

would be permitted to exist in the Canadian Northwest. If there were a school board of recalcitrants, unable or unwilling to give to the people of their locality the school facilities which they should provide, it would be in the power of the commissioner of education to place that board to one side, even though they might have been elected in the ordinary way, and to replace them with a professional to carry on the work. So that it appears to me that in the school ordinances of the Canadian Northwest, as they exist to-day, and as they will doubtless continue to exist for the government of the schools of Alberta and Saskatchewan, there is the amplest safeguard for the continuance of educational efficiency; and, that being the case, I cannot see that the slight limitations which it is proposed to place upon the liberty of the provincial legislature in the matter of education will in any way interfere with the present or future efficiency of the schools in the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my remarks hitherto have been mostly of an explanatory character. I have endeavoured, as far as I could, to make clear what was the purport of the contemplated legislation before this House, and also what were the existing conditions in certain parts of this our country for the purposes of comparison. And now it becomes necessary for me to make a statement as to what attitude I shall take upon this Bill when it reaches the committee stage or the second reading. I wish to state that, as a member of the Conservative party, I feel that our party deserves the greatest credit for being a party in which full liberty is given to the individual when questions which relate to conscience come up for discussion. An attempt was made by the Minister of Agriculture this afternoon to make it appear before the country that the Liberal party at the present time were the sole custodians of the spirit of toleration and freedom in this country. I think, Mr. Speaker, that the spectacle, as it was called this afternoon, which the Conservative party presents at this time is one of which it has no reason to be ashamed. On this side of the House at least there is absolute liberty of conscience; on this side of the House there is complete absence of coercion; on this side of the House every member is permitted by his chief and his fellow members to look at questions of this nature conscientiously, and to arrive at the conclusion which to him seems best; and, Mr. Speaker, I am going to take advantage of the words of my honoured chief in which he said:

When I addressed the House on the first reading of the Bill I said I did not desire to make this a political question. Perhaps the expression was not very happily chosen, because from whatever aspect you view it, it must in the highest sense of the term be a political question in the end. What perhaps I should have said was that I did not desire to make it a

Mr. AMES.

party political question and I do not desire to make it a party political question to day. I shall express my own opinion with regard to it; I shall express that opinion at the present time; I have not felt called upon to speak before.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the honoured leader of the Conservative party, realizing that in questions where religious prejudice, as it has been called—I prefer to call it devotion—is concerned, the leader of the Conservative party has seen fit to give to his followers complete and absolute liberty. He has told them that they shall one and all consult their constituents and their conscience, and shall then vote as they see fit on this Bill; and, unless I am greatly mistaken, there are many members on the other side of the House who would have been glad enough if their leader had made the same declaration. I think there are quite a few in that solidly united party of which we heard this afternoon, and of which we have heard on many previous occasions, who would be glad enough if they might be allowed to vote as their consciences dictated, and as their constituents demand, at this time. If the leader of the government had been willing to make the same frank statement which the leader of the opposition has made and had he said to his followers, Gentlemen, on this phase of the question you have your absolute and complete liberty, I believe the House would then have been divided naturally, each man voting as he thought to be in the best interests of Canada, and the result would have been a far more true expression than the one that will be reached by the present method.

Mr. Speaker, we are called upon, as I said at the outset, to pass legislation for the creation of two new provinces. In the natural course of events those provinces would be given full provincial autonomy; they would be given power to prosecute their own affairs in their own way; and it could only be under the stress of another and a greater principle that this House would venture in any way to curtail that provincial liberty. At this time it is necessary for us to ask ourselves whether this greater principle excludes the less. And so I find myself exercising the liberty which my chief has given me, and the liberty which I feel bound to use. Had this been a matter which was considered vital to the Conservative party as a whole, I might have found myself in a position similar to that of some hon. members on the other side of the House; but the fact that my leader has given to me and to every other member who sits about me absolute and complete liberty to follow his own conscience on this question, that fact renders it necessary for me to make my individual investigations, to weigh the evidence personally, and to stand before my constituents in support of the clause I believe, to be just. Only if I stand conscientiously