true you have been governed wisely and well; it is true your country is peopled with a thrifty, intelligent, and industrious people; nevertheless we cannot entrust to you this great patrimony lest you might dissipate it in a prodigal manner: Therefore, your liberties must be curtailed and your jurisdiction must be limited; likewise your assets. And so a proud and self-reliant people are made to feel the humiliation of a patronizing restraint exercised by those who are in no way their superiors. If this government were fearful lest the new provinces might, at some time in the future do away with this policy of free homesteads that has been such a factor in bringing immigrants to our shores, then, rather than retain the lands in their own possession, why could they not have followed the suggestion of the leader of the opposition (Mr. R. L. Borden) and have incorporated a provision in the law which would