

of the House. In introducing the Bill on the 21st of February, the right hon. Prime Minister used the following words:—

A great deal has been done in fact, more has been done than we have to do to-day. We have to take the last step but it is easy and comparatively unimportant in view of and in comparison with what has already been accomplished. The metal has been in the crucible and all we have to do now, is to put the stamp of Canadian nationality upon it.

The right hon. gentleman's colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) spoke a couple of nights ago. He had seen this Bill, not before it was introduced but before he spoke. But between the Prime Minister's speech and his own, apparently, he had heard something from the country that his leader had not anticipated, so that when he spoke—and he is a most careful speaker—he said:

We have to-day before us perhaps the most important measures that have ever engaged the attention of the parliament of Canada.

Now, Sir, is it not, to put it mildly, a little disappointing to hon. gentlemen on this side, when called upon to discuss a measure which is evoking such a feeling as this Bill is, that the right hon. Prime Minister in introducing it should tell us that it is a matter of such little importance that it is hardly worth while wasting time over it;—while, a few days later, the Minister of Finance—who might have been justified in using the language of his leader, and saying the Bill was of no moment, because his leader thought the Bill of so little importance as to be not worth while submitting to the consideration of the Minister of Finance and the Minister of the Interior, the two experts whose opinion would be required—frankly admits that it is the most important measure that we have had in many a day. I go further than the hon. gentleman and say, in all sincerity, that not only is it the most important measure before parliament to-day, but I believe that it is the most important measure that has ever been before this House, the most important measure—and I say it with a due consciousness of the seriousness of my words—that will be brought before any English speaking assembly for many a day to come. Let me explain why I say that. A great deal has been said by some speakers in the way that I sincerely regret. I trust I shall be able to express myself on these vexed questions without using a single word that will be offensive to any one. I do not see why one cannot express his views conscientiously and frankly without being offensive. And I must pay the ex-Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) the compliment of saying that there was nothing said by him this afternoon that could be offensive to any one on either side of

Mr. NORTHROP.

the House. I hope to follow the good example that the hon. gentleman has set. But, when we are dealing with half a million square miles of territory of our Northwest, we must not forget that time is fleeting, that history moves on, and that now-days great changes take place within a few years. We have often been referred to the year 1875 in this debate, the year when the law was passed for the regulation of the Northwest, when the school law was placed upon the statute-book. Who would have expected at that time that people to-day would be spending time in discussing the school regulations for a country in which, I understand, there were in 1875, only about 500 people. We know that that part of the country was then regarded as a part that would not attain anything like the importance it has attained to-day. Within a quarter of a century, since the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, wonderful changes have come over that part of our country. Immigration is pouring in and development is rapidly progressing. Not only are the eyes of the old provinces fixed on the Northwest, but the eyes of the empire are upon that country as the future granary of the empire. More than that, Sir, we know that the eyes of the whole world are turned to the Northwest as being the most attractive place for immigration for those leaving the countries of the old world, which are not so free as ours, and wishing to find new homes. It seems that we are approaching this subject in a parish spirit if we cannot see more in it than a few details concerning the regulation of a few schools. The ex-Minister of the Interior has quoted some eminent Roman Catholic prelate as saying that these schools differed nothing from public schools except in the name. If there is so little to distinguish them, if they are practically one and the same thing, why should the right hon. gentleman have thrown this firebrand into the political arena? The right hon. gentleman discussed the Bill, with a sub-committee consisting of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Fitzpatrick) whose ability as a lawyer we are all proud of in this House; the Secretary of State and the Postmaster General (Sir William Mulock). If in discussing it with these gentlemen—which one representing the Northwest I do not know, which one representing the adverse view on education to that held by the Prime Minister himself I do not know—none of them was willing to discuss it from the standpoint of the majority of the Northwest, why could not the Prime Minister have waited until his Minister of the Interior had returned? Why could not the right hon. gentleman have waited till his Minister of Finance returned? Why could he not have waited an hour or two until Mr. Haultain could have been found? Why could not the right hon. gentleman have done something